Unwrapping Mats:
People, Land and Material
Culture in Tongoa, Central
Vanuatu

Susanna Katharine Kelly
Department of Anthropology
University College London
Thesis submitted for the degree of Ph.D
1999
Abstract

This thesis examines the phenomenon of the pandanus mat in central Vanuatu. The pandanus mat is a ubiquitous object, appearing in all arenas of life on Tongoa and has remained a crucial item of material culture throughout the political and economic changes of the last one hundred and fifty years. Unlike other items of material culture such as barkcloth which was rapidly displaced by calico in the nineteenth century, the pandanus mat has continued to be essential. The thesis addresses the problem of why this should be so: what is it that mats ‘say and do’ that cannot be said and done by any other material object?

The thesis argues that the reason mats have continued to be absolutely necessary is because mats are fundamentally connected to the system of chiefly titles and land relations on Tongoa. Issues of land and land alienation assumed critical significance in the colonial and post-colonial period and this forms a background to contemporary concerns with land. Realising the significance of land issues is necessary for an understanding of the importance of ples (‘place’; this Bislama word fuses notions of territory and identity) and the fundamental attachment of person to place in Vanuatu. This thesis argues that mats are a material expression of the attachment and detachment of persons to place on Tongoa and, furthermore, effect this attachment and detachment. The material, technical and social specifications of the Tongoa mat act upon the various contexts in which it appears and effect a social and spatial organisation of place.

Despite its centrality within daily practices and ceremonial contexts, however, the Tongoan mat is relatively unelaborated both physically and metaphysically. Individual mats do not acquire ‘biographies’ or histories that accompany them through exchanges and ceremonial use. Because mats are not individuated in this way, it is their material identity rather than their individual identity that is important. The thesis explores this problem, drawing upon recent developments in the field of material culture studies to examine the production and transformations of the Tongoa mat in use. Examining the technical processes and social relations of production that bring this material form into being allows an examination of how the mat is so thoroughly implicated within other Tongoan cultural processes; namely, the reproduction of people and their relations to ples.
# Table of Contents

Title page 1

Abstract 2

Table of Contents 3

List of Maps 6

List of Illustrations 7

List of Plates 8

List of Tables 10

Abbreviations 11

Acknowledgements 12

Chapter One - Introduction and Ethnographic Review of Vanuatu and Tongoa

1.0 Introduction 17

1.1 Approach to the Problem and Literature Review 19

1.1i People and Things in Melanesia and Elsewhere 23

1.1ii The Study of Mats in Vanuatu 28

1.1iii Land, Place and Ples 34

1.2 Variety of Social and Political Forms in the Archipelago 37

1.2i A Brief History 38

1.3 The Shepherd Islands: centre of the archipelago 46

1.4 Tongoa in Perspective 48

1.4i Language 49

1.4ii Ethnographic Literature on Tongoa 51

1.5 Social and Spatial Divisions on Tongoa 56

Section One - Dialogues of Island and Place

Introduction 69

Chapter Two - The Ethnographic Setting of Purau Village

2.0 Introduction 71

2.1 Routines of Everyday Life in Purau 76

2.2 Kinship and Residence Patterns 82

2.3 Marriage 93

2.4 The Subsistence Economy 101

2.4i The Garden 103

2.4ii The Social Relations of Garden Production 104
Chapter Three - Relations of Land and Title on Tongoa
3.0 Introduction 119
3.1 Perceptions of Land 120
3.2 Historical Review of Land and Land Alienation in Vanuatu 125
3.3 Land Relations and the Title System on Tongoa 131
3.3i The Nature of the *Nawota* 135
3.4 The History of Tarisaliu’s Title 139
3.5 Chiefs’ Control over Land Transmission 148
3.5i Pigs and Mats 149
3.5ii Other Payments Made in Relation to Land 151
3.5iii Men and Women’s Access to Land 156
3.6 Changing Patterns of Land Use 158

Chapter Four - The Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Material Culture and Dialogues of Kastom
4.0 Introduction 162
4.1 *Kastom* in Vanuatu and Melanesia 163
4.2 The Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the Fieldworkers Projects 165
4.2i Models of *Kastom* Within the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Women’s Culture Project 168
4.3 Understandings of *Kastom* on Tongoa 171
4.4 The Introduction of the Women’s Culture Project on Tongoa 176
4.5 Mats and *Kastom* on Tongoa 186
4.6 *Kastom* as Knowledge of Place 191

Section Two - Metaphors of Reproduction

Introduction 200

Chapter Five - The Technology of Weaving and the (Re)Production of Mats
5.0 Introduction 203
5.1 The Social Relations and Conceptual Associations of Pandanus Production 206
5.2 Technical Description of Weaving 214
5.2i The Making of *Katafau* mats 221
5.2ii Weaving Baskets 223
5.3 The Symbolism of Pandanus and Coconut 229
5.4 Dyes and Patterns 231
5.5 The Ways that Women Weave 234
5.6 Reproducing the Mat and Rendering it Absent 241

Chapter Six - Material Metaphors of Persons and Place
6.0 Introduction 244
6.1 *Pies*: Spatial Organisation and Identity 245
6.1i Person and Place on Tongoa 246
6.1ii The Town-Island Polarisation 249
6.2 Spatial Organisation and Roads 253
6.3 Formal Properties and Semantic Associations of the Mat 258
6.4 Mat Bodies and Human Bodies 258
6.5 The Mat as Spatial Ordering Device 265
6.6 Reproductive Metaphors: Making Mats and Making People 273
6.6i Patterning the Connections between Women’s Bodies and the Social Body 276

Chapter Seven - Mats and the Attachment and Detachment of Persons to Place
7.0 Introduction 279
7.1 Mats Resist Attachment to Persons 283
7.2 Processes of Attachment and Detachment: Mats and the Management of Lifecycle Events 292
7.3 Transferring Women Between Namatana at Marriage 293
7.4 Mats and the Making of Chiefs - Analysing the Ritual Process of Transferring Chiefly Titles 300

Chapter Eight - Conclusions 315

Glossary 326

Appendix One - Examples of Mat Patterns 328
Appendix Two - Patterns Employing Imagery of the Face and Head 334
Appendix Three - Examples of Tattoo Patterns 336

References 339
List of Maps

1  Map of Vanuatu  

2  The Shepherd Islands  

3  The Villages of Tongoa Island
List of Illustrations

Figures
3.0 Model of the title - land system 132
4.0 The structure of the Maraki Vanua Riki as it was depicted at the 1996 meeting 195

Diagrams
4.0 Late nineteenth century mat claimed to be from the Shepherd Islands 190
5.0 Nalakena weaving components split into nambatin 216
5.1 Nalakena interwoven to create the building block of the mat 216
5.2 Nalakena interlocked to form the starting edge of the mat 216
5.3 Weaving action: taking a weaving element (nambatin) and bringing it down across contrasting elements 218
5.4 Basic mat structure: two panels made up of roads 222
6.0 Wind directions and the positions of sunrise and sunset orientate Tongoa within the world 255
6.1 The two panels of the mat form mirror images of each other 259
6.2 The mat structure refers to the human body 261
6.3 Mat spatially divided into roara (gardens) 264
List of Plates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>i</td>
<td>Making a road through mats: Mareta carries mats to a funerary exchange</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>Exchanging mats as a fine payment, Tarisaliu’s <em>farea</em>, Purau village</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>The orientation of Tongoa within the Shepherd Islands: view taken from the western side of the island with Efate, Mataso, Makura and Emae Islands from left to right</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>Looking out from Tongoa on the southern side of the island with Ewose Island in view</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>View of Purau village taken from the hill between Purau and Selembanga. Kurumabe village and Emae Island in the background</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>Hearing village court cases at Tarisaliu’s <em>farea</em>, Purau village</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Stones and trees combine to become powerful markers of <em>ples</em>: Meriu village <em>farea</em>, Tongoa</td>
<td>124</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>Coconuts remain fixed to <em>fanua</em>: newly cleared <em>fanua</em> in preparation for planting</td>
<td>157</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.0</td>
<td>Tarisaliu’s wooden dish carved with chiefly symbols and identified as <em>kastom</em></td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.1</td>
<td><em>Faru Sikai</em> (‘one side’) mat worn by chiefs on occasions of <em>kastom</em></td>
<td>189</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.0</td>
<td>Pandanus newly planted in the garden</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.1</td>
<td>Mature pandanus palm with bundle of <em>nagaruta</em> at its base</td>
<td>210</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>Carrying pandanus to <em>Natorotoro</em> to dry</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>Mats and mat-making permeate the domestic space: house interior with rolls of pandanus, partially completed mats and folded mat tucked into the rafters</td>
<td>211</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>The first panel of the mat showing initial starting edge on the right</td>
<td>220</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.5 Jean employs her whole body to weave

7.0 The ‘diary man’ and his assistants recording gifts of mats at a marriage

7.1 Preparing the *naweweleana* presentation

7.2 Marriage prestation of four *nakakafu* with *dogi* baskets

7.3 Carrying piles of mats from the groom’s kin as part of the *navagotoana* marriage payment

7.4 Transferring a woman from her natal *namatana* to her husband’s *namatana*
List of Tables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Table Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>Purau Namatana</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>The Distributed Chieftainship: Tarisaliu's Nakainaga</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abbreviation</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVR</td>
<td>Maraki Vanua Riki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OTP</td>
<td>Oral Traditions Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PWMU</td>
<td>Presbyterian Women’s Missionary Union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SDA</td>
<td>Seventh Day Adventist Church</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SFNH</td>
<td>Société Française des Nouvelles Hébrides</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VCC</td>
<td>Vanuatu Cultural Centre</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WCP</td>
<td>Women’s Culture Project</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements

It has become something of a truism to state that research carried out in far off communities depends almost solely upon the help and support of people there. The research for this thesis is no different. I am indebted to the people of Purau, especially my host family, Leipoiya Roy, her children and grandchildren, most especially Jimmy and Reknal Roy. Throughout the entire period of fieldwork I was very reliant upon the friendship and help of Jenny Solomon and her family. No work at all could have been carried out without the support and sanction of Chief Samuel Tarisaliu and his deputy Willy David TiNapuakoto. I would like to take this opportunity to acknowledge my debt to them and thank them for welcoming me and for their positive assessment of both my research and the Women's Culture Project. Joseph Marakitapu, Leiwea Rita, Jack Solomon, John and Mareta Rerik, Willy and Karina Roy, John and Nono Roy, Leipakoa David, David Mariwota, Dorah Harry, Songi Marimele, Leiwea Maki and Leisongi Elsy helped me beyond measure in my attempts to understand something of the way that Tongoa people live their lives. Joseph Marakitapu gave his time and patience unstintingly both in Tongoa and Port Vila.

In Port Vila, I found the staff of the Cultural Centre and Library an unfailing source of assistance, conversation, humour and guidance. I am most indebted to Jean Tarisesei, Coordinator of the Women's Culture Project, who first accompanied me to Tongoa, and whose wisdom and understanding proved invaluable. I would also especially like to thank Ralph Regenvanu, Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre for his hospitality. Thanks are also due to Margot Szamier, Mark Ramsden, Sean and Lisa Bracken for hospitality and friendship.

In London I would like to thank my family, especially my parents, Michael and Katharine Kelly, for the unfailing support they have given me. Thanks also to my brother Jonathan and to Samantha Woodland for her extremely generous work in illustrating the thesis. My supervisors Susanne Küchler and Allen Abramson have consistently helped me to see what it was that had to be done. My friends and colleagues in the Writing Up seminar run by Danny Miller and Chris Pinney at UCL are also part of the whole process of writing this thesis and thanks are due to Michelle Lee, Pauline Garvey and Adam Drazin. Patrick Brindle and Chris Hagisawa also deserve special mention. Sandra Squires proved to be the most encouraging and unflagging partner in our meetings to exchange work. Most especially, I would like to thank Henry Broughton for participating in long discussions, proof-reading and offering advice, love and support.

Research for this thesis was funded by the Economic and Social Research Council (Award number ROO429434181). The University of London Central Research Fund leant photographic equipment and gave a generous grant to visit the collections of the Australian Museum in Sydney. The Graduate School of University College London financially supported attendance at the European Society of Oceanists conference in Basel, December 1994. The Royal Anthropological Institute gave financial support through an award from the Radcliffe-Brown Fund in the last months of writing up. My thanks to all these institutions.
Map 1 Vanuatu
Map 2 The Shepherd Islands
Map 3 The Villages of Tongoa Island
Plate i  Making a road with mats: Mareta carries mats to a funerary exchange
Chapter One
Introduction and Ethnographic Review of Vanuatu and Tongoa

1.0 Introduction

It is no exaggeration to say that life without mats would be impossible on Tongoa today. This thesis analyses the pandanus mat tradition of Tongoa Island, central Vanuatu and uses this material form as a lens to examine relations between people and place on the island. Mat making and mat use underline and structure everyday life as well as ceremonial junctures such as lifecycle events. The very ubiquity of mats, however, coincides perhaps unsurprisingly with a corresponding lack of emphasis on their meanings and the relevance and significance of pandanus mats are not widely spoken of. Arriving on Tongoa, with a research project to study mats, I was struck by how unelaborated the mats were, both physically, and in the ways they were talked about. My attempts to draw people into conversation about mats were met with very similar answers; mats were important, they were *kastom* (‘traditional’), they were necessary, but this was really all there was to say.

The language of mats seemed to be symbolic allusion rather than explicit and reflexive and this seemed to mirror the physical phenomenon of the mats themselves being relatively unelaborated. While weaving patterns have names and are sometimes spoken as having a named origin, usually another island, there are often no stories attached to these images. Whilst the connections that the mat has to other aspects of Tongoa culture did emerge through informants’ exegesis, in this thesis I argue that the essential relevance of the mat lies in the connections its production and material specifications make with other cultural processes - the making of men and women, the spatial organisation of place and the attachment (and detachment) of people to land and place.
The simple form of the Tongoa mat means that on Tongoa any mat may be used for any number of wide-ranging purposes such as household use, exchange, fine paying, or ceremony. In trying to access an exegesis of an object both profoundly mundane and yet essential, examining the process of technical production and the ways it is situated within daily lives came to the fore. This meant typical participant observation, located, as the weaving was, in the households of individual women and their families.

This thesis is based upon eighteen months fieldwork carried out in Vanuatu from November 1995 to May 1997. Field research was based in Purau village, Tongoa Island. The thesis reflects the nature of the investigation into an item of material culture present in all areas of life yet not accompanied by an overt exegesis and also reflects the primary research method of participant observation. The thesis draws strongly upon the interpretation of ethnographic data to analyse the Tongoa mat within themes that emerged from Tongoan concerns during fieldwork: land, the chieftainship and title system and dialogues surrounding kastom, local identity and participation in national economic and political structures. These themes reflect in part what Tongoans considered important and wanted to talk about. Underlying these themes I argue is a concern with land issues and relations of ples ('place’ this Bislama word fuses notions of geography and identity).

The arguments presented in this thesis are offered as an ethnographic interpretation of the intersections and referencing between material and non-material social forms, in this case, as exemplified by the Tongoa mat. Privileging a single object in this way necessarily has consequences for the analysis and imposes limitations on what may be concluded. By
exploring the nature of the Tongoa pandanus mat I am not assuming that such objects simply have “inherent attributes” as discussed by Thomas:

“inherent attributes specify a little rather than a lot”...[about the nature of an object; Thomas’ example is alcohol in Tahiti and Fiji]..."The ‘nature of things’, then, can only be a conceit; the study ‘of’ a thing can only be a study of what people take to be present in it, which might mean what they take it to cause or be caused by.” (Thomas 1993:136).

The present argument is in effect not just an exploration of the ‘nature of the thing’, but rather, how what people “take to be present” in things, including their cause and effect, is enabled and informed by their material qualities generated through technologies of production and use. Other studies of singular items of material culture by Guss (1989) and MacKenzie (1991) illustrate the complex social and material elaboration of the Yekuana basket and the Telefol *bilum* respectively. In the case of Yekuana basketry, designs of individual baskets incorporate different symbols, origins, names, physical properties and use. In doing so, Yekuana basketry materially mirrors non-material structures such as myth. The diversity of the Yekuana basketry tradition is not present in Tongoa mats. Here, we have one form serving as a kind of compressed metaphor for the many social processes and categories it refers to. Primary amongst these is the generation and attachment of people to land and place.

1.1 Approach to the Problem and Literature Review

Despite not being marked by a striking degree of physical or metaphysical elaboration, particularly in comparison to other mat traditions of the archipelago (see section 1.1ii below), the Tongoa mat appears in every aspect of Tongoan life and accompanies almost every exchange at significant lifecycle events, fine payments and formal presentations. The Tongoa mat is further distinguished from other ni-Vanuatu mat traditions by the principle
of its simple form. That is, mats used for domestic purposes, and mats used for ceremony and exchange, are made to the same design and when woven are interchangeable. The simplicity at the heart of the mat design does not restrict the forms that it can take however. The basic shape of the mat can be utilised to make diverse material statements when rolled, folded (see plate 1.0) laid out or wrapped around other things. All these permutations illustrate the multifaceted nature of this object. The mat is an indispensable object, but one whose significance is difficult to explain because mats permeate every level of existence and consciousness of Tongan life.

As Bolton writes for Ambae, finding a method to elicit information about aspects of Ambae mats apart from the physical, was difficult:

"We found it relatively easy to find out about the technology of mat-making and the names of mat types, stencil patterns, weaves, and so on. It was harder to learn about mat uses. Mat-making is something that is taught, and women are able to articulate their knowledge about it; the ways in which mats are used are to some extent self-evident and there is no established mode for describing it." (Bolton 1994:156)

On Ambae, modes of transmitting knowledge about mat-making is well established in the teacher-learner relationship but, just as on Tongoa, knowledge of the social meanings of mat use are not part of everyday discourse in Ambae life. Local verbalisation about mats on Tongoa exhibits a dual tendency: people do not seem to discuss the relevance of mats but also simultaneously produce indirect statements about the significance of these objects, such as one needs them to do certain things such as get married or assume a chiefly title. This tendency is reminiscent of the different kind of verbalisation discussed by O'Hanlon in his analysis of Waghi exegesis of the wigs worn at clan pig festivals (O'Hanlon 1992). O'Hanlon argues that the lack of overt local exegesis on the significance of wigs is not the
Plate 1.0
Exchanging mats as a fine payment, Tarisaliu’s farea, Purau village
same thing as an absence of verbalisation about them (ibid:590). Rather, the things that Waghi people do say about wigs are primarily located in the processes and restrictions surrounding their production and the assessment of their effect when worn (ibid.:597,604). This verbalisation is interpreted by O'Hanlon as reflecting a wider Waghi theory of significance about a person's clan and extra-clan relationships. The lack of explicit talk about the significance of these objects reflects its nature as a "mechanism of revelation" of these relationships that appears only once every generation (ibid:606). In contrast the Tongoan mat is present throughout and in all areas of individual's lives. I would suggest that there is no meta-narrative of mats on Tongoa because their meanings are not self-evident to either ethnographer or indigenous exegete. The ubiquitous presence of mats underlines and structures Tongoan life and thus mats do not readily lend themselves to explanation. By looking at the ways that Tongoa people do talk of mats reflects an ever-present object that is universally declared to be important but whose role is essentially unemphasised in both everyday life and ceremonial occasion. The approach taken in this thesis turns then to analysing mats as a material form that in the daily processes of making and using and in its appearance during ceremony effectively makes statements about people's relationship to their ples.

Recent examinations of social forms and processes within material culture studies have emphasised the centrality of quotidian, mundane objects and practices such as eating, within such diverse arenas as nationalism and the construction of identity (Miller 1998). The ubiquity, quotidian and unelaborated nature of the Tongoan mat belies its centrality at critical junctures such as life cycle events. How is it that these objects are so present in Tongoan everyday and ceremonial life, and yet are so unforegrounded? Such a statement can perhaps be said to be particularly true for Melanesia; many Melanesian cultures
produce stunningly complex and striking art forms which eclipse (in both the local culture and in ethnography), more humble artefacts such as the everyday bilum, the mat and the banana leaf bundle (cf. MacKenzie 1991; Weiner 1976; 1989). It is no coincidence that these latter objects are associated more with everyday rather than ritual life, and further, are primarily associated with women rather than men. But as MacKenzie's and Weiner's discussions of the Telefol bilum and the Trobriand banana leaf bundle demonstrate, these objects are intimately bound up with social and cosmological reproduction.

1.1i People and Things in Melanesia and Elsewhere

A number of recent writings on persons and objects in Melanesian ethnography have stressed that the active site of the production of meanings and values lies in the relationship between producers and their products as evinced in the acts of making, using and transforming (Battaglia 1990; Bolton 1993; Jolly 1994; Keller 1988; Küchler 1992; MacKenzie 1991; Munn 1977; Tilley 1999). The realisation that: "(o)bjects are created not in contradistinction to persons, but out of persons." (Tilley 1999:103) highlights the mutual definition and creation of objects and persons in tandem with each other through the processes of production, exchange, ritual consumption, sacrifice and removal (Küchler 1988; Munn 1986; Miller 1995). The significance of objects in the arena of the everyday has not been privileged in most enquiries into Melanesian material culture however. Enquiries into highly elaborated or ritually restricted objects such as canoes and funerary sculptures have produced different analytic approaches than the present study of an object distinguished by its universal presence in everyday life.

Like many other 'Melanesian objects', such as Sabarl axes and Gawan canoes, Tongoa mats feature an intertangling of ideas about people and things as mutual social products.
The canoes of Wala Island (northern Vanuatu) illustrate such intermeshing of the categories of person and thing, becoming ‘as-persons’ in certain contexts. For example, canoes are decorated to achieve the same effect as the adorned human body; to seduce “persons with whom one wishes to maintain links and from whom one wishes to extract gifts and favours.” (Tilley 1999:117). While being ‘person-like’ in their physical makeup Tonga mats do not become ‘as persons’ but simultaneously refer to a number of social forms such as people, gardens and chiefs.

In reaching an understanding that people and things are not necessarily separate and distinct from each other, what are we speaking of when we state that we are studying ‘material culture’? Rather than privileging and considering ‘things’ in isolation, material culture studies have emphasised a recognition of the material bases of all social action, identities and relations (Miller and Tilley 1996). Reassessing the theoretical possibilities of looking at material culture is a reevaluation of the search for meaning itself. Thus, a statement such as:

“The fact that objects tend to be meaningful rather than merely communicate meaning has helped move our concerns from narrow questions of semantics to larger issues of identity.” (Miller and Tilley 1996:5)

is a recognition of the role that objects and the qualities of their materiality play in constituting social life, rather than merely representing it.

The wealth of ethnography produced in Melanesia in the last century amply demonstrates that material things and images in many of these societies are frequently thought of as having the potential to have an impact upon people, relationships and events (Munn 1986; Thomas 1991; Strathern 1990). Within the same dynamic non-material forms such as speech and knowledge are also objectified, and ‘inanimate’ objects are understood to have agency. Above all, people and things are recognised to be engaged in a mutual dynamic.
Within such broadly general statements we can understand assertions made by Tongans, for example, that it is the namele leaf that ‘carries the talk’ rather than the chief’s messenger who holds it in his mouth, and that stones have the power to inflict sickness on trespassers. This perception of the world, where objects are understood to have the ability to directly act upon events, very much influences the starting point of many of the questions asked in the last two chapters of this thesis: namely, what is it that mats enable and effect when they make appearances in lifecycle rites, exchanges, and everyday life?

In this view the Tongoa mat is not just a: “metaphorical vehicle for transmitting fundamental beliefs and values” (Tilley 1999:5) comparable to the Wala canoe but, in itself, enables fundamental social processes such as the transmission of social status and political authority. In such an understanding, the material form and qualities of the mat come to fore of the analysis. In its production and use, the planar surface of the mat acts as a symbolic surface, a material metaphor for the literal surfaces of the land and garden. Its ability to do so enables the transference of land tenure relations at the handing over of chiefly titles at the navuvusakeana ceremony. The fundamental material presence of the mat at this ceremony and other lifecycle events is considered in chapter 7. Furthermore, through the potential of its form, the mat acts a symbolic container through its ability to wrap and conceal. By extension, it also has the ability to transport people (chiefs, brides, the deceased), pigs and ritual yams and transfer them from one place to another. The metaphor of unwrapping mats in the title of this thesis does not refer to a quest for layers of meanings but is intended to evoke the way that the physical form of the mat is employed to make statements through a material language rather than a verbal one. For Tilley, such objects silently voice what cannot be articulated through the medium of spoken language; this “silent discourse” is, however, “made continuously present through the objects
themselves", employing “material metaphors” that comment upon social tensions such as the relationship between men and women (Tilley 1999:32).

Two studies are both explicitly and implicitly present in this thesis; MacKenzie's exemplary investigation into the string bag (*bilum*) of highland Papua New Guinea (MacKenzie 1991) and Bolton's study of Ambae mats in Vanuatu (Bolton 1993). The former study has shaped many ideas into the present analysis of a singular item of material culture and the gender relations it emerges from and shapes. MacKenzie’s focus on a single item of material culture which until then had not received detailed ethnographic attention, skilfully demonstrates the profound cultural and social elaboration of the *bilum* in Telefol life. MacKenzie's approach to investigating the meanings surrounding this object have particular resonance for the current analysis of the Tongoa mat. MacKenzie builds on the work that has been developed on technology and material culture to examine the *bilum* “in relation to the particular structures and processes through which they were created.” (MacKenzie 1991:25). Such an approach is evident in my analysis of the mat as material metaphors of person and place in chapter 6.

Bolton’s study of Ambae mats within the discourses of *kastom* produced within and in relation to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre similarly can not be ignored in the present investigation. Like Bolton's project the research for this thesis was undertaken in conjunction with a Vanuatu Cultural Centre project to document women's *kastom*. The influence of the Cultural Centre on issues surrounding *kastom* and tradition in Vanuatu today, and its impact on the present research project, are considered in chapter 4. Bolton's thesis looks at the transformations of Ambae mats as they are incorporated into an idea of women's *kastom* and considers a number of similar themes to the present study of Tongoa
mats. Issues such as kastom, land and ples are fundamental to understanding cultural forms, both material and non-material, within contemporary ni-Vanuatu life. While land and the concept of ples are of the utmost importance on both Ambae and Tongoa, the differences in the social organisation of access to land and their diverse mat traditions raise interesting questions about the relation between material and non-material cultural forms on these two islands.

The essential relevance and efficacy of the Tongoan mat lies in its identity as a particular material form, rather than its existence as an individual object with an individual history. Mats do not acquire individual biographies and histories and are important as a category which is internally indistinguishable (when woven any mat can stand in for any purpose). The mat effects connections between person and ples not as a result of the efficacy of the symbols or pattern it is embellished with, but, I argue, through it's technical specifications. That is, the material that it is made from and the processes by which it comes into existence. The technical and social relations of mat production are examined closely in chapter 5. Mats also structure the relationship between people and their ples as a result of its presence in the daily practices - gardening, eating, weaving, sleeping - that connect Tongoans to place. This argument is clearly influenced by a phenomenological perspective on how humans perceive and experience the world (Csordas 1994; Merleau-Ponty 1962). Given that the salience of the mat lies in its particular material form structuring the daily processes that organise human experience, it is revealing to consider how this form is in turn apprehended by and through the human body. Touch becomes an obvious faculty here: the qualities of pandanus itself shape this in particular ways as the discussion of weaving reveals in chapters 5 and 6.
1.1i The study of mats in Vanuatu

Mats and other woven forms are made on all of the islands within Vanuatu. Mats are significant on a national scale and since independence have emerged as an appropriate symbol of nation and ni-Vanuatu womanhood. Mats and other woven forms such as baskets are ubiquitous symbols of gender, identity, national unity and island diversity (Keller 1988). The Tongoan mat encompasses a polysemy: a local product making localised statements about people and place whilst also having the capacity to be a national product, making statements about wider identities. The changes of the post-colonial period have led to new social formations and a new arena, such as that of nation, for items such as pandanus mats.

To the north of Tongoa exists an important regional complex of red mat production and exchange. This regional complex of Ambae, Pentecost, Maewo and Tomman Islands features mats dyed to produce stunning patterns in magenta. In central and northern Malakula, magenta dye is used to produce mats of a uniform block of colour (Bonnemaison et al 1996). The most detailed study of mats in Vanuatu to date is the research of Lissant Bolton on Ambae (Bolton 1993;1996; see also Kanegai 1994 and Women's Unit, Vanuatu Cultural Centre 1995). Mabonlala and Walter have published on mats in central Pentecost (Mabonlala 1996, Walter 1996) and Jolly has written about southern Pentecost mats (Jolly 1981;1994). These works will serve as the main contrast for positioning Tongoa mat traditions vis-à-vis the rest of the archipelago.

In central Pentecost there are three basic categories of mats: sese, tsip or malmal, and butsuban (Walter 1996). These mat types differ in form and function. All are made of pandanus (pandanus tectorius), and distinctively, all are made using the same process: each
mat is constructed of two panels joined together by a central seam (ibid:103). This construction is predominantly the same in Ambae (Bolton 1993) and Tongoa. In both Ambae and Tongoa, however, there are mats which do not have two panels but are single panels. Although the category of 'mat' in Ambae is glossed in Bislama as *mat*, in the local languages, there is no generic term for the objects which Ambaeans distinguish into three classifications: *gwana, maraha* and *singo* (Bolton 1993:201). This contrasts with Tongoa where the word *nagbanu* indicates just one category: that of 'pandanus mat'. Walter does not tell us how the three categories of Pentecost mats are indigenously conceptualised but for Ambae Bolton states that the defining principle as to whether a mat is *gwana, maraha* or *singo* is not the design added, but the characteristics - size, shape, finishing edge - of the initial woven form (Bolton 1996:115).

The most immediate visual distinction between the mat-making traditions of Tongoa and the central islands and traditions to the north is the use of colour in creating pattern and design. The use of colour in Tongoa to produce pattern is the direct opposite of the dyeing methods of the north. In Tongoa, colour is introduced during the process of weaving itself, resulting in a very different principle of design. In the northern islands, pattern is dyed onto the surface of the mat using stencils and submersion of the mat in dye baths. In Tongoa (see chapter 5) pandanus is dyed prior to weaving, and the pattern depends on the incorporation of dyed weaving elements into the body of the mat during weaving. Speiser's early work on the material culture of the archipelago notes a connection between Efate and Tongoa in this method (Speiser 1991[1923]). Bolton tells us that certain *singo* type mats incorporate a particular weaving method (overweave) which is then further emphasised by subsequent over-dyeing. This combination is a potent one, with consequences for the power of the individual *singo* mat. No such combination is apparent
on Tongoa mats, although women strive to produce bright colourful mats by selectively using coloured and uncoloured pandanus in weaving patterns, creating a fusion of colour and pattern in the body of the mat as it is woven.

Another aspect of the dyeing methods which distinguish Tongoan mats from those of Ambae and Pentecost are the colours themselves. On Ambae, Bolton reports that red is the preferred colour for all three mat types. Walter tells us that only two of the three central Pentecost mats (sese and tsip or malmal) are dyed with red designs. The third type of mat butsuban, the type used for sleeping, has a white surface. A distinction is thus made between mats used in exchange or ritual and those mats associated with the everyday acts of sleeping and eating (Walter 1996:100). The former have red designs, while the latter are plain and undyed. This split between ceremonial and everyday mats also occurs further south in Pentecost: in Bunlap the mat universe is divided into white pandanus mats (for utilitarian and ceremonial purposes) and batsi, the red mats used solely in ritual exchange (Jolly 1981;1994). The reddish purple dye produced from the ventilago neocaledonica bark and today from commercial dye is the most socially valued and appropriate colour for mats in the northern islands (Bolton 1996). Bolton reports that while women in Ambae may occasionally use other trade store colours such as blue this is not approved of and she goes on to state that "mats should always be red." (ibid:115). In Tongoa and the other central islands of the Shepherds, all commercially available colours are used. The preferred aesthetic is one of vibrancy, brightness and thus eye catching impact. To this end, red, green, blue, yellow and purple dyes are used. The most common colours are a pinky red and green but the more unusual colour is often the more coveted.
In Pentecost, forty seven named designs (each with variations) have been inventoried for use on sese mats and twenty three designs for tsip mats (Mabonlala 1991 cited in Walter 1996). In Ambae, Bolton records twenty different mat types and over fifty names for these types (Bolton 1993: 217). The specificity of Ambae and Pentecost mat traditions, where certain patterns may only be used on certain mat types and thus in certain ritual and exchange events, is a specificity lacking in the mat tradition of Tongoa. The symbolic content of these patterns and the references made through them (Mabonlala 1996) is strikingly absent from the patterns used on Tongoa.

A theme central to the mat-making traditions throughout Vanuatu is the association of mats and weaving with women. For example, in central Pentecost, Walter reports that the red dyed mat is symbolic of menstrual blood and of the “feminine principle of the universe...(and) the lineages which give women in marriage.” (Walter 1996:108). As such, the central Pentecost mat is symbolically opposed to pig’s tusks, “which represents men’s reproductive substance, the masculine principle of the world and the lineages which give men.” (ibid.). Furthermore, the two panels of the mat and the two tusks on either side of the pig’s jaw directly refer to each other. Bolton also postulates a connection between the two panels of the east Ambae mat and the matrilineal moieties (Bolton 1993).

An important factor in the very strong cultural association between women and mats is the fact that it is women who make mats, women who spend a good deal of their day (and sometimes nights) making mats. In short, on Tongoa, women are the source of mats in both a metaphysical and practical sense. If a man needs a mat for a particular exchange or fine payment, he must persuade his female kin to part with a mat she has woven or stored. This is in fact an underlying principle of gender relations: women make the mats that are
needed in every sphere of life by all individuals, both men and women. Bolton refers to women as the "sole producers" of mats and locates mat production as emerging from female identities and female relationships alone (1996:114). Whilst only women can weave, however, the relationships of production that create the mat on Tongoa, extend beyond the moment of technical transformation of pandanus into mat. The cultivation of pandanus in the garden extends the social relations of mat production into a realm that is characterised and defined by male-female relations and co-operation.

The knowledge and practice of mat-making itself on Tongoa are almost exclusively orientated towards the female however. For the most part, it is women who plant, harvest and process pandanus and only women who know how to weave. In contrast, the production of the red dyed batsi mats of Bunlap, Pentecost demonstrate a very different dynamic of male - female relations in mat production. While in Tongoa, as in Ambae, it is women alone who process pandanus and weave mats, in south Pentecost women weave the batsi mats but it is men who dye them and create the patterns on their surface (Jolly 1981).

Another feature of the northern mat complex which differs essentially from Tongoa is the way that mats correlate to certain structures of social organisation. On Ambae, mats are ranked, just as men, women and pigs are (Bolton 1993:220; Rodman 1981). Particular types of mats and particular patterns are reserved for high ranking men and women in the graded society. As we see through the course of this thesis a formal relationship between mat type and social structures does not exist on Tongoa. On Ambae individual mats have the capacity to accompany and refer to individual persons in a way that Tongoa mats do not.
In both Tongoa and the northern islands, mats are used in exchange and ceremony. Despite the profound differences in their form and design, the mats of Ambae and Tongoa share a very important characteristic, namely, that as individual items they do not acquire personal biographies and accrue value as they age and participate in more and more exchanges. In this Tongoan and Ambaean mats differ significantly from the fine mats of Polynesia such as those of Samoa (Kaeppler 1978; Linnekin 1991a; Weiner 1989). Bolton's description of the ways that mats feature in Ambae marriage exchange differs dramatically from the ways mats are exchanged in Tongoa:

"Today, mats dominate exchanges...as many as 1500 mats may be exchanged at one marriage. The sight of women pouring onto the ceremonial ground, carrying great baskets of mats on their heads, is a most dramatic and impressive one. When they reach the centre of the ground, they let the baskets fall from their heads with a satisfying thud, expressive of the labour they have invested in their contribution to the exchange, and unfold and lay out the mats in great heaps." (Bolton 1996:114)

This contrasts with the Tongoan presentation and exchange of mats. In Tongoa, mats do not necessarily dominate events in their numbers or display, but nonetheless quietly underpin events: people say that one cannot go to an exchange without mats. Neither the event nor one’s participation can occur without mats.

When mats are given by attending kin at life cycle events on Tongoa they are carried in small numbers and presented to a host designated the ‘diary man’. He or she is responsible for recording the gifts brought by everyone. The diary man sits in a house, or purpose built shelter (see plate 7.0) receiving mats and other gifts (lengths of calico, money) and recording the name of the giver. The piles of mats are thus out of sight and a point is not made of their display. Although women most usually carry mats to events it is not unusual to see men also do this. Women, however, will carry mats folded in a dogi basket (see
plate i) while men will tuck a folded mat under their arm. This gendered engagement with the mat is very clear from the moment the mat is made and, along with pandanus, has its ultimate origins in the differential engagement of men and women with gardens and land. These themes are picked up and considered in an analysis of the social relations of garden making (chapter 2) and land relations (chapter 3).

1.1ili Land, Place and Ples

Tongoan concerns surrounding land are a central theme in this thesis. The management of land relations on Tongoa is fundamentally connected to being of that place, a concept indicated in Bislama as ples. The concept of ples in ni-Vanuatu Bislama fuses notions of place and identity; humans and the places that they occupy, garden, eat from and dwell in are understood to be mutually acting upon and constituting one another. The concept of ples as articulating ni-Vanuatu notions of identity and belonging has been widely considered in ethnographic work done in the archipelago (Bonnemaison 1984, 1994; Larcom 1982; Jolly 1992; Rodman 1987; Rubenstein 1978). The importance of ideas of ples in organising the spatial division of Tongoa and its surrounding islands is considered later in this introduction (section 1.5). An essential part of the cultural logic behind this spatial organisation are perceptions of land considered in chapter 3 and the processes by which Tongoans identify and are identified with the place that is Tongoa (chapter 6). Without pre-empting the discussions of land and ples in chapters 3 and 6, the present section considers the framework of these important themes in the thesis.

That the enactment, assessment and recall of events and relationships occurs with reference to named places in many Melanesian cultures has been widely noted (Kahn 1990; Tilley 1994; Bonnemaison 1994). The understanding that places are culturally ‘made’ and do not
exist as pre-given backdrops for action has received renewed interest in anthropology recently. Theoretical interest in place within cultural geography has been taken up by anthropologists exploring how ethnography can contribute to theorising space, place and landscape (Bender 1993; Rodman 1992; Feld and Basso 1996; Tilley 1994; Hirsch and O'Hanlon 1995). Emerging from these works is an emphasis on the construction of place as ‘lived space’ embodying spatial narratives, relationships and values inscribed upon the world through different aesthetics such as poetry, song and story as well as the practices of everyday life. In short, human experience is understood to be grounded in and shaped by place: “the lived world in physical form” (Rodman 1992:650).

Rodman considers the attention paid to meanings of place in anthropology and emphasises that places are not “inert containers” where things (including ethnography) happen but are politicised social and cultural constructs (Rodman 1992: 640). Rodman argues that more attention needs to be paid to how specific places contain and evoke others: “one could argue that regional relations between lived spaces are developed through infusing experience in one place with the evocation of other events and other places.” (ibid:644). This view of places implicated with other places in what Rodman calls a ‘geographical milieu’ (cf Munn 1990) is helpful in analysing Tongoan constructions of a regional world through the dispersed places and relationships that constitute the title system. The understanding of place in this thesis is influenced by phenomenological perspectives on place as embodied experience of the world (Casey 1996; Merleau-Ponty 1962; Munn 1986). This perspective illuminates the discussion of ples on Tonga and its surrounding region, emerging clearly in the discussion of the embodied social and spatial divisions of Tonga (section 1.5).
Within this understanding of the embodiment of place and spatial relationships, the analysis of the mat in later chapters reveals how it is a central artefact of these processes of embodiment. The spatial divisions of place are made manifest and partially constructed through the presence of the mat. The mat creates spatial relationships between people and events based upon two very different aspects of itself, namely, its qualities as both a mobile and a fixed object. Firstly, as a stationary object fixed in the household, the mat organises people’s proximity to one another when it is laid out for people to sit, eat or lie on. In the simple act of putting a mat on the ground, where and how one places it creates social spaces, organising and dividing people's relationships to one another. Indeed, what appears to be a simple act in fact constitutes a whole complex series of statements about Tongoan cultural processes (Bourdieu 1977). Secondly, as a mobile object, one that travels outward from its namatana of origin to other namatana, the mat has the capacity to connect people and places in the context of the event. These themes are returned to in the second section of the thesis.

This thesis is divided into two sections. Broadly as a whole the thesis is an examination of how the making and use of mats is implicated within the dynamic of the relationships between chiefly titles and land, and more generally, between people and place. The first section ‘Dialogues of Island and Place’ examines the contexts of the arguments that I make about mats, land and ples. The first of these contexts is Purau village, location of fieldwork. The chapter considers the structures of Islanders’ lives within the village andchieftainship. Chapter 3 looks at the way the title system organises access to land and examines the background of land relations on Tongoa today. Thirdly, opening out these discussions, chapter 4 discusses the wider context of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the parameters of the research project itself. A number of themes run through the first section

36
of the thesis: the importance of the attachment between people and land in contemporary Tongoa, the position of mats within the making and unmaking of such attachments, and the relationship between the changing power of chiefs and the processes of land transmission. Section Two ‘Metaphors of Reproduction’ picks up these themes and examines them through a detailed discussion of how mats articulate and enable the social reproduction of people and their attachment to land and ples. These discussions focus upon the mat itself; an examination of the technical and social relations of production in chapter 5 is followed by an analysis of the references contained in the material form of the mat (chapter 6). Finally, chapter 7 brings the themes of people and place together in an examination of the role of mats in the passing on of chiefly titles and lifecycle rites more generally. Before embarking on these considerations, however, I first conduct a survey of the ethnography of Vanuatu and place Tongoa within the context of its surrounding region and recent history.

1.2 Variety of Social and Political Forms in the Archipelago

The concern of this section is to conduct a comparative sketch of the ethnography of Vanuatu as a whole and to review the major work published on the regions to the north and south of Tongoa. A number of themes run through this review: chieftainship and political authority, concepts of ples and mobility, the fundamental significance of land, and material culture. These themes serve to contrast and compare Tongoa and the Shepherd region to the rest of the archipelago and begin to foreground issues of land, ples and identity.
1.2i A Brief History

Vanuatu is an island nation conventionally situated within the category of Island Melanesia (Spriggs 1997), but with considerable Polynesian influence in particular islands. 1 An archipelago of some eighty islands (of which sixty eight are inhabited) Vanuatu is often described as lying in a Y shape along a north-west south-east axis between the 13° and 21° south and the 166° and 170° east (see map 1). The islands are volcanic in origin (MacClancy 1980) and volcanic activity has played an important role in the history of the Shepherd Islands in particular (see below). Original colonisation of the islands is thought to have occurred in successive waves of Austronesian expansion and settlement from South East Asia throughout the Pacific region beginning some 6,000 years ago (Gorecki 1996; Irwin 1992; Spriggs 1997).

Spriggs discusses early settlement in Island Melanesia occurring between 40,000 and 20,000 years ago but states that there is currently no evidence for Vanuatu being occupied before 3,200 years ago (1997:40). This date, however, is solely dependant on the limited archaeological investigations carried out so far and further excavations may reveal earlier settlement (ibid.). Early European encounters with the islands began with the voyage of de Quiros in 1606. De Quiros set up a short-lived colony on the large northern island that he named *Terra Austrialis del Espiritu Santo*. In 1768, de Bougainville named the islands the Great Cyclades, and 1774, Captain Cook named the group the New Hebrides. Ruled by a

---

1 On the classification of Melanesia in this thesis: Melanesia is a regional name which has come to be contrasted to other regions of the Pacific, namely Polynesia and Micronesia, through historical use and precedent. Dominant usage of the terms date from the time of European expansion in the nineteenth century, and continue to be used today, although their imprecise nature and origin is acknowledged: Sillitoe refers to the category of Melanesia as “a certain ill-defined sameness, which shades off at its margins into difference.” (Sillitoe 1998:1).
unique Anglo-French Condominium from 1906 until 1980 (see chapter 3), Vanuatu achieved Independence in 1980. The most recent population figures for the archipelago is 156,000 (Republic of Vanuatu 1991).

Any discussion of the ethnography of Vanuatu must initially acknowledge the division between French and English language enquiries. As with all aspects of life and administration inherited from the colonial era, the Condominium has left a legacy of a divided tradition (Miles 1998). Throughout the time of the colonial government, researchers were regulated and overseen by either the French or British administrations with the result of somewhat separate research traditions. This situation was further complicated by a moratorium on anthropological (and archaeological) research from 1985. The moratorium ended in 1995 and although French and English language researchers are still somewhat separate the situation has improved in recent years with a number of translations and joint publications and surveys of research in all languages (Valjavec 1986, 1987).

The earliest ethnographies of the archipelago include the comparative works of Codrington (1891) and Rivers (1914) on Melanesian cultures. Language was often a focus of early anthropological attention (Codrington 1885; Ray 1926). There are more than one hundred Austronesian languages spoken in Vanuatu, making Vanuatu one of the highest areas of language density in the world with some 1,500 speakers for each language (Tryon 1996b:170). Three Polynesian languages are spoken in Vanuatu, two of which (Mele-Fila

2 A figure of 164, 100, based on a 1994 estimate, is given in a 1996 publication (David 1996: 320).
3 Most notably the 1990 translation of Felix Speiser’s Ethnology of Vanuatu: An Early Twentieth Century Study (Speiser [1923]1990) and the 1996 volume Arts of Vanuatu (Bonnemaison et al.) which was published in both English and French to accompany the travelling exhibition of the same name.
and *Emae* are located in the central region. These languages are sometimes called Polynesian Outliers and are the result of Polynesian back-migrations between AD 1000 and AD 1400 (Tryon 1976; 1996a). Tryon depicts the connections between the languages of the archipelago as a chain of shared characteristics of lexicon and grammatical features (Tryon 1996b: 176). This situation of overlapping but distinct spheres of commonality is matched by the pre-colonial trade routes and networks which previously interconnected the islands of the archipelago from the Torres Islands in the north, to Aneityum in the south (Bonnemaison 1996a: 174).

Bonnemaison employs the metaphor of a web to describe this pre-colonial situation: “a pattern of autonomous points [a language and local society] linked by threads of relationship.” (Bonnemaison 1996a: 174). He develops this into an interesting representation and explanation of the form the societies of the archipelago took:

“in the web of relations thus formed, the points where the most threads converge stand out and indicate central nodules, knots where the web is more densely woven, allowing communication between segments which otherwise would remain separate”, producing “a multi-centred cultural space” (Bonnemaison 1996a:173-174).

Thus, centres and peripheries are resisted, and the autonomy of the local group is maintained. The islands are characterised as a ‘network society’: “In such a system, the extent or size of the islands counts less than their position relative to each other. Topology is the primary datum.” (Bonnemaison 1996a:175). So rather than a series of completely separate cultures, an image reinforced by the actual physical separation of the islands themselves, an imbricated sequence stretched throughout the archipelago. This sequence previously connected even the most widely divergent societies and languages. Yet within this system of connectivity, independent localised societies existed and flourished. These
ideas consider the pre-contact history of the archipelago but Bonnemaison's idea of “central nodules” where roads of communication and trade converge has the potential to inform contemporary understandings of the siting of Tongoa. Tongoa is at a cross-roads within the archipelago, a bridge between the northern societies via Epi, and the southern societies via Efate and further south, Erromango (Bonnemaison 1996a:175).

The political systems of Vanuatu have been characterised as falling into broadly two categories: those societies where political authority and material wealth revolve around graded ranks, and those where political authority is organised through hereditary titles (Allen 1981; Bonnemaison et al. 1996; MacClancy 1980). In the former, men and women attain influence through personal ambition and resources, and in the latter, authority is attained through hereditary acquisition of hierarchical chiefly titles restricted to men (Allen 1981; Bonnemaison 1996b:200). Early ethnographies of the north often concentrated on the graded societies that extend from the Torres group to Epi Island (Allen 1972; Bonnemaison et al. 1996; Deacon 1934; Layard 1928,1942). These grades refer to hierarchical ranks which men aspire to and achieve through mastery of material resources such as pigs. Political power is thus organised through male competition (but see also Bolton 1993 and Rodman 1981 for an assessment of women’s grade-taking). The onus is on the grade-taker to pay for all the rituals involved in his taking a higher grade, and when he achieves the higher rank, there is a corresponding right to certain insignia and rights of rank such as moving to the associated cooking fire in the men’s house. The grade-taker is buying the right to enter the grade from those men who have already attained it.
The grade system is still practised in Ambae, Pentecost, Maewo, and some parts of Ambrym and Malakula (Bonnemaison 1996b:200). Graded ranks often co-occur in northern Vanuatu with matrilineal moieties (Ambae, Pentecost, Maewo, Banks) and secret societies which are the magic/spiritual correlate to the graded hierarchy (Allen 1981b). In addition, this area has a number of origin myths in common. In yet other areas (northern Malakula, south west Malakula and north Ambrym) the graded-taking institution takes place in patrilineal societies, and the rituals and ranks achieved were more religious in character than further north (Deacon 1934; Layard 1942). In Malakula, the rise of a man through the ranks was akin to his moving further away from the world of men and closer to the world of spirits/ancestors (Bonnemaison 1996b:209). The presence of slit-gong drums is a feature throughout the northern region. This represents a connection with the islands of the centre through material forms rather than social or political forms: slit-gong drums, hollowed and carved out of tree trunks were erected on the dancing grounds of Efate and the Shepherds in the pre-missionary era (Michelsen 1892: 36, 151; Don 1926).

In contrast to the graded societies, in the central islands (from southern Epi through the Shepherd Islands to Efate Island), power and rank is achieved differently and revolves around title. The political organisation of the Shepherds is often characterised as hereditary chiefdoms, which are sometimes referred to as Polynesian in type (Guiart 1973: Bonnemaison 1996b). MacClancy refers to hereditary chiefs among the Big Nambas of north Malakula in addition to the Shepherds, Mele Island, and Vila Island (MacClancy 1980:29). Hierarchy is a socio-political feature of both the graded ranks of the north and the title system of the centre and south. Titles are typically hierarchically arranged from dominant to subordinate (Guiart 1973:408). In the central region (the Shepherd Islands) a
top ranking title (nawota) has two or three ranks of title holder who receive title and land from him and who owe allegiance in return.

Each title is thus part of a larger whole and has been characterised as pyramidal in structure (Bonnemaison 1996b) with the title nawota at the apex. Each nawota and each title has a particular kastom histri (oral history) which is an account of the arrival of that title on Tongoa and that of the men 'behind' him. This next level of titles - napau nawota (smol jif, 'small chiefs') - are the heads of residential descent groups (namatana) - and likewise have titles beneath them. Local idioms, however, do not speak of these titles being beneath the nawota but rather 'behind' him. This suggests a somewhat different structure than a pyramid, and rather, a structure where the dynamic of support is spatially characterised as extending horizontally rather than vertically. This spatial dimension of the nawota's support extending outwards rather than downwards has significant connotations for the spatial organisation of the chiefly title and land discussed in chapter 3. It is with the dimension of land and specifically, title and land, that the political systems of northern and central islands differ sharply. In the graded ranks of the north, a hierarchy is created that is not formally connected to the system of land tenure, while the titles of the central islands are explicitly linked to land tenure.

Kaufmann has described the Shepherd Islands and Efate as a 'transitional zone' in the centre of the country (Kaufmann 1996:27). This transitional zone connects the northern zone (from the Banks to north Epi) that produces the greatest variety of material forms such as tree fern or wooden carvings, ceremonial houses, masks and effigies, and the southern zone (Tanna, Aneityum, Futuna, Erromango and Aniwa) where “there are no, or almost no images in permanent materials.” (ibid). In the northern region the rich variety of
non-material forms such as the graded society and secret societies seems to mirror the high incidence of material forms. The Shepherds and Efate are connected to the southern zone through common traditions such as barkcloth production and to the northern zone by criterion such as the “symbolic use of objects of value (traditional shell money, chiefly insignia, and so on), or...architectural forms” (ibid:27). Such architectural forms include carvings that once adorned the *fa rea*: “The bird with outstretched wings reigns on the nakamal rooftops of Tongoa, also symbolising the great power and the spirit of the canoes.” (ibid: 33; also see Don 1927:205). Undoubtedly, both today and in the past, areas such as Malakula and Ambrym seemed to have produced a huge proliferation of carved images. Mats, baskets and other woven forms, however, appear throughout the archipelago. Although mentioned by early ethnographies (Layard 1942), their role has not been emphasised, even in investigations devoted to material culture (Speiser 1991[1923]).

Systems of political authority in the southern region (Erromango, Tanna, Aniwa, Futuna and Aneityum) feature hereditary chiefs similar to the titles of the centre (Bonnemaison 1996b). Apart from early regional surveys (Humphreys 1926) studies of the southern islands have tended to concentrate on Tanna (Adams 1984; Bonnemaison 1994; Brunton 1981; Lindstrom 1990; Guiart 1961; Capell 1958) and issues of power and social structure have often been emphasised, with a lack of enquiry into the material forms produced. Such forms as baskets have only briefly been the subject of interest. Keller’s enquiry into Futuna Island baskets examines them as ‘neotraditional’ forms that have the capacity to encompass the local and the national in the new arena of nation-state (Keller 1988). Keller’s article, however, is almost alone in considering material culture in the south. By far the greater tendency has been to examine non-material forms such as knowledge and speech and to analyse them as objectified systems (Lindstrom 1990).
Grouping the societies of the archipelago into 'types' may be useful in such a broad overview, but the danger of identifying cultural types and classifying them into common groups must be acknowledged. Principles such as matrilineal and patrilineal can be seen throughout the archipelago but, as Tonkinson points out, even in societies considered strongly unilineal, both principles are in evidence in access to land (Tonkinson 1982:75). Indeed, broad principles of access to land existed between the pre-colonial land tenure systems of north and south (Alotoa et al. 1984; Arutangai 1987; Van Trease 1984). Rodman points out that the pre-colonial organisation of land tenure was marked by just such coexistence of apparently opposing canons:

"Land holding principles were diverse, linked by common but often paradoxical themes (such as rootedness and mobility, matrilineality and patrilineality, communal and individual control" (Rodman 1995:8).

Even given such paradoxical themes in common, the principles of land holding between north and centre can be seen to differ in the relation that they have to political authority. As mentioned above, the hierarchy of titles in the Shepherd Island are linked to land tenure very specifically, in contrast to the graded ranks of the northern islands. This divergence parallels in an interesting way the similar divergence in the mat traditions of each region. In the northern mat traditions (Ambae, Pentecost, Malakula) mats are highly differentiated and embellished, which perhaps parallels the diversity of grades and secret societies and indicates a different relationship between the use of mats and land relations. In the northern region in other words, the articulation of hierarchy is diverse and not formally fixed to land tenure. In contrast, in the centre, the hierarchy of titles is fixed to land and extends across the whole region. Correspondingly, the mat tradition of the centre features undifferentiated mats that, we shall see, bear very specific relation to the use of land in the Shepherd Islands.
1.3 The Shepherd Islands: centre of the archipelago

The Shepherd Islands are a group of islands at the centre of the Vanuatu archipelago made up of Tongoa, Buninga, Tongariki, Makura, Emae, Mataso and the uninhabited islands of Tevala, Laika, Ewose and Falea (see map 2). This small archipelago forms a system within a larger regional complex that includes south Epi and north Efate and offshore islands. The following section examines how the title system connects the islands of the centre into a regional complex. Ties of allegiance with Efate to the south and Epi to the north represent the overlapping commonalities of the archipelago referred to in the previous section.

The Shepherd Islands display a large degree of cultural homogeneity in the structure of the chieftainship system, land tenure and social organisation. According to Guiart Tongoa and Tongariki form the most complex and clearly defined variants of a model of social and political organisation that extends across the region (Guiart 1973: preface). Language is sometimes cited by Shepherd Islanders as a mark of difference between the islands, but the uniformity of the chieftainship system is always invoked to demonstrate their essential similarity. There are however differential attitudes (Tongoa-centric in this case) to specific islands within the group. For example, people on Tongoa speak of Mataso as being different: the people look different and are less known than others from Emae and Makura. Generally, Tongoa exerts more influence regionally (and nationally) and despite being on the far eastern edge of the group, dominates a convergence of paths of chiefly alliances (Guiart 1973: 467). In Bonnemaison’s metaphor of island societies forming a “web of relations” Tongoa would be a “central nodule” or “knot” (Bonnemaison 1996a: 173-174).

The dominance of Tongoa in the region is sarcastically acknowledged in a number of ways from the stereotype of Tongoan aggressiveness, to the saying ‘big aelan, big hed’ (large island, large head). Mataso and Tongoa are the furthest away from each other of the
Shepherds group, and there are not many kin links between the two. Efate is acknowledged to be related to the Shepherds and features prominently in the oral histories of settlement of these islands. There is for example a saying (identified to me as *kastom toktok*, a ‘traditional saying’) that the Shepherd Islands are the reef of Efate Island.

The pattern of chiefly alliance and obligation, stemming from shared chiefly histories, form the Shepherd Islands into an integrated whole. I heard the following statement many times about the region: ‘*ol Sepad Aelan, oli sem mak nomo*’ (‘the Shepherd Islands are identical, all the same’). The shaping of a shared understanding of the islands as an integrated whole was facilitated in the past by canoe journeys between Epi Island at the northern edge, Tongoa at the eastern edge, and Efate at the western edge. This maritime aspect of regional identity continues today with the frequent journeys of the two ships serving the Shepherds, the MV Marata and the MV Belama. Both owned and operated by Shepherds people, these ships ply back and forth between the islands, carrying people, produce, cargo and livestock. The twice daily shipping news on the radio is an important marker of the day for people in rural villages. These ships primarily enable movement between each of the Shepherd Islands and Efate. There is movement between the other islands of the archipelago, but Efate has become the dominant commercial centre and there has been a steady population move from all the Shepherds Islands to Efate (Bonnemaison 1977;1985:78).

The differences between the Shepherd Islands and Efate lie primarily in the ways that kinship and other principles of relatedness are structured. These differences represent an internal division within the region between Efate and it’s offshore islands, and the islands of

---

4 Unless otherwise noted all translations of Bislama quotations in the thesis are my translations.
the Shepherds group proper. Guiart states that the same vocabulary terms are used for parallel institutions throughout the region, from Efate throughout the Shepherds. The ways that these institutions ‘work’ differ however (Guiart 1973). Despite close language affinities between north Efate and offshore islands - that side of Efate orientated towards the Shepherds - the structural differences illustrate the history of the area. One of the most significant differences between the social organisation of the Shepherd Islands and Efate is the presence of matrilineal exogamous totemic clans on Efate and offshore islands Emau, Pele, Kakula, Nguna, Moso, Leleppa, and Retoka (Facey 1989; Guiart 1964, 1973). Facey and Guiart differ on whether these clans acted to govern marriage (Facey 1981:298) or served as extra-chiefdom entities that enabled people to move through hostile groups safely during times of warfare (Guiart 1973).

Such matrilineal clan membership in Efate exists in tandem with patrilocal residence groups, and continues today. Tongoa and the other Shepherd Islands had no such tradition of matrilineal clans. Facey states that missionary attempts on Nguna to invert the matrilineal principle governing the inheritance of title and land succeeded only with the highest level titles (Facey 1981). The less visible lower ranking titles continued to pass in the matriline. All such titles are transmitted in the patriline on Tongoa. Nineteenth century missionary Michelsen (1892; 1934) and later, Miller (1987) do not mention attempts to change on Tongoa a matrilineal principle of inheritance in favour of the title holder’s own offspring.

1.4 Tongoa in Perspective

Situated within the central region of the archipelago, Tongoa is the largest centre of an outwardly radiating network of chiefly allegiances, oral histories, kinship ties and political
affinities. The following section describes the social and spatial organisation of the island and considers previous ethnographic work. Tongoa is an irregularly shaped hilly volcanic island, rising steeply out of the ocean, with rocky shores and areas of black volcanic sandy beach (see map 3). It lies at latitude 17° south, and has a tropical climate with clearly marked wet and dry seasons. The wet season between November and April is typically hotter and it is during this period that frequent, sometimes devastating, cyclones occur. Tongoa is the largest of the Shepherd Islands and is part of a seascape of islands that are both separated and connected by the sea. There are no reefs surrounding Tongoa, although reefs serve as important cultural metaphors. Other of the Shepherd Islands, notably Makura and Emae, have extensive reefs and they thus form part of regional knowledge.

1.4i Language

There are three indigenous languages spoken in the Shepherds in addition to the languages of education, English and French, and the national lingua franca of Bislama.\(^5\) Bislama is a Melanesian pidgin which has its roots (along with Tok Pisin of Papua New Guinea and Pijin of the Solomons Islands) in the plantations of Queensland in the last century (Crowley 1990; Tryon 1987). As mentioned above, although Efate Island is not considered part of the Shepherds group, there are considerable links between the languages of north Efate and certain Shepherd Islands. This language or dialects of the same language have been variously referred to as North Efate, Nakanamanga, Ngunese and Tongoan (Lynch 1994; Tryon 1976). Nakanamanga and its variants are spoken in the

\(^5\) A note on non-English words in the text. References in the local vernacular and Bislama will be written in italics and in italics and underlined respectively. Unless specified, all references in locally specific language will be Nakanamanga, the language spoken in Purau where fieldwork was centred.
northern part of Efate Island and its offshore islands of Nguna, Pele, Emau, Siviri and Moso, and on Emae Island and northern Tongoa.

The language spoken in northern Tongoa is formally identified by Tryon as North Efate (Tryon 1976). Following Lynch, however, I refer to it as Nakanamanga (Lynch 1994). It is very similar to the language of Nguna Island, sometimes called Ngunese, which was the language used by early Presbyterian missionaries in the area to translate scripture and hymn. This situation continues today with the primary hymn book Na-legaana Maga ni Nalotuana\(^6\) (Maropa: 1974) being used in church services in both Nakanamanga and Namakura speaking areas of Tongoa. In addition, Peter Milne, missionary to the Nguna district, which included the Namakura speaking islands of Makura and Mataso, imposed Ngunese as the language of the church throughout the district. Written records and narrative, mostly missionary, exist from the nineteenth century and at this time the languages of Nguna and Tongoa may have differed more than they do today. Miller notes that the Nakanamanga language changed considerably between his time on Tongoa in the 1940's and when he made a return visit in 1984 (Miller nd.b). The similarities in contemporary Nakanamanga and Ngunese have possibly been influenced by the missionary texts in Ngunese dating from the nineteenth century which were and still are used in Tongoa (Anon 1891, 1972; Milne 1989). In addition, these texts were used in Efate, and the translations that had been done in Efate dialects (such as Rev. Macdonald's Efatese Primer, Catechism and Hymn Book c.1870) were eclipsed by the greater availability of work in Ngunese (Miller 1987:116).\(^7\) Today, Nakanamanga-speaking Shepherds people say they speak the same language as north Efate and Nguna but with very different accents.

---

\(^6\) Na-legaana Maga ni Nalotuana (O I Singsing blong Wosip; Songs for Worship).

\(^7\) The History of the New Hebrides Mission Press compiled by J.A Ferguson (1943) compiles all the publications produced in local languages. Thirty nine works in Ngunese are listed; Milne is responsible for all except for three by Oscar Michelsen (cited in Miller 1987:146).
More formal linguistic attention has been paid to Ngunese than the other variants (Facey 1988; Schütz 1969a, 1969b).

The second major regional language is called Namakura by Tryon (Tryon 1976). Namakura is spoken solely in the Shepherd group, on Makura, Mataso, Tongariki, Buninga, parts of Emae and in the southern part of Tongoa. Few recent publications have examined Namakura (Sperlich 1993, Sperlich et al. 1986; but previously see also Tregear 1896; Ray 1897). Namakura differs significantly from Nakanamanga; villagers raised in one language often state that they cannot understand the other language at all. The third regional language, Emae is only spoken on Emae Island and is one of the ‘Polynesian Outlier’ languages spoken in Vanuatu (Capell 1962; Clark 1978). We thus see a situation of overlapping language commonality in the Shepherds which mirrors the linguistic situation of the archipelago as a whole. On Tongoa and Emae Island, the largest of the Shepherd Islands, two and three languages are spoken respectively, representing overlapping spheres of mutual intelligibility through the region.

1.4ii Ethnographic literature on Tongoa

Tongoa and the central region has not been the focus of much anthropological work. By far the most detailed research published on the area are the works of Guiart, Espirat, Lagrange and Renaud (Espirat et al.1973) and Garanger (1982). These publications are the result of a joint project which is the most comprehensive survey of central Vanuatu to date. The project encompassed geological work (Espirat), archaeological (Garanger) as well as ethnographic enquiries conducted by Guiart. Later work done by Bonnemaison has supplemented the work done by the joint project (Guiart et al 1973), although Bonnemaison has not published work which concentrates on Tongoa exclusively (but see
Bonnemaison 1984; 1996b). There has been no published anthropological work specifically devoted to the other Shepherd Islands, although the work of Facey on Nguna Island, off the north coast of Efate provides valuable comparative material (Facey 1981; 1988; 1989; 1995). Early missionaries on Efate itself also provide some data on the region (MacDonald 1889a; 1889b; 1892).

The earliest writing of an ethnographic nature on Tongoa was done by missionaries. Oscar Michelsen, the first European missionary to live and work on Tongoa arrived there in 1879 and published two works about his fifty years on the island (Michelsen 1892; 1934). Michelsen’s contemporary Peter Milne was engaged in converting the population of Nguna Island to the south of Tongoa (Don 1927). Graham Miller, posted with his wife Flora Miller on Tongoa from 1941-1947, is undoubtedly the most dedicated missionary author of the region and has spent many years working on a comprehensive series of books about the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu (Miller 1978-1987). All of these missionary publications mention the social and cultural structures of the region and, in particular, the chieftainship system and its origins.

The origin of the chiefly title system, composed of three ranks of title, extends across the region and is explained by Tongoans today through the resettlement of the islands following the Kuwae cataclysm. The story of the eruption which destroyed an island named Kuwae has been told in the oral tradition of Tongoa and other Shepherd Islands for

---

8 During my time in the field, however, two other anthropologists were conducting research in the Shepherds: Chihiro Shirakawa (see Shirakawa 1999) in the Namakura speaking village of Itakoma on Tongoa, and Samantha Sherkin, working with Mataso Islanders resettled in Port Vila.

9 The attention paid to the chieftainship system reflects perhaps missionary and colonial interest in local forms of government. The success of the missionary was dependant upon gaining tolerance and acceptance from local leaders.
generations. The story was published by Guiart (1973) (see also Miller 1985:144-155; Garanger 1982, 1996) and also told to me. I present a summarised version here.

The Kuwae Explosion and the Chiefs Return

Before, Kuwae was Epi, Laika, Tevala, Vatumiala, Tongariki, Bunina, Falea and Ewose islands; they all formed one. And at this time they was a man named Tombuku. He and his brothers were making laplap from red yams. Tombuku used a white yam however, and this turned the entire laplap white. The next day they made laplap again, this time from white yams. This time, Tombuku used a red yam, and once again the whole laplap turned another colour, red. At this, Tombuku’s brothers were jealous and tried to spear him, but did not succeed. They then tricked him into committing incest with his own mother, and in anger Tombuku went to his uncle on Lopevi Island\textsuperscript{10} to ask for the means to sink Kuwae. His uncle tells him to help him dig at the volcano, and carrying a long red yam, he skins it and cuts the top off. Placing this yam near the volcano, first a black lizard, then green, white and yellow lizards approach the yam. With each lizard the uncle asks if Tombuku wants this one, each one Tombuku rejects, until finally a red lizard approaches. This lizard has red teeth and a red tongue, and when it pushes it’s tongue out, fire flames forth. Tombuku declares that this is the one he wants, and he pushes it inside the red yam. His uncle tells him to carry this yam back to Kuwae and bury at the base of the nearu (\textit{siok, casuarina equisetifolia}) tree by the Kuwae farea (\textit{nakama\textbf{1}. chief’s meeting house})\textsuperscript{11} for six years. Then his uncle tells him to kill pigs and put their bladders at the top of the nearu for six years.

After six years has passed, Tombuku tells his mother “today, we will eat and feast, all family, everyone.” He then kills pigs, and tells his family to come and feast. Everyone eats, and Tombuku climbs the nearu and climbs down again. They then know that he is preparing something. ‘What is he doing?’ they ask themselves. He

\textsuperscript{10} Lopevi is a small island north-west of Tongoa. It has an active volcano and was inhabited, but following an explosion in the nineteenth century is no longer occupied. Occasionally at night, the red glow of the volcano is visible from Tongoa. Tombuku’s choice to seek out the help of his \textit{loloa} (MB or FZH) on Lopevi thus makes sense for two reasons: firstly one’s \textit{loloa}, particularly one’s mother’s brother, is understood to be a primary source of support, secondly, the island where he lives is actually a live volcano.

\textsuperscript{11} The \textit{farea} is where the act of incest took place.
is doing this because he slept with his mother: Tombuku tells them “today, all of you will see my mother’s ass become red.” Tombuku then climbs the nearu again. He then eats, and when he has finished, his mother and family continue to eat while he climbs the nearu again, and holding one of the pig’s bladders, he sings. Tombuku sings, addressing the island, telling Kuwae, to wait, wait, wait like Bulaewa (a small island that once existed near to Emae Island but is now submerged beneath the sea) and then to burst into flame, to explode into pieces like the megme tree (a tree whose seeds fall to the earth in a spinning motion in a great shower when the tree is shaken). Tombuku calls upon the namalau (skrabdak, megapodius freycinet which digs an underground nest and lays its eggs) to ‘scratch out’ the island, his brothers to ‘scratch out’ the island. With this, he breaks the first pigs bladder with a loud bang. He then goes onto a second bladder singing the same song. Tombuku breaks this in the same manner, and goes onto a third.

At this, all those of Kuwae gathered there start to call out loudly to Tombuku, and to laugh at him. Tombuku then sings for the third time, with the third pigs bladder. When he breaks this one, they feel the island tremble. They say: “but what is Tombuku doing?” And Tombuku climbs back up the nearu and taking the fourth pig’s bladder, he sings again. Again, when he breaks it, all feel Kuwae shake and move. Then all the people and the chief say, “oh, but what is this man doing?” and with the fourth bladder, they see smoke, they see that the sea is smoking, and clouds are rolling in. It looks like its going to rain, although it doesn’t rain, and clouds from the volcano billow forth because the volcano is moving, all because Tombuku has buried it, he has succeeded because he dug the roots of the nearu and waited six years. Six years have passed now, and the volcano is preparing to explode.

Tombuku takes the fifth pig’s bladder and from the top of the nearu tree sings again. When he breaks this, all there see the smoke completely cover Kuwae. At this, everyone begins to run away frantically. Some take canoes and go to Atasiwo (Epi Island), some go to different islands. At this, Tombuku climbs back up the nearu and strikes the sixth and final bladder. He says: “today, you will all see my mother’s ass become red. This day, you make me sleep with my mother.” And
then, they all feel the volcano, Kuwae move and shake. Then, Tombuku takes out the sixth bladder and singing for the final time, the volcano explodes apart, and turns upside down and the island is cut into Laika, Tevala, Atasiwo, Tongoa, Ewose, Valea, Tongariki, Makura. The explosion cuts Kuwae into these pieces and the sea separates them; they are no longer one. The people have run to Efate, and they see the dark cloud year after year for six years. They stay in Efate for six years and they watch Tongoa from Maniura point. After three years, they see the smoke finish. Then, the canoes start to go back. They see the trees, grass, everything growing, and they see the whole island is green once more. So after six years, they go back to Tongoa, the chiefs go back to Tongoa and they tour their villages ('places'). Some, they go to Lubukuti, some to Kurumabe, some to Purau, some to Pele, some to Woraviu, BongaBonga, Meriu, Mangarisu, Itakoma, Oriu. The chiefs were silent because when the volcano exploded, it ruined Tongoa for many years. (Recorded in Nakamamanga, translated by J.Solomon and S.Kelly)

The oral history of Kuwae and its aftermath represents the 'beginning of the world' in narrative histories of Tongoa today. Indeed, the volcanic cataclysm created the island as it exists today. The Kuwae cataclysm has been extensively examined by both volcanologists (Monzier et al. 1994; Robin 1994), archaeologists (Garanger 1982,1996; Spriggs 1997; Ward 1990), and geologists (Espirat et al.1973) in addition to anthropologists. As the above tale relates, after plants had begun to re-grow on the islands, chiefs and their retinues set out in canoes to repopulate the islands. On their way from Efate the chiefs in their canoes stopped at Nguna, Emae, Makura, Tongariki, Buninga and Epi Islands and according to the legend placed one of their men or conferred one of their titles on a man from that island. In other words, the movement of the original chiefs through the region

---

12 In other versions, notably from the Namakura speaking side of Tongoa, there are two survivors of the cataclysm: TiTongoa Liseyriki (or Semet), and Tarifeke, a man and woman respectively. The pair survive by hiding in a naapea (slit-gong drum). When Kuwae explodes into separate islands, they find themselves on Tongariki, and are rescued to Makura Island, uneffected by the explosion. Returning to Tongoa after a length of time, they land near Panita village and plant narara (this tree is an important land boundary marker) trees, marking the villages of Lubukuti, Ravenga, Kurumabe, Purau, Itakoma, Euta, Mangarisu and Bonga Bonga (Tessier nd:34). Thus, in the oral tradition of Namakura speaking peoples, the resettlement of Tongoa occurs from Makura rather than Efate.
created a chain of titles and thus rejoined and reconnected the separate islands into a single entity once more. Each holder of a title bestowed then owed allegiance to the giver of the title, creating a system of inter-connected titles which continues today. A title holder’s allegiances thus may not just be localised, but be part of an inter-island network. In the following section I outline the social and spatial organisation of place, road and title on Tongoa through a discussion of the above works, in addition to my own material and the oral histories available. The particular structures of the localised chiefdom are analysed in more detail in chapter 3.

1.5 Social and Spatial Divisions on Tongoa

Guiart’s extensive survey of the title system in central Vanuatu (Guiart et al. 1973), demonstrates a central principle in the social and symbolic divisions within Tongoa:

“In the Shepherd Islands, South Central Vanuatu, plots linked to an elective title are never contained in a single cluster, but systematically dispersed all over a district, an island, or even more than one island.” (Guiart n.d:16).

Today Tongoa is divided along socio-political lines into fourteen chiefdoms, each headed by a chief (nawota or nawotalam in the Namakura language) who is referred to as a paramaon jif (paramount or head chief) in Bislama. The chiefdoms divide the island from its centre, radiating down to the shoreline. At the centre are the chiefdoms of Pele and Woraviu, neither of which have shoreline. This radial division has been noted elsewhere in Vanuatu (Bolton 1993; Facey 1981) and indeed throughout the Pacific, particularly on high volcanic islands (Ward and Kingdon 1995:40). The chiefdoms are strongly associated with specific places such as canoe landing sites and taboo stones and thus have a definite territorial aspect. As the quote from Guiart above indicates, however, this territory is not bounded. Indeed Guiart argues that the chiefdoms are not territorial entities at all because of the scattered nature of land plots and titles (Guiart 1973: 164, 177). As the following
chapters show, however, while the chiefdom is constituted of titles rather than a bounded territory, fixed plots of land accompany these titles. I argue that this means the chiefdom does have a territorial aspect, one that centres around the *farea* (large meeting house) of the *nawota*. The territory is not bounded however. Plots of land (*fanua*) near to each other may accompany titles within the remit of different *nawota*. These *nawota* may be based on different islands of the region. The migratory histories record chiefs putting men or titles in place on different islands. This resulted in the establishment and maintenance of land rights on these islands (Tessier n.d:49).

The contemporary chieftainships of Tongoa have become aligned within the slightly different shape of a ‘village’, an entity that has been shaped by the needs and desires of the missionary church and the colonial government. The entity that is the contemporary village, however, is strongly identified with a *nawota* (‘chief’) and his domain. This domain is referred to as ‘*natokoana*’. *Vilej* (village) is the translation most often given for *natokoana*. *Natokoana* refers to *pleg* (*tokoro*-place; *nakoro*-fence or boundary marker) and represents the territorial aspect of the chieftainship. The suffix -*ana* refers to possession: thus *natokoana* indicates that the village is literally ‘the place of the chief’. *Namarakiana*, another word used to name the chieftainship, refers to the people who are also considered to constitute the chief’s domain. This chiefdom is centred around the position of the paramount chief and his retainers, (speaker, priest, chief warrior, chief of land: these positions are discussed in chapter 3). Today the title “Tarisaliu” is the *nawota* or paramount chief of Purau and is the focus of the village’s identity (both within Tongoa and beyond)\(^\text{13}\) as a chieftainship.

\(^{13}\) For example, a popular song by a local string band is often played on national radio and tells of Chief Tarisaliu and a court dispute over land claims in Efate Island.
The domain of the *nawota* is constituted of titles which he has the customary right to bestow. These titles are held by the *napau nawota* (*smol jif*, ‘small chiefs’) who head segmentary domains within the chiefdom. These segmentary domains are the *namatana* (also sometimes referred to as *farea*). The *napau nawota* receive the title and the land which accompanies it from the *nawota* and thus owe him allegiance. Chiefly titles are fixed in a particular territory and are unchanging in their relation to other titles; passing from holder to heir, assumption of the title also means assuming a set of relationships with co-existing titles. A *napau nawota* or *smol jif* within one chiefdom can not only owe allegiance to the *nawota* of that chiefdom, however, but also to *nawota* of other chiefdoms. These relationships are characterised by allegiance owed and received. These allegiances thus do not necessarily only extend beyond the chiefdom within which their title is fixed but also beyond Tongoa itself.

The chiefdoms, or villages as they are most often referred to today, are principally linked through the relationships that exist between the *nawota* of each village and between these *nawota* and the next ranking title (*napau nawota*) of other villages. The dominating titles of many of the Shepherd Islands titles is located on at Tongoa. For example, the title “TiMataso” appears on Mataso and Makura Islands, and each holder owes allegiance to TiMataso Mata, *nawotalam* (‘chief’) of Meriu village on Tongoa. The explanation for this is precisely that TiMataso Mata of Tongoa placed the other TiMataso titles as he made his way to Tongoa. The common history of migration told in the story of resettlement means that title relationships extend across island boundaries. There are other migratory histories apart from the Kuwae narrative; during Milne’s time on Nguna, he describes the enmity between inland and coastal people which resulted in a group of coastal people fleeing Nguna and making their way to Southeast Epi, via Emae Island. This history is the reason
why the same village names appear on Nguna, Emae and Epi (Don 1927:23). Thus, not only do titles appear throughout the region, but so do place names.

The historical links between particular chiefly titles are re-remembered with each exchange between titles and relationships between particular islands are thus maintained over time. For example, Milne notes in 1918 that:

"The Makuran people, who are connected with the Mangarisu people (of Tongoa)...went over to Mangarisu...and took pigs with them, and joined with the Mangarisu people in the singing and dancing and killing of pigs." (Milne 1917-18 Report to the Foreign Missions Committee of the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand, quoted in Miller 1987:165)

Milne had forbidden such practices and the incident is given by him as an example of the 'backsliding' that Presbyterian missionaries found so problematic. It appears that the maintenance of the relationship between Makura Island and Mangarisu village was more important than heeding Milne and Michelsen however. In 1996 I witnessed the relationship reactivated once again when TiTongoa Mata of Mangarisu made a customary prestation of a pig and new yams to MasoeRangi of Makura. Miller noted cultural ties between Buninga Island and Mataso Island and strong links between Emae and Tongoa during his tenure in the region during the 1940's (Miller 1987:224, 326). There are strong links in particular between the Nakanamanga speaking chiefs of Tongoa and Emae.14 Mangarisu village on the southern side of Tongoa also had a close connection to Ewose Island (now uninhabited). It appears that TiTongoa Mata, paramount chief of Mangarisu, had the right to bestow the title of the paramount chief of Ewose and this seniority meant that he successfully blocked Michelsen’s attempts to place a teacher on the island, despite Ewose receptivity (ibid: 297). Finally, there are particular links between the islands of Buninga...

---

14 An example from Michelsen’s tenure on Tongoa illustrates the inter-connected nature of chiefly titles between Tongoa and Emae: when Michelsen purchased land at 'Tongalapa' near Panita village in 1879, he found himself having to deal with an Emae owner (Michelsen 1892:29).
and Tongariki to the south of Tongoa. These neighbouring islands are very small and have common fishing and harvesting rights over nearby uninhabited Falea Island.

The *kastom* histories reflect that Namakura speaking chieftainships on Tongoa have more direct links to Tongariki, Buninga, Makura, and Mataso (Tessier n.d). Tessier’s lists of titles owing allegiance to the *nawota* and *nawotalam* (*Namakura* language) of Tongoa show that even dispersed through the region most of these titles are of the same language as the dominating title. There are numerous exceptions, however, and these represent significant links between the two language groups. Within this system of interconnected titles individual chiefdoms of each *nawota* also exists as localised entities. Not all *nawota* were of equal power and stature however. In the process of attempting to gain the cooperation of the *nawota* on Tongoa, Michelsen consequentially records the state of hostilities between them in the late nineteenth century. He reports that the enmity between Pele and Lubukuti (chiefdoms of Marakipuelemata and TiNapua respectively) dominated the island and that the villages of Kurumabe, Purau, Ravenga, Selembanga and Lupalea were drawn in as either allies or enemies (Miller 1987).

According to villagers today, the contemporary division of Tongoa into fourteen independent chieftainships (villages) reflects the way the villages were ‘*bifo*’ (‘before’) when the missionaries came although the actual physical sites of the villages have moved. This is not the situation as described by Facey in her ‘historical reconstruction’ of Nguna Island (Facey 1981). Facey divides pre-Christian Nguna into entities that she names dominions to translate the entity *namarakiana*. As seen above, this word is also used on Tongoa, but is translated as ‘those led by the chief’, indicating the domain of a particular *nawota*. The *namarakiana* dominions of pre-Christian Nguna were larger, made up of a
number of villages, each headed by a nawota or chief. The villages were themselves made up of varea (ibid: 298). The varea described by Facey is a very similar institution to the fairea of Tongoa. Guiart describes the Tongoa fairea as a patrilineal, patrilocal unit (1973:338). My own data concurs with this: made up of households headed by agnatically related males, the fairea organises residence and access to land within the chiefdom as a whole. On Tongoa, the fairea refers specifically to the meeting house of both the chieftainship and the segmentary domain ‘namatana’ held by the napau nawota. In the case of the latter entity the two terms (namatana and fairea) are used somewhat interchangeably to refer to the group and it’s locale (residential and garden land). Facey’s data from Nguna and my own observations indicate that the namatana or fairea may have been a more independent unit in the past before the institution of ‘village’ became a feature during the adoption of Christianity. Each namatana thus had its own fairea or meeting house, and its own malala (dancing ground) with napea (slit gong drums) erected at one end. During the period of fieldwork for this thesis, none of the namatana within Purau had these institutions.

The dominion described by Facey does not seem to have had a collective head, but seems to have served a co-operative and symbolic purpose: “Each dominion was known as navata - something, for example, navatataura, “the whale people” or, likewise, navatatipaga, “the owl people”. ” (1981:299). The co-operative nature of the dominion served a purpose in the face of inter-dominion hostilities which were apparently common. Facey does not delineate clearly how the dominions of the past may have undergone change however. From my own work on Tongoa, no entities such as the dominion were described to me, nor can I find any reference to them in other works. Of Tongoa’s fourteen villages today, four are very closely linked geographically and socially, although
they are still considered to be separate villages. In the case of Pele and Woraviu, the latter is sometimes referred to as ‘Pele kiki’, small Pele. In another case, the two villages of Matangi and Itakoma are joined under the name Selembanga. Whether either of these examples reflects a supra-village entity is difficult to ascertain. Each of the four villages involved has a *nawota* and the structures of a chiefdom: the *farea* or meeting house. Certainly, in response to my questions, informants maintained that they were separate villages but with close connections: ‘*tufala i stap tutea*’ (the two are together). This response potentially refers to a number of links: their physical proximity, a shared history, close links through marriage and kinship ties. The configurations of the villages often changed during the missionary era; on Tongoa, shifts in location were common, most often to higher more exposed sites. On Nguna, William Milne (Peter Milne’s son, born on Nguna and who later became a Presbyterian missionary himself) noted that changes occurred as household by household relocated to be in the vicinity of the preacher’s house (Don 1927).

The villages on Tongoa today are interlinked through marriage and kinship connections reckoned back several generations. Inter-village marriage is not unusual, although this possibly represents a significant change from marriage patterns in the past where marriage beyond the chiefdom was usually the preserve of the *nawota*. Examples of marriage between *nawota* and sisters of other *nawota* appear in oral tradition. This reflects a more general regional situation, namely, that previously, alliances of all types beyond the chiefdom were the preserve of those of high chiefly rank (Facey 1981: 299). In 1902, Milne notes that Nguna chiefs were resisting his pronouncements that women should marry beyond the village. (Milne’s concern was related to ideas of reproductive health). Endogamy within the chiefdom was preferred by Tongoans and Ngunese, however, and
chiefs were active in keeping young women within their natal chiefdom (Miller 1987:164). The emphasis on endogamy within the chiefdom in the nineteenth century perhaps indicates its more autonomous nature previously. It is possible to speculate that in the past the chiefdom was a more autocratic ritual polity centred around the sacred tapu nature of the nawota (see also Facey 1981,1989; Bonnemaison 1996b; Guiart 1973).

The pre-Christian era predates even the oldest villagers' memories of their parents and grandparents. Today, all of Tongoa is Christian, and has been so almost one hundred years. What contemporary Christianity means in practice is undergoing rapid change however. Unlike in the past, when the Presbyterian church dominated, today there are a proliferation of faiths which divide villagers. The main religions are: Presbyterian, Seventh Day Adventists (SDA), Catholic, Holiness, Ba'hai and a local splinter Church, Revival. Although language and religious differences create internal divisions on Tongoa, it is questions of land that dominate contemporary internal divisions along chiefdom lines. Disputes over land manifest themselves in other tensions - hostilities about pigs and bullocks from other villages eating gardens indiscriminately for example. Spatial relations between villages are marked by fence borders and boundaries. These fences exist ostensibly to keep livestock out, but they also serve to underline what concerns everybody, land boundaries between villages.

---

15 The question of individually dating memories of the first missionary becomes problematic due to Oscar Michelsen's prolonged time on Tongoa: over fifty years from 1879 until 1930.
16 I did not collect data specifically on the topic of religious adherence, but based on my observations, it seems possible to view the new religious movements today on Tongoa as potentially challenging the authority of the chief. The number of religions is increasing and the chiefs individually and collectively find this problematic (as shown in the discussions at the Maraki Vanua Riki meeting of the Shepherd Island chiefs) and some chiefs have attempted to ban any villagers converting to new religions.
All of the Shepherd Islands can be seen from Tongoa and thus form part of its landscape. Importantly though, the islands that can be seen vary according to where one is located on Tongoa’s shore (see plates 1.1 and 1.2). This physical fact mirrors the social organisation of Tongoa itself vis-à-vis the other Shepherd Islands. Some Tongoan villages have a closer relationship with other islands in the Shepherds group. This is affected by a common language and chiefly titles with linked histories. The southern villages of Tongoa are Namakura speaking, while the northern villages are Nakanamanga speaking. Thus, from Purau village in the north, one is orientated towards Southeast Epi (and beyond to Lopevi and Ambrym) and the islands of Tevala, Laika and eastern Emae. From Meriu village in the south one’s view takes in the islands of Ewose, Buninga, Tongariki and Emae. On clear days, Mataso and Efate to the south are visible from the southern and western shores of Tongoa.

From the vantage point of Tongoa’s hills (important garden sites), however, all of the other Shepherd Islands can be seen from all villages. Thus another split in perspective according to one’s position and ples emerges. On the one hand, the view orientating Tongoa in the region differs radically according to one’s ples on different sides of the island. On the other hand, this orientation changes with an individual’s daily movements within their ples, moving from house to garden for example. The view from the shoreline of a person’s village, contrasts with the potential view from their hill-site garden. There is thus an underlying factor in the orientation of Tongoa-in-the-world based on the orientation of the human body itself (Merleau-Ponty 1962; Munn 1986). Additionally, the island itself is situated from either a seawards (elau; also the noun for sea) or landwards (euta; also the noun for inland) perspective depending on the way one is facing.
Plate 1.1
The orientation of Tongoa within the Shepherd Islands: view taken from the western side of the island with Efate, Mataso, Makura and Emae Islands from left to right.
Plate 1.2
Looking out from Tongoa on the southern side of the island with Ewose Island in view and Buninga and Tongariki Islands beyond
These potential splits in perspective reflect the multidimensional character of *pies* where one's identity changes with one's orientation and specifically with which relationship one is investing in at that moment, which alliance one is acknowledging and maintaining (Bonnemaison 1996b:215). One's *pies* in Tongoa is entangled with and mutually constitutive of one's relationships and identity. In other words *pies* orientates one's social, cultural and personal endeavours and identity vis-à-vis others. The point at the shoreline, where one leaves Tongoa to journey outwards, pivotally orientates one's identity vis-à-vis the region and beyond. To use Bonnemaison's metaphor of the tree and the canoe, or rootedness versus mobility, the shoreline, a critical juncture between island and beyond, becomes a symbolically laden location (cf Munn 1986:23). It marks ones departure from island, but also, at inscribed sites, marks the roads (*napua*) that connect all of one's dispersed places. Thus, a *nawota* travelling to another island where he has men is spoken of as going to his *pies*. The different locations of his men thus form a distributed domain. This distributed domain is the subject of chapter 3.

The potential for multiple orientation based in one's person reflects the social organisation of space on Tongoa. The system of chiefly titles divides and connects people and places in such a way that a chief of Mangarisu village is closer to Makura Island some 30 miles distant than he is to a chief of Lubukuti or Itakoma nearby on Tongoa itself. Metaphysically, the island is fragmented along internal divisions whereby one group or individual has closer historical connections to other islands than to adjacent groups or individuals on Tongoa. Emphasising connections rather than disjuncture between Tongoa and other islands in the region, stresses that Tongoa itself came into being, and continues to exist, as part of a composite made up of many parts. These parts includes places/sites such as the *farea* (chief's meeting house), *tabu pies* (sacred sites), canoe landing sites,
dancing grounds and gardens as well as hierarchical chiefly titles, allegiances and crucially, the roads (*napua, rod*) which facilitate the entire social system.

Tongoa is part of a landscape of islands created out of the Kuwae cataclysm. The story of the resettlement of the islands from Efate after the explosion defines Tongoa in relation to the rest of the region. Today, the landscape of Tongoa reflects this history; it is marked at its periphery by named landing passages where the first resettlers and their followers arrived and by areas of volcanic activity on the island and in the surrounding sea. These serve as continual reminders of the active forces which shaped Tongoa. The migratory histories of the chiefs and resulting system of titles strives to keep the distributed islands rejoined in an interconnected entity. The mechanisms of how this is attempted is considered in Section One 'Dialogues of Island and Place'.

68
Section One

Dialogues of Island and Place

Introduction

The first section of the thesis examines the background to contemporary concerns with the attachment of people to land in central Vanuatu. These concerns have been heightened by the changes of the last one hundred and fifty years. The following three chapters consider the contexts of the arguments made about mats, land and place in the second section of the thesis. These contexts are diverse: the ethnography of Purau village, the relationship between the title system and land relations on Tongoa, and finally, dialogues of kastom on the island and within the Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

In part, the discussion of Purau village in chapter 2 is a consideration of the traditional ethnographic subject matter of kinship, residence and marriage. By grounding mats within a thorough discussion of everyday life the chapter also reflects the overall approach to the study of material culture more generally within the thesis. The description of Purau’s material setting and the routines of villagers’ daily life is not therefore intended to merely ‘set the scene’ but is included as central to the argument of the importance of the processes of the everyday such as eating, gardening, weaving and daily movements. Analysis of these processes of the everyday reveal the physical and metaphysical structures of Tongoan lives. Chapter 2 also considers the events that pull disparate people together and the connections that Purau people maintain beyond the village.

These events reflect in part the social and spatial divisions discussed in chapter one. These divisions are underlined by perceptions of land and ples engaged by the title system.
Chapter 3 examines the chiefdom of Tarisaliu in order to explore the links between title system and land relations. The detailed discussion of practices of land tenure on the island reveals chiefs control over land and the transmission of land. These processes have been affected by Vanuatu’s transition from condominium to nation-state. A powerful element in the dialogues surrounding this transition is the idea of *kastom*.

A theme evident through both chapter 2 and 3 is the distinction Tongans draw between the cash economy and customary obligations to kin, landowners and dominant title holders. Transactions within this latter domain are often characterised as *kastom*. The Cultural Centre has a primary role in regulating anthropological research in the archipelago today. The distinctive role played by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre within ni-Vanuatu dialogues of *kastom* and the production of this thesis are the subject of chapter 4. This chapter opens out the themes of Section One and considers how chiefs, land, material culture and the research project itself, are all affected by ideas of *kastom*. 
Chapter Two

The Ethnographic Setting of Purau Village

2.0 Introduction

Purau village is located on a slope high above the northern shore of Tongoa island. As one enters Purau, a vast expanse of ocean is the first thing one becomes aware of, before one emerges into a large, open, relatively treeless space in the centre of the village. To the west, the perimeter of the village can be seen where a narrow strip of garden land borders the sharply defined (and barbed-wire fenced) boundary of the neighbouring village Kurumabe. To the east, a hill rises between Purau and the villages of Itakoma and Matangi (see plate 2.0). Purau is located some distance from the shore, but the huge sea vista dominates the village. This was not the typical coastal village that I had been expecting and which is more common throughout Vanuatu. There was a general shift in the nineteenth century from inland habitation, to coastal villages and the larger islands of the archipelago have a marked population distribution favouring the coast.

Depopulation in the nineteenth century due to epidemics and ‘blackbirding’ (the labour trade to supply workers for the cane fields of Queensland and Fiji) is responsible for the relatively empty interior of many of Vanuatu’s islands today (Shineberg 1967; Spriggs 1997). Purau’s situation is in fact the opposite; the village has moved further inland since the nineteenth century and Tongoa along with the other Shepherd Islands are among the only islands in Vanuatu to be threatened by overpopulation. Located closer to the sea during the nineteenth century, the village could be easily defended during the sometimes violent relationships with other chieftainships on the island. Following missionary activity and the adoption of Christianity, armed hostilities between chieftainships lessened, and the
need for villages to be defended ceased to be as important (Michelsen 1892). When missionary Oscar Michelsen came to Tongoa in 1879, one of his policies was to move the villages of Tongoa to higher, more exposed sites. The reason people most often give today for this move is that the present sites are healthier, and in particular that there is more fresh air blowing in from the sea. Others affirm that the move was related to, and made possible by the coming of Christianity.¹

Today, Purau village is spread out over a large physical area, with open spaces between the houses. There is only one road passable by motor vehicle into the village and this is part of a road network begun by Michelsen and expanded during the time of the Condominium. This road network connects all fourteen villages on Tongoa and centres around the airstrip at Pele village in the midst of the island. Other, older connecting links exist between the villages however. There is a path, napua lagana, characterised as smol rod in Bislama which connects the villages both literally and metaphysically. The napua lagana still exists today and continues to be used when people move between villages on foot. The ideas surrounding this path reflect its identity as something along which things such as people, objects and speech flow. These things represent and indeed constitute the power of the chief. As such, the napua lagana must not be blocked in any way. The path crosses gardens and bullock enclosures which are necessarily surrounded with fences. If one builds a fence across the napua lagana however, one must also build a gate or passage in it. If one fails to do so and consequently impedes the flow of the napua lagana sickness will result. This sickness is called nasana nawota (nasana- sickness, nawota- chief). The

¹ The ways that people often talk about the coming of Christianity reflects the fear associated with sorcery and armed conflict (daknes toem, "time of darkness"). Christianity is often portrayed as liberating people from such fears. This is perhaps even more true of people whose conversion is considerably more recent than Tongoa. On Tomman Island (off the south west of Malakula Island to the north of Tongoa), Christianity was adopted in the 1930's and 1940's. The fear of sorcery is reiterated over and over when people compare their lives today and in the past (Curtis, personal communication).

²The associations of the Bislama word rod are many and are analysed in the second section of this thesis.
power of the chief has the ability to sicken those who come into unregulated contact with it. There are other manifestations of the chief’s potency and the movement of things along roads (napua): the comestibles that move between namatana and villages in exchange must undergo a ritual cleansing specifically to neutralise this power.³

When one journeys to Tongoa however, one does not usually enter the village via the napua lagana. One travels to Tongoa either by ship or plane, and the large road connecting airstrip and shore is easier to transport cargo either by truck or on foot. As the road enters the village one sees the remains of the church on the right. The single church building reflects Purau’s identity as a predominantly Presbyterian village. There are other religious affiliations but followers either walk to the Catholic church in Pele village, the Seventh Day Adventist (SDA) church in Lupalea or they worship at home (Holiness).⁴

The church is one of two ‘public’ buildings in the village. The other is the farea (nakamal in Bislama), the meeting house of the chief. The farea is to one side of the open space in the village centre, coming into view as one enters the village. It is the biggest building in the village, a large wood and thatch structure that is the focal point of the village (and chieftainship, see below). Purau’s farea was in a bad state of repair when I arrived in the village, January 1996. In late 1997 I received news that it had been repaired, but during my time in Purau there were two cyclones and the thatched roof became more and more dilapidated (see plate 2.1). It was still used as a meeting place however. It is in the farea that court cases and grievances are heard, and it here that all fines must be paid.

³ An example of this: during my time in the village, one of the women had a problem with the afterbirth during the birth of her baby. This was attributed to nasana nawota and the fact that Leiwea had handled the food which had come in exchange from another namatana and had not been cleansed properly.

⁴ Distribution of religious affiliation along household lines within Purau was as follows: 17 households Presbyterian, no Catholic, 3 SDA and 2 Holiness.
Plate 2.0 View of Purau village taken from the hill between Purau and Selembanga. Kurumabe village and Emae Island in the background

Plate 2.1 Hearing village court cases at Tarisaliu’s farea, Purau
Other village farea in good repair have mats tucked into the rafters, in readiness for use. In Purau, when mats are laid out in the farea, they are carried by individual women from their households for the particular occasion. When mats are used in the farea people, usually women, sit on them and this determines the type of gathering it is. In the context of court cases, mediated by the chief and his officials, men usually sit on benches or on strategically placed stones around the edge of the interior. In this context, women are usually ranged around the outside of the farea, no-one sits on the floor inside. Schools also often act as a potential public space, but there is no school in Purau. Children of school age go to either the French primary school (Kutundaula School) or the English primary school (Naworaone School) just outside Pele village. There is also a SDA school in Lupalea which a few Purau children of SDA parents attend.

Purau is a Nakanamanga speaking village. The association of each village with either Nakanamaga or Namakura is strong: everyone in the village except for in-marrying women speaks the dominant language of that village as a first language. Women in-marrying from other language areas are discouraged from speaking their natal language to their children; this underscores the ideology that she and her children are members of the husband's place and kinship group (namatana). At the time of fieldwork, there were approximately 133 people living in Purau in 33 houses. The houses are grouped into 22 households that share a cooking house (peva). As the next section will reveal, these households are distributed into nine namatana. During the fieldwork period, the number of households within each namatana in Purau varied from one to six, with the average number of

5 45 women, 33 men, 55 children. These figures are based on a census taken February in 1997. The numbers reflect the average residence in Purau over the fieldwork period, taking into account the frequent travel and return of people to other islands. The figures do not reflect the large numbers of people from Purau who are living in Port Vila and elsewhere.
households being 2-3. The number of resident women who had married into Purau from other villages and islands was small (6 from other villages on Tongoa and 1 from Efate).

Between the houses of the village and the sea, the land extends downwards, in some place fairly steeply. On this land there are gardens, piggeries, coconut plantations, bullock enclosures and areas categorised as ‘bush’. This continues down to the seashore, where coconut plantations dominate along the shoreline. There is a road large enough for motor vehicles which extends from the village down to the shore. This was built so that copra could be transported to the shore for loading onto ships. Copra production is no longer on such a large scale, however, that the road is needed for this purpose. It is currently used by people going down to the seashore to collect shellfish or go spearfishing, or go to their gardens, piggeries or plantations off to either side of the road. There are paths extending down to the gardens etc. from other points in the village and these are used according to the location of one’s garden. Where such paths emerge into other namatana however, people seem to prefer using the paths on either side of the village which are defined as more ‘public’. At the seashore, the land ends abruptly in a cliff-like escarpment. The beach is stony, with volcanic sand, and the sea meets the land in a jumble of large black volcanic rocks. Along the beach, occasional trees (naru siok, casurina, ‘casurina equisetifolia’) and navele (fisposentri, ‘barringtonia asiatica’) grow along with wild pandanus (nambarau, ‘pandanus spp.’).

2.1 Routines of Everyday Life in Purau

The village day begins at around sunrise when the chickens descend from their night perches on the roofs of houses and along with other birds begin to make noise. Sleepy adults emerge from houses to start the fire in the peva (cooking house) and collect water
from the tank. The morning meal is begun by women; tubers are peeled and prepared for cooking, and coconut is grated in readiness to ‘milk’ the food. People usually eat breakfast indoors and the action that marks the beginning of the day is the shaking out and laying down of mats in readiness for eating together. Everyday use of the mat structures daily practices in and around the household. After eating, the mats are often moved outside, under the *tapau*pu, an open-sided structure supporting a roof of dry coconut leaf fronds. The *tapau*pu is built adjacent to the sleeping or cooking house and it provides shade, and represents an extension of the domestic space. The move from inside the house to the *tapau*pu indicates the start of social interaction with people of other households. This move is particularly marked during the hot weather when very little of the day is spent indoors. The laying out of mats organises and restates the social space of the household.

Not all members of the household will stay under the *tapau*pu after the morning meal. If it is a school day, children are chivvied along to get washed and dressed. At around 7.00 am the children begin their walk to school which starts at 7.30 am. Adults then begin the business of their day. More often than not this involves the tasks associated with a subsistence lifestyle; going to the garden, feeding pigs, repairing fences and occasionally fishing. Women also spend time collecting and preparing pandanus, and weaving mats. The ongoing tasks of garden work vary in intensity according to the seasonal cycle of planting, weeding and harvesting. Mats are sometimes carried to the garden; this is not usual but is done if there are babies or young children going along. In such cases, the mat will be laid out under a shady tree and will serve as a kind of centre (although it is usually in fact on the periphery, under one of the boundary marking trees) that other working members of the party come and go from, having a drink of water or sitting to eat. If a trip down to the seashore for collecting shellfish or simply swimming is planned, mats will also
be brought, along with more substantial food which will be eaten in the manner of a picnic. Purau people enjoy going to the shore for no particular reason other than whim; they express this simply as a desire to experience being by the sea. If it is a rainy day, people are less inclined to go to the garden or seashore, and women in particular regard rainy days as opportunities to stay indoors and weave. Pandanus preparation and weaving structure women’s daily life in the village.

Large tasks such as house building, digging water tanks or constructing garden fences require the communal efforts of many people. If one has such a task (known generically as *bisnes*), one arranges a specific day for the event, and people bring their labour and contribution towards the effort. These people are usually from one’s own village, but the larger event, the wider the ‘pull’ of kin and helpers from other villages. There is generally a division of labour along gender lines at these events. Men perform the tasks of going to the bush to cut wood, carry it back to the village, construct buildings, and dig holes for water tanks, while women prepare the midday meal which feeds everyone. This meal usually consists of a meat or tin fish soup and rice, eked out with manioc. While manioc is the staple of everyday consumption, there is a definite emphasis that rice should be served to the people who have come to help. Similarly, tin fish is acceptable but I never saw fresh fish used on these occasions. Food that one must pay cash for is required in this context, rather than food one has acquired from the garden or the sea and is thought of as ‘free’. This is also true when one is host at a wedding or funeral or makes *bisnes* of one sort or another. The meal fed to those who have come to work is called *namaua* and not only should it include the expensive and valued rice, but it also must include meat. The host must kill one of his/her pigs or bullocks and the building of a new house or the marriage of
a son or daughter requires careful planning of one's resources. These resources include of course calling on others for help and support.

On these occasions, once the *namaua* has been eaten and cleared away and the men go back to work on the project, women group together to prepare the evening meal which consists of the large *laplap* (*nakoa*) puddings. These puddings are made by grating root vegetables (manioc, sweet potato, wild yam, taro) or plantain and smoothing the mixture out on a layer of *nalikau* leaves (*tifo laplap; heliconia indica*). These leaves resemble banana leaves and are grown specifically for the purpose of making *laplap*. A slightly different preparation called *nanbouri* is also made. This consists of the same parcelling technique, but instead of being grated, vegetables are cut into chunks - all the above mentioned root vegetables are used in addition to yam. Once the *rubaki* parcels are in the stone oven, the women clear away the food preparations and generally socialise until it is time to go and get washed in readiness to return later that evening to eat together with the men. *Kava* (*namaluk*) is usually drunk in the evening, the host also having an obligation to provide kava for those who want to drink it.

---

6 The process of making *laplap* has an affinity with other objects such as mat bundles (*nakakafu*) through the actions and metaphorical associations of wrapping and layering. These connections will be explored in later chapters. To make *laplap* one first takes four *navau* leaves (collectively as a bundle they are known as a *rubaki*; this is also the noun for the finished food parcel) and lays them out overlapping one another. This is known as *nafaruna sikei* (one/first side). A second *rubaki* is then laid out at right angles over the first layer. This second layer is referred to as *nafaruna garua* (second side). Over these now go the *namoto* - the soft young leaves on which the food is to be directly laid. It is important that these leaves are pristine and they are usually still-furled new growth. The prepared food is then placed in the centre and coconut milk (*lorei*) is added by wringing the grated flesh of the mature coconut (*namarito*) though coconut husk fibre (*neeki*). Large quantities of salt is also considered a necessary addition. If meat is to be added, this is placed on top with a number of the extremely hot stones from the fire, and the whole is carefully wrapped layer by layer. The parcel is then fastened with a rope made from the midrib of the *nalikau* or the bark of the *nambeleitu* (*buroo*, cottonwood, 'hibicus tiliaceus') and placed in the stone oven (*fufu*) where it is covered up with hot stones, leaves and old mats (see chapter 5).
Other more irregular special events include the gatherings that mark weddings, deaths, and five and ten day events following birth, circumcision, and funerals. There are also newer events such as the party given by the parents of a child who has succeeded in secondary school entrance examinations. There are also various fund-raising events where people bring food and objects such as mats and baskets to be sold in aid of schools or the PWMU (Presbyterian Women’s Missionary Union). Such events mean that people leave Purau to walk to another village or the school and airstrip. Other diverse activities include visiting the clinic, or Pele village where the airstrip and post office are located. The post office has one of the two public phones on Tongoa, and people frequently make trips to contact relatives on other islands. The cost of a phone call is relatively high however - 200 vatu (US$2.00) for three minutes - and not everybody can afford it. The need for cash and the endeavour to raise it is a concern which permeates villagers’ everyday life. Villagers need money to pay school fees, host events, pay for ship passage, freight, and clinic visits. The ever increasing rate of bridal payments (pemaot woman; navavagotoana) is a concern and is discussed in the village and also at a national level. On 9/4/96, Radio Vanuatu broadcast a news item about complaints by a Tongoa man’s family that the payment demanded by an Epi woman’s family was too high at 80,000 vatu (US$800).

Cash and the limitations on earning it are a constant concern in the village. Access to cash is typically limited to selling copra, operating a trade store or holding one of the few salaried jobs on the island. These jobs are all government paid and include school teacher (approximately 10), police (approximately 3), local government officials, the bank clerk, the airline clerk and the post office attendant and telephone operator (during my time on Tongoa these last two jobs were usually fulfilled by one man). What is more, apart from the teaching jobs, most of these positions are located in either Pele village or Morua, the
local government centre. In Purau village there is only one regular salaried worker, the head teacher of Naworaone primary school. There were two other irregular and very low paid jobs of pre-school assistant and first-aid post trainee which were intermittently held by two young women in Purau.

Communications with other Shepherd Islands and Port Vila are frequent. The plane comes to Tongoa from Port Vila five days a week. People on the island are intensely interested in movement between Tongoa and elsewhere and will often go to the airstrip to either greet or send off relatives, put produce on the plane to be collected by relatives in town, or conversely, collect boxes that relatives have sent with town products such as fresh bread, frozen chicken, sugar, salt, tin fish and soap. Similar scenes accompany the arrival of the ships that carry cargo and passengers between Tongoa and other islands. There is no harbour or pier on Tongoa, so people gather on one of the two or three landing beaches while the ship anchors offshore and a boat makes trips to shore.

Towards the end of the day, whether one has gone to the airstrip, the seashore, or worked in one's garden, one returns to one's own household to wash and eat the evening meal. This is most often manioc (miork, maniok), or sweet potato (pitete, kumala) and greens, all liberally doused in coconut cream. Hot sweet tea is drunk again at the end of the meal. Children fall asleep as their elders talk and when they also retire everyone goes to sleep in the company of others. Although babies are sometimes laid to sleep in a separate room while adults eat, people generally do not sleep alone at night. Where and with whom one sleeps depends on the size of the house and its inhabitants and is further illuminated by looking at kinship and residence patterns.
2.2 Kinship and Residence Patterns

Kinship is the general organising principle of residence patterns in Purau. Residence is organised through membership of patrilineal, virilocal groups called namatana. This group is also sometimes referred to as farea, or meeting house. There were ten inhabited namatana in Purau during the fieldwork period. Each namatana is made up of one or more lineal family/household units. Each of these is usually headed by agnatically related men, and as a unit, the namatana is headed by the napau nawota, or smol jif (‘small chief’) in Bislama. The namatana is a central feature in the organisation of people’s lives in Tongoa. It structures membership of descent groups and residence, and it is through membership of a namatana that individuals gain access to land. The central organising principle of the namatana is not immediately obvious when one enters the village however. Some houses within the same namatana are located far apart whilst elsewhere houses of different namatana are close together. The initial overall impression is of widely spaced households whose connections are not directly visible. Nevertheless the namatana are central to Tongoa’s social organisation.

One is born into a namatana, sometimes literally, in a house built on its land and one is spoken of as ‘coming out of’ that namatana. Membership comes through either birth or adoption, through marriage for in-marrying women, and through receiving a title for men. The ideology of the namatana as a group was explained to me as a patrilineal, virilocal model: children are born into their father’s namatana and men remain members of it, whilst

---

7 Guiart describes the farea as a residential group which is at once the group, the name, the political territory and the house which represents this group. (Guiart 1973:49)
8 Such a home birth is not uncommon today; of the three births during my time in Purau, two were home births. Although I did not collect island-wide data specifically on this topic, I got the impression that the majority of women give birth at Silimauri clinic at Lubukuti village. This clinic runs a pre-natal programme where pregnant women are carefully monitored, and those with anticipated difficult deliveries are advised to go to Port Vila. For women in labour on Tongoa however, the nature of transport on the island means that they are sometimes not able to reach the clinic in time and subsequently give birth in the village.
women become members of other namatana when they marry and go to live with their husband’s family. The namatana is thus in principle an exogamous unit: women leave to marry a man who is ideally classified as daowean (cross-cousin). Such daowean are in principle members of different namatana as they are the offspring of one’s mother’s classificatory brother or father’s classificatory sister, each of whom should in principle be members of a different namatana to oneself. There are obvious exceptions such as adoption, ‘fostering’ and pikinini blong rod to the patrilineal ‘rule’ of residence however. If residence is characterised as where one sleeps most of the time, it becomes increasingly clear that the ‘rules’ of membership do not necessarily explain actual residence patterns which can be fairly fluid, with certain categories of people such as young men and women sleeping in different houses with different relatives at different times. Nevertheless, even if sleeping at houses of their matrilateral relatives, such young people are spoken of as definite members of a namatana.

Within a namatana there are a variable number of households (in Purau the number ranged from a single household to six) headed by men cosanguineally related to each other, usually as siblings. In day-to-day practice of course, some households are headed by women. These can be women whose husbands are dead or away working on other islands. Occasionally a woman may never have married but is living in her natal namatana with her children and grandchildren. The namatana is made up of groups of people who cook and eat together on a regular basis whether or not they also share a sleeping house. Generally these groupings are referred to as lina, which is glossed as place of house, area around

9 ‘Children of the road’; those born outside formal unions.
During the fieldwork period, there were two distinct households in Farea Kiki (the namatana that I lived in). The first of these is headed by Willy David who shares a sleeping house with his wife Leipakoa Teawia and their two young unmarried daughters, Espel (around 15 years old) and Leiwea Lucy (around 9 years old). They cooked in a peva (cooking house) which was also shared by their son, James Ruben and his wife Annie Moti. James and Annie have two young children, Roy Bill, around 3 years, and a new baby, named after her paternal aunt Espel. Although James and Moti sleep in a separate house, they cook and share their meals with the others in the same peva. The second household in Farea Kiki was headed by an older widow, Leipoiya Roy, whose husband had been the brother of Willy David’s father. Leipoiya sleeps in a house with her son’s son, Jimmy, his wife, Reknal, their young baby daughter Harelin, and myself. This household has one peva in which communal meals for all are cooked. The overlapping nature of households is shown by the fact that Willy David’s elderly mother Annie sleeps in Leipoiya’s house, but cooks and eats in the other peva with her son and his family. This situation was considered somewhat aberrant though; Annie and her son’s wife Leipakoa did not get on, and whenever the point that a woman should respect and look after her husband’s parents (indeed this is what brideprice is about, informants sometimes told me), was reiterated to me, the situation between Leipakoa and Annie often arose.

10 The noun lina also refers to a cleared site in the bush that has been cultivated, but no longer still has food growing. Miller gives the following translations: ekopu, a preposition meaning inside, hence the nouns ‘the place within’, ‘the house’. Esuma also a preposition meaning housewards, at the house and yard, hence the noun ‘the place of the house’. Lina i) noun. An open place usually including and adjoining a house ii) in the open ie it is manifest ‘e doko lina’ and iii) e paki lina a)to the clearing, into the open b) to be born (Miller n.d.b).
The sharing of a *peva* by James and Moti with the older household of James' parents is representative of young couples who have established a partnership and sometimes begun a family, but who still share a *peva* with the man's parents. Three other young couples of Purau's nine *namatana* shared a *peva* with the man's parents or grandparent. The *namatana* of Matananilang, the second example of households and *namatana*, illustrates a different stage of household development where the majority of households are headed by middle-aged men. Matananilang is the largest *namatana* in Purau and had six households in February 1997. Three of these are headed by brothers, Sanday, Eddy and John, each of whom is married with children and have separate *peva* as well as sleeping houses. The other households centre around separate *peva* and are headed by their father's brother, Jack Solomon, their father's brother's son, Willy Timo and Leibunua Winnie, the widow of a man from another patriline.

So while *lina* refers to the area of the sleeping house and *peva*, the *namatana* is a larger entity made up of these household compounds which are structured around patrilines. The *namatana* is both a conceptual, abstract feature of the kinship and social system, and, a physical manifestation of this system. *Namatana* are laid out in a variety of ways that nevertheless have common features. There is always an open space, whether this is central or not. If this space is marked with a large and shady tree, people gather and socialise here. One other space where people socialise is the *tapaupau*. The *tapaupau* is usually built adjoining or nearby the house or *peva* and is an integral feature of the domestic space. The *tapaupau* in fact structures to some extent the negotiation between inside and outside; one usually steps under the *tapaupau* on initially leaving the house, and it is not

---

11 People do not usually gather in the houses used for sleeping. If one is socialising at another *namatana*, one is likely to be under the shade of a central tree, under the *tapaupau*, or in bad weather, inside the *peva*. Generally, only close relatives will spend time in the sleeping house of another.
only used for eating, preparing food, weaving and socialising, but is itself utilised as a site for the things one needs upon ingress and egress such as garden tools, food preparation (bowls, knives, lif laplap etc.) are stored on an adhoc basis on the roof of the tapaupau. Every namatana (and most households) have a tapaupau.

In the hot weather (the rainy season, lasting from November-April) the tapaupau is an important locus for social activity when people spend a lot of time outside eating, sleeping and socialising. During the cooler, dryer months, the tapaupau remains an important space during the daytime. In the cooler season people prefer to eat indoors at night, but during the hot months the evening meal is eaten outside. This is always under the tapaupau; people do not sit outside under the night sky without something over their heads. It is in fact considered harmful to sit outside at night because there is a dangerous substance descending from above at night-time. With this in mind we can see that the tapaupau is central in structuring domestic space and in negotiating transitions between inside and outside, day and night, and the more private life of the household, versus it’s more public face. The tapaupau marks liminal spaces both literally and conceptually. Very often the tapaupau is distinguished by the presence of large smooth black stones which are to be sat on. These stones are very distinctive and have been brought especially to the lina for this purpose. At the sites of previous habitation in the area below the village, stones mark the

12This substance is called nasau. It is invisible but dangerous to the vulnerable, particularly for babies and sick people; I first became aware of this unseen presence when I had a cold and was warned not to sit outside the peva while we were preparing the evening meal. Nasau falls down from the sky throughout the night and in the early morning, resulting in the morning dew. During the early morning period however, it is beneficial to babies, aiding their growth and general health. There was a young baby in the house where I lived during fieldwork and I would sometimes see her mother carrying her outside in the early morning to expose her to this. Conversely however, whenever the baby was carried anywhere at night, Reknal was scrupulous in ‘blocking’ (blokem) this nasau with an umbrella even if it was only for a very short distance. It is not surprising that the periods between full darkness and light at either end of the day are considered to be liminal in this way. Perhaps even more indicative of the danger and ambiguity of these periods is another belief centring again around babies and dusk. Between early dusk and full darkness there is another unseen presence abroad which is particularly harmful to babies’ eyes. This is called kamea and unlike nasau, is alive and cannot be blocked. A baby must never be carried outside during this time of day. If they are, their eyes will be harmed and they will not see well as a result.
fact of older *lina* and the connection between them and the contemporary *lina*. At the older sites, these stones are the only overtly visible sign of previous habitation - there are trees which are distinguished and remembered, but the stones are placed in relation to the houses and *farea* that have long since disappeared. Stones act as mnemonic devices in many respects, and these stones link past and present *lina* in Tongoan memories. Stones mark old grave sites in the bush area below the present day village. Today, Purau has a burial ground just outside the village. Even here however, the graves are marked by stones (or concrete slabs without writing). Stones also often mark taboo places. One informant told me that the stones marking the burial sites in the old style did not mark where the body was actually buried, but marked the existence of that man (we were talking about chief’s graves) in the genealogy of the chiefly title (Joseph Marakitapu 30/5/96). On another occasion, a researcher who works on the Namakura side of Tongoa told me that an informant recited 48 generations of chiefs using the stones marking their deaths as a mnemonic device (D.Luders, personal communication 19/9/96).

The layout of the *lina* is structured around the open space mentioned above. Ranged around this space are the sleeping houses (*nasuma; ekopu*), cooking house (*peva*) and smaller structures such as the bathing house (*bles blong swim*), the dish rack where plates and saucepans are washed and stored and often a chicken enclosure. Not too distant is the water storage tank which (except for two above ground tanks in the village) are concrete lined and set into the earth. These tanks collect rainwater runoff from the corrugated iron rooftops. Further away and often somewhat out of sight is the toilet (*klosis*, also referred to as *smolhaos, ekopu kiki, nasuma* all of which mean ‘small house’). The houses of Purau are a mixture of traditional and newer forms. New building materials such as concrete and corrugated iron are expensive but widely used. One advantage that they have (apart from
the prestige of being able to afford to build such a display of wealth) is that the collection of rainwater from the roof is possible. The traditional house form has a thatched roof designed for the rain to slide right off. There are a number of house styles which use traditional materials. The use of traditional materials in houses which mimic new forms is done not only in a continual adaptation of practice, but also for bottom-line economic reasons; wood and thatch are cheaper than corrugated iron and cement. There are a number of differently named house types: ekopu ni Tongoa (‘house of Tongoa’), ekopu ni falaroura/ekopu naufer (‘strong house’; this is a style adopted since colonialism), ekopu ni faka Ravenga (‘house in the style of Ravenga’, another village on Tongoa).

Ekopu ni Tongoa could be characterised as the most indigenous house form and differs significantly from more recently adopted house styles. The indigenous origin of ekopu ni Tongoa can be seen in its design. These houses are low-built and reinforced to withstand the frequent cyclones that hit central Vanuatu (Coiffier 1988). Like the farea described above, ekopu ni Tongoa are oval in shape, and have strong support timbers sunk deep into the earth. The walls slope from a central beam to the earth, and a long low entrance opens along one side. The farea will have this entrance open but ekopu ni Tongoa built as sleeping houses always have doors, the primary concern being to shut and lock the door at night. Ekopu ni faka Ravenga are similar in structure to ekopu ni Tongoa, built with

13 Rainwater is by far the largest source of water on Tongoa. There are a few natural springs, but only the villages immediately near them benefit. There has been a programme on Tongoa to harness the advantage of it’s underground water sources, and a number of villages (principally Lupalea, Matangi, Itakoma) have water distribution networks with central taps in the village. Rural access to water is a problem nation-wide in Vanuatu, and on Tongoa, people remember very well what it was like to collect water before the present day tank system. The villagers of Selenganga are fond of telling how during the Second World War the Americans set up an observation post on a hill near their village. This hill did not have any water source however, so the women of the village spent the war climbing the hill next to it that did have water and bringing it to the American soldiers stationed there (older women can still name these soldiers). Today, rainwater tanks are situated close by the house and excluding particularly dry seasons, there is enough water to cook, drink, wash and launder with. This is by no means the case on other islands though, where water has to be transported over a long distance and the arduous daily task of collecting a bare minimum of water is still common (Szamier 1996, Hargreaves 1997, personal communication).
traditional materials, but with open ends. This type of structure could be used as a cooking house (peva) which people do not sleep in and so are not concerned about locking at night. Most of the cooking houses that I saw however had at least one end closed. This protects people, food and the cooking fire from inclement weather and strong winds. The orientation of ekopu ni Tongoa and the chief's farea incorporates a practical logic coinciding with a logic of ples: their openings ('faces') are always built facing inland, with their backs (see chapter 6) to the sea, because the full force of the wind comes from the ocean. Cyclones are reckoned to come from a northerly direction, from the open ocean. Additionally the farea is orientated so that it faces the house of the nawota (jiif, 'chief') the head of the village. One reason given for this is so his men (napau nawota) who may be sitting inside the farea can watch for his approach and this reflects the orientation of the chieftainship and village towards the nawota.

In contrast to the farea and ekopu ni Tongoa, a third type of structure, ekopu ni falaroura or ekopu ni naufer are built on the principle of a pointed roof rather than a rounded roof. Ekopu ni falaroura and naufer have rectangular floorplans and vertical walls. These houses are built with both traditional materials, concrete and corrugated iron. The haos Amerika is a variation of this structure, and has a central roof beam, but sloping walls. The haos Amerika is reminiscent of a Quonset hut¹⁴ and the origin of this type is explicitly dated to the Second World War. It and the ekopu ni falaroura/ekopu ni naufer are thought of as new types. Large houses built with concrete and corrugated iron are admired but are recognised to have distinct disadvantages, primarily that they are not as strong as ekopu ni Tongoa in withstanding the devastating effect of cyclones. Rather than having walls with foundation timbers anchored deep in the earth, they have either concrete walls

¹⁴ A pre-fabricated building with a semi-cylindrical corrugated roof widely used by the US army in the Pacific during World War Two.
on a poured concrete foundation or insubstantial timber posts set into this foundation with corrugated iron sheets nailed to them. There are many concrete foundations scattered about the village; the only reminder of houses blown away in cyclones.

The interiors of the old and new house forms reveal alternative constructions of domestic space. While the concrete and corrugated iron house is always divided into separate rooms the interior of the *ekopu ni Tongoa* is one open space with no internal walls. In the latter the space for sleeping and the space for other activities such as eating, talking and weaving are less demarcated. Often the sleeping area will be screened off from the rest of the house with a row of calico. This is pulled back during the day, and drawn closed at night. In the newer house styles, the rooms used for sleeping are partitioned off with permanent walls. Another interesting difference occurs with the use of mats in each type of house. In the case of the traditional house, the entire floor is covered with layers of mats. Beneath the pandanus mats (*nagbamu*) is a layer of *katafau* (coconut frond mats) and then dry coconut fronds which are laid directly on the ground. The entire space of the *ekopu ni Tongoa* is thus created as social; space where one can sit, lie down, converse, eat and sleep. None of these activities can take place without mats. Conversely, in the newer house structures, mats often lie in the centre of rooms on concrete floors, creating an oasis of social space where people may gather. *Katafau* are still placed between *nagbamu* and the floor, although coconut fronds are usually dispensed with.

The houses constructed on the *namatana* sites are permanent settlements, slept in all year round. There is no shifting habitation to accompany garden work as in other subsistence agriculture economies (cf. Gell 1975). Less permanent shelters (or perhaps more accurately secondary houses) are, however, infrequently made away from the compound
and nearer to the gardens. There are a few instances of gardens being close by houses in Purau, but generally, garden land is within easy walking distance, with the exception of a steep hill site which is utilised due to pressure on land. Some gardens on the other side of this hill are relatively difficult to reach, with a climb and hike of about 30 - 45 minutes. Even here however, people did not build shelters to sleep in during periods of more intensive garden work. There was only one example of an overnight house being built outside the village during my time in Purau. This was built by Timo Tisa, in the garden land below the village which is generally called, esuma (house, place of house) or natusuma (site of previous location of one’s lina/house, place, namatana) by villagers.

Trees are an important permanent feature of the namatana and lina. Coconut palms (naniu, ‘Cocos nucifera’), breadfruit (nambatau, ‘Artocarpus altilis’), mango (manggo, ‘mangifera indica’), Malay apple (nakavika, ‘Syzygium ricchi’), native lychee (nandao, ‘Pometia pinata’), great hog plum (namali, naos, ‘Spondias dulcis’) and nut trees, nangae (native almond, ‘Canarium indicum’), navele (bush nut, ‘Barringtonia edulis’) are all planted around the compound. Trees are planted and act as symbolic markers of continuity, identity, matrilateral links, and family histories. The tree that people sit under in the central space of the namatana is specifically planted for a number of reasons: to provide shade, to be a supply of food and to act as a memorial. Trees planted around the lina are remembrances of the ancestors who planted it and the circumstances of this action.

At the Solomon family lina in Purau, there is a breadfruit tree from Ewose Island, planted by Jack Solomon’s paternal grandfather. He planted the tree as a memorial of a female ancestor from Ewose Island who married to Tongoa. Today, this tree is spoken of as a commemoration of the origin of their line on Ewose Island. There is also for example, a

---

15 Ewose is a small island to the south of Tongoa (see plate 1.2). It is no longer inhabited, the last residents moving to Tongoa during the early years of this century.
low-key tradition of a woman's father planting a tree in the *namatana* his daughter has married into and into which her children are born. This tree is always a food producing tree and was explained to me as being explicitly thought of as feeding her children.

The *namatana* thus conceptually and physically organises the concomitance of kinship and residence. In the following section I examine the ways we can see the ideology of the *namatana* as a patrilocal, patrilineal entity and how it incorporates in-marrying women. To consider the difference between patrilineal and matrilateral connections, and to understand how children are understood to be born into their father's *namatana*, it is necessary to look at the ideas surrounding marriage, and in particular the practice of *navagogotoana* (*braedpraes, pemaot woman*, bridewealth). The preferred marriage rule in Purau and indeed throughout the Shepherds is cross-cousin marriage. Thus one should marry a person to whom one is classified cross-cousin (*daowean*). This is ideally the child of one's mother's brother (*lolua*) or father's sister (*mimi*). However, the principle of reckoning kinship whereby father's brother (FB) is also called father (*popo*), and mother's sister (MZ), is called mother (*tete*) means their children are siblings to ego. This means that over a number of generations, for example, one still calls father's father's brother's son's son (FFBSS), "brother" (*tai*). Although Purau people say that the child of one’s father’s actual sister or mother’s actual brother is one’s ideal marriage partner, it is perhaps more accurate to say that one’s marriageable partner is anyone whom one calls *daowean*. Indeed, the *daowean* relationship itself is defined as sexual or potentially sexual. There is a 'joking relationship' side to *daowean - daowean* interaction which means that one should be playful (*mekem fami*) with one's *daowean*, playing tricks and jokes on them in a way that is inappropriate with one's siblings (*tai*). Given the preference for cross-cousin marriage, the marriage of a woman to another village sets up the potential for future marriages between
these villages. When a woman marries back to her mother’s natal village (to her MBS for example), it is said that she is following the *rod* that her mother made when she married out of the village. It is in fact customary for her daughter to marry back along this *rod* and she is spoken of as replacing her mother.

2.3 Marriage

The process of marrying can sometimes start with a practice which is called *mekem switat* (‘making friends’; I never heard a *Nakanamanga* term for this). This involves the boy’s family making a gift of shop-bought items such as dresses, calico, bra, underpants, petticoats and scent, powder, oil. Money and mats are also added. These goods are put into a basket (whether or not they are actually presented in a basket, collectively the offering is referred to as a basket). *Mekem switat* is the initial step towards a more permanent union; when a young man likes a particular girl and his close kin agree, the basket is carried to the girl’s village (or *namatana* if the girl is within the same village) and given to the titular head - either the *napau nawota* or her father. If the girl is agreeable to the union, she will use the presents. The custom of *mekem switat* corresponds to an earlier practice whereby matches were agreed between parents when their children were very young or not yet born. Today, people explain that *mekem switat* means that the boy’s family wants the girl to *stop kwaet* and not make friends with any other boy. *Stop kwaet* means to wait, to be quiet, but also has moral overtones; to behave appropriately, not *mekem flas* (to show off or boast) etc. Thus the girl is expected to live quietly and be understood by all to be spoken for.

The next stage of establishing a union often involves cohabitation. Commenting to me on a couple that had established a partnership, one informant explained to me: “*tufala oli*
wokbaot long wan ples finis, tufala oli slip tugeta, tufala oli go long garen tugeta.” (‘They have already walked in the same place, they have already slept together, they have gone to the garden together’ Espel David 1/4/96). After a boy’s family has taken the step of giving a basket, it is customary for the girl to go and visit the house and namatana (the ples) of the boy to sleep with him. Often matters are precipitated by pregnancy. Pikinini blong rod (children born outside established partnerships) are not shameful, but are considered nevertheless to be problematic, particularly if they are male. As one informant said to me: “sapos pikinini blong rod hemi wan gel, i olraet lelebet from we yumi save sakem” (‘If the child is a girl that is somewhat okay, as we are able to get ‘rid of her’ ie. she will marry out. Leisongi Elsy 10/11/96). The child will usually be raised by its mother in her namatana and this is more problematic if the child is a boy. Men’s primary access to land occurs through inheriting a title (and thus rights to land) from their father or another male member of his namatana. Issues of land can thus be problematic for a male pikinini blong rod; as Elsy put it “hambae hemi kakae long wanem graon?” (‘what/whose land will he eat off?’). The principle of virilocality means that his wife should join him in his namatana thus extending the group of people who do not in principle have the right to land in that namatana.

If, after the birth of a child, a couple go on to cohabit and establish a partnership, their child is not considered pikinini blong rod. Such a couple are considered to be in a formal union, even if a marriage ceremony has not been carried out. The ceremony of marriage is carried out in two quite separate parts. One is the church ceremony, the second is the navagogotoana, the payment that the groom’s family make to the woman’s kin (pemaot woman; ‘bridal payment’). These ceremonies can be separated by years, and both can occur after the partnership is a number of years old and children have been born. A general
rule is that the church ceremony happens before the navagotoana. Although some couples have been established for many years, and may have been married in church, if the man’s family has yet to *pemaot woman*, to make the navagotoana payment, the union is not absolute. Indeed, the issue of the navagotoana not yet being paid can cause considerable dissension. *Navagotoana* consists of money, pigs and/or bullocks, mats, calico, kava and foodstuffs (sugarcane and manioc). Such foods and kava always accompany a pig or bullock given in exchange and are referred to as *nafinaga anean* (*kakae blong hem*, the food that goes with it). *Navagotoana* goes from the groom’s kin to the bride’s kin, and is just one of the exchanges that accompanies marriage. Preceding the navagotoana, a payment called *wago tipapiri* is made from the woman’s kin to the man’s. The *wago tipapiri* payment is a pig (*wago*), with accompanying foodstuffs, but no mats, calico or money. In return, the man’s family will give two or more pigs.

It is the payment of the money in the navagotoana, however, that is the specific exchange most mentioned by informants. Examples of navagotoana payments made during my time in Purau ranged from 65,000 vatu ($US650), 1 bullock, 1 pig, 30 mats and calico (Purau man marrying a Pele woman) to the case of a Mangarisu man marrying a Pele woman: 60,000 vatu ($US600), 1 bullock, 3 pigs, and 50 mats. A navagotoana payment that I attended in Port Vila (a Purau man marrying a Purau woman) was higher still: 80,000 vatu ($US800), 7 bullocks, 1 pig, 30 mats, and 10 bundles\(^\text{16}\) of calico.

Examples given to me of navagotoana payments approximately two generations ago involved much lower amounts of money, but a higher number of pigs: 10-12 pigs, around 30-50 mats and money in the region of 1,000 vatu.

\(^\text{16}\) One piece of calico indicates a two yard length, one bundle indicates a piece four yards long.
Navagotoana is the most important marriage exchange because it removes and separates a woman from her natal namatana and kin once and for all. The meaning of navagotoana was explained to me as the man’s kin paying outright (verb: pagoto, pem: ‘to pay for completely’) for the woman and compensating her family: “Olgeta oli pem laef blong woman nao” (‘This is how they [husbands’ family] buy her life’ ie. all of her. Mareta John 9/10/96). This payment is characterised as the man’s kin purchasing outright the woman’s bones (pagoto navatuma) and every part of her body (pagoto nabatokoma). Such characterisations underline the emphasis placed on a woman becoming part of her husband’s (and her future children’s) namatana. She is now a member of the new namatana and her labour (productive and reproductive) belongs there. A woman is under considerable pressure not to spend too much time with her cosanguineal relations after marriage and her behaviour is the subject of village observation and censure. A woman’s complete transferral to her husband’s namatana is underscored by the fact that she will be buried there and burial is in fact thematic in explanations of navagotoana such as eu pagoto navatuma (‘they pay for all of her bones’). A woman is thus incorporated into her husband’s namatana and kin and will be incorporated into it literally when she dies and is buried there.

Although the verbs pagoto and pem are used to refer to the purchase of something (from a store for example), an idea of compensation is also present in their meanings. Marriage payments are thought of as a compensation to a woman’s parents in return for, and because of, their hard work (the mother in particular\textsuperscript{17}) in raising their daughter, in feeding her and looking after her. These actions have resulted in the adult woman, she is the product of their work and is now coming to the man’s family. The work she does there,

\textsuperscript{17} A separate exchange is made to the mother at the time of the navagotoana. This consists of a gift of uncooked food such as manioc, sugarcane, sweet potato.
including childbearing and gardening, she is able to do because of her family’s work in producing her. The amount of the *navagogotoana* is set by the woman’s family and will be higher if the woman is marrying to another village; and if she is marrying to another island, it will be even higher. This demonstrates the principle of compensation inherent in the *navagogotoana*.

The severance of the women from their natal *namatana* is emphasised by the things that people say about the consequences of this: one informant, an elderly widow, said that she did not think *navagogotoana* was a good thing because it meant that a woman was no longer able to help her parents. There are also strictures on them helping her: if a woman argues or fights with her husband or his family, she is told that she must not return (*RON long*, ‘run away to’) or ‘carry her crying back’ to her natal *ples*. If she does so, this act must be compensated for and her husband must kill a pig and give it to her father, brother, or other natal kin. This exchange underlines once again a woman’s complete transferral to a new *namatana* upon marriage. This *namatana* then must compensate her natal *namatana* that she has run to. Although *navagogotoana* can be seen to sever a woman from her natal kin and incorporate her children into the new *namatana* (this is why there are separate payments if there are children at the time the *navagogotoana* is paid), the fact of her connections to natal kin and *namatana* are not negated by it. Matrilateral kin are of course important figures in an individual’s life and the figure of mother’s brother assumes particular importance at certain junctures of a man’s life (circumcision and first shaving) and a woman’s life when she marries.

The undertaking of the *kastom* part of marriage ceremonies requires much more planning and support than the church ceremony. As seen above, in the *kastom* ceremony there are
numerous exchanges to be made accompanying the navagotoana. It is incumbent upon
the woman’s family to initiate proceedings, and the question of timing becomes an
important factor in the lengthy preparations. One cannot just be ready to give, one must
also be ready to receive. As a result, a woman’s father can delay the payment of the
navagotoana. Well aware of how these events can drag on, people agree that ideally the
church and kastom recognition’s of marriage should happen at the same time. As both
require considerable outlay and assembling of help and support however, they usually
occur separately. Such support usually comes from close kin, particularly those whom one
has helped previously. The largest statement of support is for someone to kill a pig or
bullock as a contribution to either the actual navagotoana (which goes to the woman’s
family) or any of other the exchanges which surround ‘carrying the woman’ to her new
namatana. A beast is often given to help the host make the return exchanges of meat
portions to people who have shown their support by giving mats, money and calico on the
actual day. These guests must also be fed meat in the midday meal, as must the relatives
who ‘carry’ the woman to her new namatana that night.

The reasons that people contribute a pig or bullock are always couched in terms of ‘giving
help’ and thinking well of the recipient, but it is also construed as an act of kastom. Giving
is talked about as the way that the donor thinks about the recipient; s/he is acting upon a
relationship and recreating it anew. The act of giving is thus spoken of as a manifestation
of thinking about the recipient; to think of them is to give. When I went to Port Vila from
the village, I was often sent on my way with enjoinments to think about such and such a
person. One might also be under an obligation to the recipient as s/he has given you a
pig/bullock in the past when you were making bisnes. Such acts are still spoken of as the
donor thinking well of one’s relative however.
Patrilineal kin with whom one shares a namatana and matrilateral kin who are members of other namatana are spoken of as the two ‘sides’ of an individual. The cross-cutting tensions between these two sides are explicitly visible in the very moment when an individual is born. While a woman is in labour during childbirth, it is appropriate for her own mother (and other women she calls mother) to be with her, whilst the presence of the unborn child’s father’s mother is discouraged and even prohibited. Her presence is believed to slow the birth down. Once the child actually emerges into the world, however, it is appropriate for the maternal grandmother (tata) to withdraw and the paternal grandmother (tua) to move forward, claiming the child. At one birth I witnessed, the child’s classificatory tua (her FFBW) washed the child and showing her to her mother for the first time exclaimed “ka pumusi pipia anigida!” (‘look at our baby!’ Leisalei Kori 19/11/96).

Children are spoken of as being absolutely members of their father’s patriline and namatana. In the case of pikinini blong rod living in their mother’s namatana the situation is less clear-cut however. An example illustrates this: Peter Kori, a Purau man had a son (David) outside marriage (pikinini blong rod) with a Nguna Island woman (Nguna is off the north shore of Efate Island). Because the child was male, tensions between the fact of his residence at his mother’s place, Nguna, and the principle of patriliny came to a head during a land dispute. David’s Nguna relatives reportedly said to him that he should be making his claim for land on Tongoa because this is where his father is from. This particular case is distinguished by the fact that Peter Kori did not apparently know of the existence of the child. In cases where the paternity is acknowledged but the man still does not want to marry the woman, he and his family can still be judged to be responsible for the
well-being of the child. Another Purau case illustrates a number of points about *pikinini blong rod*, residence and patrilineal inheritance and rights to land.

In the case of Roy Haresen, both of his parents were from Purau, but from different *namatana*. Roy's father John is the head of his *namatana*. Roy was already a fully grown man in his thirties when I knew him, but his father's sister told me about the chief's judgement in the court case that John and his kin (*saed, 'side') had to care for (*lukaot long*) Roy until he was eighteen years old. Roy remained, however, a member of his mother's *namatana*, his mother's *pies*. Roy is John's eldest son, and could inherit his father's title as head of his *namatana*, although John has had three sons with his wife. It apparently remains up to the father which of his sons inherits the title. In the case of children born into and living in their father's *namatana*, they are considered to have inherited membership fully. When Roy himself married a woman from a third Purau *farea*, the couple initially went to live at her *namatana* and as his wife put it "*Roy hemi kakae long graon blong papa*" ('Roy ate from my father's land' Leiraru 8/10/96). Within his mother's *namatana*, Roy did not have direct claims to land because he did not hold a title of that *namatana*. Although he and Leiraru made gardens on the land of this *namatana*, the couple lived at her natal *namatana* and Roy was apparently to eventually assume one of its titles. This would mean that he was of that *namatana* and would have rights to land there.

The principle of patrilineal inheritance can be seen in both the material and non-material things passed down through the father's side. The primary material inheritance for sons are title and the land which accompanies it, although as Roy's case illustrates, the passing on of land and title does not occur only in this way. An example of non-material inheritance for
both men and women is the taboo on touching or eating particular foods. Certain patriline
have these taboos and they are said to be transmitted through the father’s blad (blood) and
were explained to me thus: “olgeta oli famle blong toret, oli kamaot long toret” (‘they are
related to the turtle, their line comes from the turtle’ Jimmy Roy 16/10/96). Another
patriline in the village has a prohibition on touching or eating shark explained to me as a
special relationship between their line and the shark based on a common history, namely
that the shark features in the kastom history of their line. Perhaps the inheritance of such
tabooos can be seen as idiomatic of patrilineal and matrilateral relatedness: the tabooos are
stated to be inherited from one’s father, but children often observe in one form or another,
the taboo of their mother’s line. One example of this was explained to me as the blood of
the patriline being so strong that even children of daughters of this line inherit a sensitivity
to the taboo food.

Full membership of the namatana structures one’s access to garden land, as in addition to
being a kin group, the namatana is a land holding unit. As will be seen in the next chapter,
each namatana has a number of titles within it and each of these titles are associated with
certain land plots (fanua). The namatana is the group or unit that organises the principles
of land tenure.

2.4 The Subsistence Economy

In common with the other islands of Vanuatu, the majority of people on Tongoa are
engaged in subsistence agriculture. In this section I look at the practice of garden making
in Purau, the sexual division of labour, the annual cycle of agricultural work, including the
longer cycle of garden productivity. In addition to this agricultural activity, people raise
pigs, bullocks, chickens and goats. The amount of land classified as dakbus (dark bush’,
primary forest) is minimal on Tongoa and there is no hunting of large wild mammals such as pigs on the island. *Namalau* (*skrabdak*, scrub fowl) and *koroliko*, a marine fowl, are hunted in season. The bulk of people's diet is provided by the garden. Other dietary intake is supplied by the sea (*fish-naika*, many types of shell fish; *lobster-ura*, *crab-rakuma*) and by the meat provided in exchange and other contexts. The dietary intake provided by the subsistence and ritual economies is supplemented when possible by food bought at the trade store: tin fish, corned beef, hard crackers.

As in much of Melanesia, pigs are enormously important on Tongoa. This has changed somewhat with the introduction of cattle during colonialism and the growth of non-pork eating religions such as SDA. In Purau, not many people are SDA, and the balance between pigs and bullocks is about equal in number. Bullock meat is exchanged during lifecycle rituals just as pork is and indeed is often somewhat preferred at such occasions because they yield more meat portions. The pig, however, is still more valued as necessary in particular instances (to take a chiefly title a man must kill pigs) and is culturally valued as having more *gris* (fat) than a bullock. There is an opposition between *gris* and *drae* (dry) in the ways that people experience and talk about food. *Drae kakae* (dry food) is spoken of as being impoverished; it has no substance and is what people eat in town (note additionally the moral judgement of town-island here) when they are away from their village and island, their *pies*. There is also a dimension of social impoverishment. Meat and thus *gris* is a part of meals which are taken in the company of others as a result of one's kin and social connections during exchanges. To eat *drae kakae* is to eat in diminished circumstances, literally and metaphorically.
Much has been written in Melanesian ethnography about the relationship between people and pigs (Rappaport 1984 [1968]:59; Jolly 1981:287; Layard 1942). On Tongoa, both humans and pigs live in house structures and eat the same foods. Small pigs are often taken into the human domestic sphere and nurtured, which calls to mind obvious parallels with human children who also need to be fed and cared for. In his ethnography of Maring culture, highlands New Guinea, Rappaport reports that the gardens that a person makes depends heavily on how many pigs they have (Rappaport 1984 [1968]:51). This reflects the ritual importance of pigs among the Tsembaga (Maring). In Tongoa, pig husbandry is much less marked. Beef makes the leap between ceremonial economy and cash economy, and bullocks can be sold as meat to the co-operative store, or transported to Vila and sold. Not only did I never see pig meat sold in the Tongoa co-operative store, but I never saw it for sale in the large stores in Port Vila. Pig does not seem to be an appropriate substance for this kind of retail consumption. Shops provide a different mode of purchase and consumption indicating different modes of social relations and knowledge (Foster 1992; Miller 1995). Whole pigs are bought, however, by people who need them for an upcoming celebration or lifecycle event. In such cases the purchaser usually does not have access to a pig through their own or their relatives’ resources and so will seek out an animal from a person in either their village or another who is known to have a large pig herd. For example the men who work in Port Vila have the cash resources rather than the material resource of the mature pig. One such man, Manamuri, returned to Tongoa from Port Vila in order to make the navagogotoana to the family of his betrothed, a Pele woman named Joyce. Manamuri bought the largest pig in the herd of Timo Tisa, a Purau man known to have pigs.

2.4i The Garden
The garden as a reproductive space is an extremely important artefact of Melanesian cultures (Bonnemaison 1994; Eyde 1983; Lütkes 1990; Malinowski 1935; Gell 1992; Munn 1986). Gell discusses the Trobriand garden as a collective work of art where magical efficacy informs and transforms technical efficacy (Gell 1992:60). Garden magic is no longer practised on Tongoa and the garden (roara) is an almost prosaic feature of everyday life. Nevertheless, the garden is recognised as the basis of life and is at the very heart of Tongoan life. People take enormous pride in their gardens and the sublime mystery at the heart of the garden, namely, that it transforms land and labour into food, is never far from people’s attitudes about gardening. Given that gardens dominate people’s experiential and intellectual perceptions of the world, there are attitudes and beliefs about what makes a good garden and what makes a garden grow well. The aesthetic of a good garden lies in hard work made visible and evident in fertile abundance. The labour that produces the garden is that of the marital couple and it is the marital/sexual relationship that is the source of the garden’s reproductive power. Ideas of production and reproduction of humans coincide in the creation of this fertile space. Such ideas are evident in lexical links: nasuligna (‘the child of its child’) is the noun used for both human grandchildren and the offshoots of plants such as the banana tree that propagate by falling to the ground from the parent tree. When asked what makes a garden grow well, Tongoa people most often cite the quality of the soil. The soil of Tongoa is contrasted to other places, and is said to have qualities of ‘dryness’ (as opposed to soggy, clayey soil). This results in tubers that are sweet, dry and firm unlike tubers grown in wet soil that are said to be watery.

2.4ii The Social Relations of Garden Production

The primary relationship out of which the garden emerges is that of the marital couple and the gardening work unit is usually based around this couple and their children. When a
young man marries, or establishes a cohabiting relationship, he makes a garden away from his parents’ garden which he has previously worked on and eaten from. It is when a woman comes to his namatana and joins him in a sexual union, that a discrete, reproductive space is separated out of the homogenous land of the namatana. A couple and their children never have just one garden, but an overlapping series of garden plots, each at a different stage of the garden lifecycle. A couple themselves move through a developmental cycle, working on the greatest number of gardens when their children are grown but not yet all married. Towards the end of their lives, after their children have grown and married, a couple maintain fewer gardens. Most older people in Purau planted just one garden every year, but most couples/gardening units made approximately three new gardens every planting season. These can typically be categorised as a mixed garden, with all crops, a garden dominated by the staples of manioc and sweet potato, and finally a yam garden. Of these three gardens, only the yam garden is planted, maintained and harvested within a single annual cycle. The other gardens will continue to be eaten from for up to three years.

Not all the land within a namatana is cultivated of course, some fanua are lying fallow and others have reverted to ‘bush’ and some areas are uncleared. Once one has secured a site, the first task in making a garden, is to clear the fanua of secondary growth, leaving the trees and plants that transcend the lifecycle of a single garden. Depending on the age of the last garden made on that fanua, the plants still present can include coconut palms, banana, pawpaw and pandanus. The trees which are always left are those slow maturing, long lived fruit trees which mark the boundaries of the fanua. Men build fences (nakoro) around the garden to keep out pigs and cattle. Today, fences are made of posts and barbed wire. In the past coconut trunks were used. This choice of coconut to delimit and mark out the
space of the garden is significant when considered in conjunction with payments made in relation to coconuts between land holders and land borrowers (see next chapter).

The cutting and clearing (*uma; brasem*) is done with bush knives, and is usually carried out by women. Once the ground is clear, the residual weeds and debris from the cutting are left to dry, and then burnt ("eu dokoni roara’; *oli stop bonem garen*, they burn the garden now) away, leaving a clear site with a layer of ash, interspersed with the trees and bushes that are left. Despite that no garden site is completely clear, informants told me that when making a garden, it is better to have the land as clear as possible, as tree roots inhibit good growth of food. After one has cut, cleared and burned the garden site, one leaves it for a period of time and then one prepares the soil and plants. Both men and women plant together, but certain crops are associated with male and female labour. This statement is based on my own observations of garden planting, but informants also state that men generally plant taro and manioc, women plant sweet potato, and both sexes plant yams and pandanus. In the case of a man planting pandanus, it is always for a particular woman, who is spoken of as the owner of that plant. There is no (or I never heard of) strict association of each crop with a gender however. For the most part, work in the garden proceeds on a complementary basis between men and women. This is a visible reflection of the marital/sexual unit being the basis of garden production and indeed, reproductivity.

Each garden plot varies according to where it falls within the overlapping lifecycles of the numerous gardens that a couple will be working at any one time. Gardens are basically classified into three age types and these fall into a continuum of how land is classified overall: cultivated, semi-cultivated and uncultivated. The cultivated state is exemplified by the mature garden that is worked on regularly, while the uncultivated state is exemplified
by *dakbus*, dense bush where no-one works or lives. Existing in a somewhat liminal position between these two is the category of semi-cultivated, glossed in Bislama as *bus* (‘bush’, secondary forest). The following categories illustrate how land use is classified in detail:

*Lina* - a clear place in the bush, not a garden site, but a space where there are no trees or bushes etc., only grass. This is a space that has been cleared, but the *lina* has no food growing. Note also that *lina* refers to place of house, area around house, household.

*Roara* - the space of the garden, from the time that it is cleared in preparation for planting, through to planting, maintenance and harvesting.

*Lolua* - the older garden space, when a garden grows old and the only food still there are long term plants such as banana and manioc. One does not go to work on *lolua*, but one can continue to harvest any food still growing there.

*Malowono* - sometimes called *bus* in Bislama, *malowono* refers to land that is not planted as a garden but as a plantation, usually of coconuts, but also breadfruit.

*Namalas* - refers to *dakbus*, ‘dark bush’, space that no-one works, and is completely overgrown (*ples i fas*, ‘the area is thick with all kinds of vegetation’). Also referred to as *namalasikau* (*namalas: bus*bush; *kau: wild*).

The area below the village where the piggeries are is referred to as *bus* (‘bush’ in everyday speech, but when asked, villagers clarify that this land isn’t really bush as things which have been planted such as coconut and fruit trees exist there. *Dakbus* (‘dark bush’) then, is land where there is nothing but wild plants, including non-fruit bearing trees such as *nambeleilu*, (*burao*: cottonwood tree, ‘hibiscus tiliaceus’) and vines, grow. In other words, on *dakbus* there is no trace that someone has worked that land for a very long time. In contrast, the
most cultivated space in the conceptual landscape is the roara. This is the garden that people work on regularly from the time of preparing it for planting onwards, until it falls into disuse through age. Each garden of early to full maturity will typically have within it a mixture of edible and non-edible cultivated plants, including bright flowers which are planted to make the garden visually pleasing (flasem garen, ‘decorate the garden, mekem smat nomo, ‘to decorate only’).

Food crops are interspersed in a mixed crop practice typical of swidden agriculture in Melanesia (Clarke 1971). Only the yam gardens are orderly and clearly distinguished by their neat staking and careful weeding. Other crops are mixed; there are patches of sweet potato, manioc and taro intermingled with lettuce, cabbage (both the high growing leafy local cabbage (moasi, aelan kabis), and low European round cabbage), tomatoes, sugarcane, corn, melon and cucumber. In between, coconut palms, banana and pawpaw trees grow. Around the edges of the garden, pandanus grows huge and full. Aged coconut palm trunks are left to lie where they fall, while thick vegetation sprawls over the ground, and leafy manioc and sugarcane dominate at eye level. All this masks in fact an abundance of growing food. The roots of the leafy manioc stalks form swollen manioc tubers. The low-growing sweet potato has a mass of leaves that cover the mounds and the tubers they contain.

Women plant sweet potato (pitete, kumala), first preparing the ground into soft circular mounds of earth, and then pushing four cuttings of sweet potato vines into each mound. These cuttings will develop roots, pushing down into the soil to form tubers in three or four months. Manioc (miork, maniok) is usually planted by men. No especial preparation of soil is carried out, and the manioc is planted by pushing a stalk cutting at an angle into
the earth. This stalk has small nodules all along it and care must be taken to ensure that the stalk is placed the correct way as these nodules are the generative part of the plant and develop into roots/tubers. Another crop associated with male labour is taro (namalei, taro). Although not planted in every garden, taro is planted in the damper, shady parts of individual gardens. Taro is not a plentiful food crop in Purau, however, and there are no extensive irrigation systems as seen on other islands. Perhaps because it is less prevalent than sweet potato and manioc, it seems to be a valued food when people come to eat it.

In terms of quantity, the root crops manioc and sweet potato dominate the garden. Manioc is a fast maturing tropical crop introduced to Vanuatu (Weightman 1989), and is now heavily relied upon as a food source. Although manioc and sweet potato are the staples of everyday fare, their domination of the daily diet varies throughout the seasonal cycle. Of all the root crops, yams (naowi, yam) are the most important and are highly valued. Their size and number are carefully tallied, and a real excitement surrounds uncovering the yam mound (taki) and seeing the yam it conceals. The annual harvest of yams differentiates it from sweet potato, manioc and taro which are harvested throughout the year. Yams are harvested all at one time, and stored properly, they keep for months. In contrast, manioc and sweet potato can remain in the ground for a long time, but once dug up, are eaten within a few days. Furthermore, manioc can be harvested and eaten a number of years after being planted, although people acknowledge that it is tougher and needs to be boiled for longer than young manioc, and so is more appropriate for pigs to eat. Manioc and sweet potato in the ground are a continuous and concealed supply of food, in contrast to the yam harvest that is revealed all at once and is both a source of food and a resource displayed.
The different plants in the Tongoan garden are generated and regenerated in different ways. These have the potential to serve as powerful models for regeneration and reproductivity in Tongoan culture generally. Sweet potato, manioc, sugar cane, island cabbage and kava are reproduced by taking a cutting of either a leaf or stalk and replanting. Banana, taro, pandanus and *lif laplap* are reproduced by taking an off-shoot from an established plant. These plants are self-regenerating, with off-shoots developing and growing independently of the parent plant. Such plants are thought of as paralleling in some way human reproduction. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the small banana plant that develops next to the main trunk is called *sulig* (second generation descendant; child of one’s child or one’s niece/nephew). Certain plants such as corn and melon are planted by saving the seeds of a previous plant. The cultivation of the coconut palm is somewhat between these two practices as it is a self-regenerating seed that is taken and planted elsewhere. If the germinating coconut is left where it falls, it sends roots down through the husk into the earth, and from the top of the nut will sprout the beginnings of the palm fronds. The germinating coconut (*navara*) are rarely left to take root where they fall however, and are either eaten (by humans or pigs) or moved and re-planted elsewhere, either in concentrated form (a *plantesen*, plantation), or singly in a garden, or near a house. The coconut is not stored from one growing season to the next unlike the seeds of corn etc. which are carefully saved and wrapped in a small packet of pandanus and hung from the rafters of the *peva* until the next growing season. Closely paralleling the practice of seed saving from one season to another is saving a section (the top/head) of the yam to be planted and produce a new yam.

The cuttings, stalks, offshoots and seeds to be planted in a new garden come from already established gardens; one’s own and possibly also relatives’ gardens if they have a plant one
wishes to cultivate. In the case of yams however, where one is working from a limited population of yams, one can buy seed yams from others. I was aware of only one instance of this during fieldwork: an older widow, named Annie bought ten seed yams from another village. This cost 1,000 vatu (US$10), a not inconsiderable amount. The seed yam is the most emblematic of the saved seeds that represent a continuous link between past and present gardens and is a tangible and powerful symbol of past hard labour and reproductivity. The seed yam embodies the reproduction of not just the yam but by extension, the garden, social relations and the handing down of the chiefly titles between generations of men. The section of the yam that is planted to produce a new yam is called nasata naowi (naowi-yam; nasata-source/origin/progenitor) or olfala blong yam (father, parent of the yam). The chief who passes on a title is known as the nasata of that title. When the yams are harvested, the nasata naowi is still there in the taki (yam mound) along with the new yam it has generated. I sometimes heard this new yam referred to by older villagers as naowi kanau (naowi-yam; kanau-man). At harvesting, the nasata naowi is old and dry and is discarded. The ways that people talk about a chief once he has passed on the title echo this somewhat. The most common explanation of the nasata titles is ‘hemi nomo save mekem wan samting’: he (the old chief) no longer does things, kill pigs, make nasautonga or other exchanges for example. The agency for such actions has now shifted with the title to it’s next holder. While yams contain the ability to reproduce within themselves, some of the other seeds that are bought in stores are non-renewable (lettuce, onion, spring onion, round cabbage and Chinese cabbage). Every year, seeds have to be bought, and thus, some people don’t plant them.

18 When the time of the yam harvest came, however, the yams that Annie planted had not grown into fine large tubers. This was attributed to the seller bespelling the yams so that they would not grow well. The seller’s speculated motive was to sell Annie yams that she consumed rather than reproduced to make more yams (in other words, ate only once rather than many times). This explanation highlights the regenerative potential in the way yams are thought of.
The garden contains not only food crops, but also cultivated inedible plants. These are principally pandanus, kava and nalikau, the leaf used in making laplap. Pandanus is planted around the edges of the garden, like a boundary, wrapping the garden as mats wrap and contain things. It is the edible plants that are within, contained by the pandanus and other boundary marking plants such as coconuts. Within the topography of the garden, there are layers of food (and meanings) both visible and hidden within the earth, and these change over the lifecycle of the garden. When a new garden is first made, it is reduced to two levels: the old trees - coconut, pandanus and possibly banana and pawpaw - and the blank canvas of the ashy ground. When the garden is planted and grows into a mature garden, there are many levels of growing food. This topography reflects the profound difference between swidden and European traditions of agriculture. The latter is dominated by mono-cropping, typically utilising only one 'layer' of potential growing space (Dennon 1997). Swidden agriculture as practised widely throughout Pacific, features layers of growth both below the earth and above: root crops, low growing vegetation, high bushy vegetation, trees of low (e.g. pawpaw), medium (e.g. breadfruit), and high (e.g. coconut) growth. The topography of the Tongoa garden changes once again as it matures into an old garden. The trees are taller, pandanus has grown huge, and the manioc stalks have grown tall. Most of the root crops except for manioc have been harvested, all the vegetable crops are finished and only the fruit trees are still producing food.

Although inter-cropping is a feature of Tongoan gardens, some gardens are of a limited number of crops and usually at least one garden in the number worked on by a family will be a manioc and/or sweet potato garden. Young people making a small garden of their own for the first time will usually have just a few crops planted in the corner of one of the
family gardens. Such gardens are not necessarily serious gardens which the person
depends on for food, but are practice, and represent the beginning of their garden-making
career. After a garden is planted, it is left to establish growth until both crops and weeds
are fairly thick. The first weeding is usually done in a communal workgroup as it is
thorough and painstaking work and occurs about six - eight weeks after planting. On one
occasion I went with a weeding party to weed the garden of Lui Juhu, a young man around
sixteen years old. Lui had planted sweet potato and kava in a small plot that included
previously planted banana and lif laplap. He had not been to do the first weeding
however, and now, after approximately ten weeks, the garden was choked with grass and
weeds. It was in fact Lui’s paternal grandmother who had taken matters into her own
hands and organised the small weeding group of women. One of the women, Lui’s
daowean (cross-cousin), commented to me “hemi mekem flas blong hem nomo”- Lui was
just showing off with a garden, but was unwilling to put in the full work (Jenny Solomon
16/1/97). In fact the sweet potato and kava had not really grown due to the choking
presence of grass and weeds. If Lui had been relying on this garden to feed him, the
situation would have been different. It is precisely because Lui was not depending on this
garden but still eating off his family’s gardens that he was able to neglect the garden he had
planted. It is when other people are also expecting to eat from any garden Lui plants that
the difference between this and the ‘starter’ garden are clear.

In the months following July, August and September, the garden is planted and then
weeded. After the first weeding, the next large task is to stake out (sumata) the yam
plants. This involves a lot of work but large parties do not gather to do this. Most
people’s yam gardens are not very large and therefore do not produce many seed yams to
be planted the following year. This perpetuates a cycle of small yam gardens. Secondly,
there is a feeling that yams are to do with individual effort and this is reflected in the saying that yams planted by one alone grow better.\(^\text{19}\) The next task in the garden is to *suragdoni* (*kavremqap, bury*) the growing roots within the sweet potato mounds. After this, ongoing tasks includes weeding and maintenance work such as training the wild yam vines up bamboo stakes which lean against a tree. This work continues piecemeal throughout the year, when the garden starts to produce food and the gardening unit begins to eat from it.

People do not go to the garden everyday. One can usually collect enough food to keep a household in meals for two or three days and the ongoing work once the garden is established and growing is less. Nash's work among the Nagovisi of Bougainville highlights the difference between what she refers to as a ‘low production’ society in comparison with the Highlands of Papua New Guinea. The following quote about working time spent in the garden reflects this:

"Though active, Nagovisi women do not give the impression of being over-worked, and rarely go to the garden more than three times a week...To count ‘hours in the garden’ is misleading, for women by no means get down to their tasks in a businesslike manner - they stop at villages en route to chat and chew betel, and once in the garden, they cook snacks, tend to small children, bathe, and so on."


The intensity of garden work in Nagovisi and Tongoa can also be compared to places where yam gardens are more important. Even at the height of the seasonal cycle, the

\(^{19}\) The comments that people made to me about the yams that they had harvested were characteristically cagey about number and size. During the second yam harvest of my time in Purau, it seemed that everyone in the village was talking about the impressive size of Songi’s yams. Praising another’s yams usually provokes an immediate disclaimer however. When I asked others why they thought Songi’s yam harvest was so good, the fact that he planted them on his own was often cited. It was explained to me that it is better if one plants yams on one’s own rather than with many people because when alone one will plant slowly and well. On reflection, this seems to have an affinity with the way that people talk about women making mats. During this time, it is just her and the mat, and the end product is the result of her thinking well on, and of, the mat she is weaving (see chapter 5).
gardening work on Tongoa did not resemble the very intensive labour required by the yam gardens of the Trobriand Islands (Weiner 1988).

The gardening cycle fits into an annual cycle, that is itself thought of in terms of the agricultural cycle. This cycle begins around the time of clearing and burning in preparation for the planting of new gardens in July, August and September. The demarcation of the year into hot/wet and cooler/dry seasons dominates the annual cycle. The hot season, *ragi ni sui* (*ragi*-time, *ni*-of, *sui*-hot) occurs from about November to April and is the wettest time of the year. Temperature, humidity, rainfall and the threat of cyclones increase. Falling within the *ragi ni sui* is the period between January and March known as *narurue*. This term was explained to me as *taem blong planem tri* - the time to plant trees such as breadfruit, *natau*²⁰ (*nandao*, native lychee), *namale* (*naos*, great hog plum) and other fruit trees. *Narurue* as a term is also used to refer to the fruit trees planted at this time of year. The other half of the year is known as *ragi ni namaladiana* (time of cold) and lasts from April to September. At the end of the cooler season, the *puma*, a cicada-like insect starts to cry. This marks the beginning of the hot time and indicates that it is time to begin making new gardens. In September and October leaves grow back on the trees that shed them during the cool time and this is another sign that it is time to plant new gardens and new yam gardens in particular. Other signs indicate that the planting season is beginning: the appearance of a migrating bird, the *siviu*, a bird that is described as coming from the sea around September. The *siviu* was also described to me as *kampas blong yam*, a yam compass. There is also another bird, the *gogo*, whose cry is heard coming from the bush around the same time, and indicates the start of the planting season. Anecdotal reference

²⁰ The word *natau* also refers to the period of one year as a whole (*natau e pisa?* - how many years?), and is used to refer to the leaves of any plant that are cut to cover the *fufu* oven.
associates both the *siviu* and *gogo* with yams: "*taem yumi harem tufala pijin ia, yumi talem 'bambae yumi tekem gudfala yam'*" ('when we hear these birds, we say 'bur yams will be good' 'Marakitapu 23/10/96).

Generally, gardens are not too far away from the sleeping houses of the village. The *fanua* of a *namatana* are not all concentrated in one area, but scattered over the land which makes up the chieftainship or domain of chief Tarisaliu. In addition, one may have rights over *fanua* distributed even further afield (see chapter 3). Within Purau however, people must take particular paths to move between their *lina* and garden. These routes mostly follow paths that are more-or-less defined as public such as the large road coming into Purau going down to the shore and the peripheral path on the other side of the village also going to the shore. This latter path branches off from the *napua lagana* (*smol rod*) which connects Purau and the neighbouring village. There are also a number of smaller paths which wind between the gardens and are commonly used by a number of people to reach their gardens. Although these paths pass through the *fanua* of other *namatana*, to move along them is not necessarily to move into another's *ples* in the same way that moving through their *lina* would be. Passing through the space of the *lina* is usually only done if one has a close kinship relationship to that *lina*. For example, an older Purau couple had a garden in the area below the village, on the land of their *namatana*, 'Malafakalo'. To get to this garden they could either go down the large vehicle road, or use a more direct path. To use this path, they had to pass through a different *namatana*, Farea Tapu. One of the *lina* in Farea Tapu is headed by their daughter's son, and it was this *lina* that they went through on their way to the garden. Moving through other people's *lina* to get to one's garden, coconut plantation or bullock yard, is an expression of relatedness and movement.
through the space of another's namatana is circumscribed, unless one has a close kinship connection with the members of that lina.

The garden is a powerful site for models of reproduction not just because of the nature of the whole enterprise of the garden, but because of its peripheral meanings revolving around human reproduction. Gardens are made by marital/sexual unit and is a symbolic space of men and women co-existing: marriage makes gardens and gardens make marriage. A man makes a garden when he gets married and women separate a reproductive space out of a man’s namatana land. It is no surprise to find that human sexuality is linked to the garden; this is a very common theme throughout Melanesia, whether it is a case, as in Umeda of human beings born in the garden (Gell 1975), or as elsewhere, that sexual intercourse is incompatible with the garden as it is thought to inhibit the growth of the crops (Battaglia 1990). Despite this, the garden is still the place for illicit liaisons. In Tongoa, the garden is the place not only to have sex with one's partner, but to commit adultery. This emerged in a number of court cases over adultery during fieldwork. Indeed, going to the garden together is in itself an expression of a sexual relationship.

Alongside the subsistence economy is the ceremonial economy of lifecycle event exchanges, customary obligations to kin, dominant title holders and landowners. Mats are important items within these obligations and women state that it is a continual balancing act keeping mats stored, versus the continual need for mats. It is hard to store mats 'in reserve', for very long, as there is always someone in need of a mat, whether it is oneself or

---

21 This is reflected, for example, in Bislama slang for former lovers (female): olfala garen (old garden, no longer maintained).

22 For example, an anthropologist working on Santo Island to the north of Tongoa found that patients of the local clinic treating venereal disease were closely questioned by nurses about sexual partners, eliciting time and location of their liaisons in an attempt to document the spread of disease. On a large number of these reports, the garden is named as the place where intercourse took place (Jean de Lannoy, personal communication).
a kinsperson who can make a claim on one for a mat. There are no formal ‘rules’ accompanying this making of a claim, but close kinspeople, men and women, can ask a woman for a mat. This mat they will exchange in their own name. When other kinspeople hold events such as marriages or funerals, this also requires the woman to part with a mat, but this she gives in her own name.

One generally does not see accumulations of mats in Tongoa households. The most usual number of stored mats is between one and three. These mats are generally not openly displayed in the front area of the house, but placed in the rafters at the back, or folded and tucked away out of sight. Even when openly trying to accumulate mats for specific events, women speak of the tension between balancing claims from others and this accumulation. The case of Leibunua Winnie illustrates this: Leibunua is an older middle-aged widow from Purau. In October 1996 she was trying to build up a number of mats for her son’s marriage. When I asked Leibunua how many mats she had set aside, she told me that she had had six, but her son Joseph ‘Manamuri’ (the purchaser of the pig in the above example) had come to Purau in June to attend a funeral and had taken 2 mats to this event. Additionally, when he returned to Port Vila, he had taken two more. Now, she said, she had “about” four mats. The number needed for the navagogotoana exceeds this but Leibunua said that one cannot ask people for mats on such occasions, the decision to contribute lies with individuals themselves. The decision to contribute to any customary obligation reflects an assessment by that person of their closeness to the people involved, a closeness that is reckoned genealogically but also with reference to proximity of title relationship. The relations of land and title form an important counterpart to other calculations of relatedness. Both contribute to the overall relations of ples on Tongoa that are the subject of the next chapter.
Chapter Three

Relations of Land and Title on Tongoa

3.0 Introduction

Issues surrounding land are absolutely central to any understanding of the last one hundred and fifty years of ni-Vanuatu history. Land has emerged as a national political issue following the experience of colonialism and the struggle for independence (Lini 1980; Jolly 1992; Sope 1974; Van Trease 1984; Whyte 1990). The fundamental importance of land is connected to ideas of *pies* that pervade much ni-Vanuatu thinking about personal and collective identity. *Pies* is a Bislama word used to refer to specific place and places, but also to indicate a primary concept of local identity, through the association of person and the place that they belong to. The notion of *pies* to express lived-in space appears throughout the archipelago, and has been highlighted by a number of authors, including Bolton (1993), Bonnemaison (1984), Jolly (1994) and Rodman (1987). Land itself is the conceptual bedrock of lived-in space (i.e. society itself) for Tongoans and indeed most ni-Vanuatu cultures. This chapter examines the relationship between chiefs and land on Tongoa, positioning this relationship within Vanuatu’s history of land alienation and the history of the chiefs’ settlement of Tongoa following the Kuwae explosion.

Perceptions of land on Tongoa and the transmission of land rights have been shaped by both these historical narratives. The key ways that mats appear in the process of land transmission is the subject of chapter 7. The importance of mats within land relations on Tongoa today is foreshadowed here, however, with a discussion of the payments made in connection with land. Land relations are at the heart of the system of ranked titles. Each
of the titles on Tongoa are absolutely identified with a number of land plots (fanua). There is an indissoluble connection between title and land, such that the title is the land which accompanies it, and vice versa. As the second section of this thesis details, mats are interposed within this indissoluble relationship, and it is through mats that the connections between people and lived-in space (garden, namatana, roads) are made manifest.

3.1 Perceptions of Land

Perceptions of land on Tongoa are intimately bound up with notions of the inalienability of ples. Studies of Pacific social systems have pointed out the highly "integrated concepts of land, place and people" (Ward and Kingdon 1995:47). Vanuatu is no exception, and the specific identifications of person with place on Tongoa are examined in chapter 6. For Bonnemaison, ples amounts to an "ideology of territory, postulated in the principle of the inalienability of places" (1984:138). Strong identifications between social unit and the land they dwell on occur throughout the archipelago: MacClancy calls land the:

"physical embodiment of the metaphysical link between the past and present members of a clan, both contain[ing] the bones of people's ancestors and provid[ing] them with food." (MacClancy 1980:20).

Land relations are, ipso facto, relations of ples: "To be Longanan by definition means having land rights; individual and collective identity is grounded in place." (Rodman 1995:88). This is also true for Tongoa. Comparison between the Longana case and Tongoa reveals the common theme of land as social product, whilst also showing the distinctions between societies with different systems of political authority.
The meanings surrounding land echo similar ideas and concerns in Longana and Tongoa. The materiality of land must be recognised in order to understand its uses and transformations into social products such as gardens, dancing grounds, sacred sites (tabu ples), shoreline, and burial grounds. For example, Longana vernacular opposes notions of land and ples: Rodman translates tano as land, while vanue means place (Rodman 1987:35). On Tongoa, natano is the noun for land, whilst famua indicates land plot (Nakanamanga language). Just as vanue is linked to island (vanue), district (loloevanue), hamlet (tokagi vanue) and land plot (mo vise vanue) in Longana, on Tongoa, we see a similar extension of famua constituting the island itself (nafamua). Rodman identifies a basic opposition between land and place in Longana thought: land, she states, is not a subject of contestation, whilst place is fought over (Rodman 1995:87). The separation between land and place is stronger in Longana: “Vanue is not land (tano), it is lived space in which place and people are part of each other.” (Rodman 1987:35). Thus, in Longana, uncultivated bush land is not distinguished as belonging to individual owners, as is garden land, hamlet sites, shoreline and reef (Rodman 1995:87). On Tongoa, all land, cultivated or not, is divided into famua and identified with an individual title holder. A fundamental difference between Longana and Tongoa systems of land relations is that in Longana, claims to land are mediated through membership of matrilines and patrilocal residence. The Longana matriclan is a descent category but not a corporate group (Rodman 1995: 88) that manages control of land. This is the opposite of the case of Tongoa namatana, as will be outlined further in section 3.3.

Rodman has pointed out a common duality between movement and fixity that is present throughout the archipelago:
“Throughout Vanuatu, land tenure principles emphasised themes of mobility versus rootedness, and an emphasis on knowledge as the key to power in land tenure matters.” (Rodman 1995:71)

On Tongoa, the ability to demonstrate one’s knowledge of place in land disputes is the key to definitively claim ownership rights over an opponent. It is not, however, the key to acquiring larger and larger areas of land under one’s control as Rodman demonstrates is the case for Longana and other parts of the archipelago (Rodman 1987; 1995). On Tongoa, success lies in persuading others that your account of the history of a particular plot of land is true kastom.

Perceptions of land on Tongoa exemplify land as a dynamic entity that is not solely acted upon by humans but one that equally acts upon them. Individuals’ and groups’ perceptions of the island and its boundaries are anchored in named sites such as the landing places for the original canoes. Such sites compress distant and recent pasts (Kahn 1990; Tilley 1994). Layers of events and narratives become inscribed upon the landscape in the naming and speaking of such sites as tabu ples, (sacred sites), ancestral burial grounds, and previous hamlet sites (lina). One such example of layered meanings is illustrated in the Christian churches built on sites previously occupied by the sacred slit-gong drums (napea) on dancing grounds (Miller 1987:276). Napea were important markers of deceased chiefs. In the nineteenth century, Michelsen reported that in moving through the landscape of the island with Tongoans, the latter continually pointed out to him sites of previous habitation (Michelsen: 1892:157). The island is thus perceived through connections between past and future inhabitants of ples. This is exemplified in the burial of the dead and the marking of grave sites. In the past, dancing grounds (mwala) were individually named. Today fanua and tabu ples are also individually named with references to events and ancestors and are
associated with namatana groups. For example, "Digala", a tabu ples of Tanomiala namatana (see table 3.0 below) marks the actions of Maripeto, an ancestor of the namatana, a warrior who hid here to ambush and kill enemies from Kurumabe, the neighbouring village.

Such sites are extremely powerful, with the ability to adversely affect trespassers. Named, individuated sites anchor people to ples and actively feature in creating and recreating such connections. Narratives of place accompany such sites and continually remake the relationship between people and ples. For example, a contemporary song tells the story of a young Purau man, getting lost in the bush between Purau and Mangarisu on his way back from courting a Mangarisu girl. This land is the subject of long-standing bitter dispute between Purau and Mangarisu. Stones are frequent markers of the lived landscape (cf. Kahn 1990). Vatutapu (‘taboo stone’) are dwelling sites for malevolent spirits (nateitapu). Trees are also powerful aspects of the ways that land is marked and thus perceived. Trees are planted to mark land boundaries, and also serve as ancestral memorials1. Trees may also be nakautapu (‘taboo wood/tree’), marking sacred sites and past events. Sometimes trees and stones are combined to mark, and indeed create, the lived-in space of the namatana. slabs of stone are placed around the roots of trees, so that over time, the roots extend around the stones, literally anchoring them in place (plate 3.0). Such a tree marks the place where members of the namatana gather. In one case of a previously inhabited place in Purau, such a tree had become tabu, dwelling place of ancestral spirits.

---

1 Trees planted as boundary markers include nakoka, narara, nakarie, namalaus, natali and coconut (naniu). The specific evocations of some of these trees and the use of the narara in the rites of chiefly investiture are discussed in chapter 7. Additionally, a dye produced from the nakoka tree was used to colour mats in the past (see chapters 4 and 5).
Plate 3.0 Stones and trees combine to become powerful markers of *pfes*: Meriu village *farea*, Tongoa.
3.2 Historical Review of Land and Land Alienation in Vanuatu

The history of large scale land alienation in Vanuatu begins with the intensification of European, Australian, and American interest in the islands. Early in the nineteenth century, whalers and sandalwood traders visited the islands, particularly the southern islands of the archipelago (Shineberg 1967). Later in the nineteenth century labour recruiters, missionaries and island traders increasingly involved themselves in the lives and affairs of islanders. It was with missionaries and traders that the nature of this involvement shifted to encompass land transactions. Unlike other foreigners, missionaries and traders were interested in establishing themselves as a permanent presence in the islands. This involved attempts to purchase land in order to set up mission houses and trading posts.

In 1843 the first white settler, a trader, Captain James Paddon settled in Aneityum. Five years later, Catholic Marist missionaries and the Presbyterian missionary John Geddie arrived on Aneityum. In 1858, another Presbyterian, John G Paton arrived and set up a mission on Tanna. By the 1880’s there were numerous Presbyterian, Catholic, and Anglican missionaries in the group and conversion to Christianity began to gain ground in the areas the missionaries concentrated on. As outlined in the previous chapter, Presbyterian missionaries Peter Milne and Oscar Michelsen arrived in the central region in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Both purchased land for mission buildings on land associated with spirits. In 1879 Michelsen bought an area of land (5-6 acres) at Panita which he records as a “sacred place” once used as a burial ground (Michelsen 1892:29). Similarly, on Nguna, Milne made a payment for land associated with spirits that no-one else would inhabit (Don 1927). Michelsen later found that the payment (£7-8 in barter goods) made to the landowner Matariliu had to be duplicated to the ‘real owner’ Malai, who was located in Sesake, Emae Island. Land purchase by foreigners throughout the
archipelago was complicated not only by differing understandings of the terms of sale, but by the fact that the seller frequently did not have sole or undisputed rights to the land in question (Rodman 1995).

The background to the massive land alienation that the islands experienced lies in the rivalry and uneasy alliance between British and French imperial powers. The infamous and unique Condominium of the New Hebrides was born of competing French and British spheres of influence in the Pacific during the nineteenth century. In 1853, the French government annexed New Caledonia, and was interested in annexing the New Hebrides (MacClancy 1980). The islands were seen as a potential settling place for convicts who had served their time in the penal colony of New Caledonia. The British government had no desire to annex the group, but was under pressure from the Australian colonial governments to resist French expansion. The British government, however, had no desire for a colony it viewed as unimportant, and potentially expensive (Scarr 1967). In addition to favourably assessing the commercial possibilities of the islands France had a strategic reason for annexation: if another power annexed the New Hebrides the colony of New Caledonia would be isolated in the western Pacific. The Australian authorities, however, did not want French ex-convicts settling in the islands, fearing lost trade opportunities, and the threat of an Anglo-French war. The colonial governments of Australia, under increasing pressure from Presbyterian missionaries began to appeal to Britain for annexation (Thompson 1980).

Throughout this period a diverse number of foreigners had settled in the islands and by the late 1860’s Europeans had begun to plant cash crops in the archipelago. In 1873 there
were 31 Europeans in Havannah Harbour, Efate Island, mostly English. This situation changed in the 1880's with the interest of John Higginson in the islands. Higginson, a naturalised French citizen, began to buy large areas of land in the New Hebrides, and encouraged French settlers. His company, Compagnie Caledonienne des Nouvelles-Hébrides (CCNH), bought out many English planters. After getting into financial difficulty, CCNH was later purchased by the French government, becoming Société Française des Nouvelles Hébrides (SFNH). Higginson urged French annexation of the islands, but in 1878 the British and French governments agreed not to annex the islands without the agreement of the other. For the next few decades, this situation of coexistence continued, the relative numbers of French and British settlers the subject of competition and unease. In 1897 there were 151 French settlers, mainly on Efate and northern islands, while there were only 55 British settlers dispersed through the group. In 1906 these numbers had increased, but still the French dominated: 401 Frenchmen compared to 228 Englishmen. There was no colonial government, the only authority being the Joint Naval Commission formed in 1887. The Commission was not a permanent presence, however, and was only present in the non-cyclone season. Conflicts between settlers and islanders were often violent: between 1883 and 1886 alone, thirteen traders were killed by ni-Vanuatu (MacClancy 1980:68).

It was with the beginnings of a plantation economy in the 1860's that the nature of land alienation in the archipelago changed. Cocoa, coffee, copra, and cotton were planted on the larger islands such as Efate, Santo and Malakula (MacClancy 1980). The planting of large tracts of land with coconuts, in particular, underscored the shift for ni-Vanuatu observers. Coconuts, with a very long life span of seventy-five or more years, represented

---

2 Much of the statistical information in this section comes from MacClancy (1980). To date, there has been no comprehensive history of Vanuatu published, but the 1980 volume represents a start.
a much longer occupation of the land in question. The small areas of land previously
alienated by traders and missionaries seemed a temporary occupation in comparison (Jolly

From the mid-nineteenth century land disputes between ni-Vanuatu and Europeans were
frequent and land transactions were often understood in different cultural terms by both
parties. The Joint Naval Commission was also not able to mediate in land disputes at all
(Morell 1960:204). In addition to this, although the British government registered land
claims, it did not confer land titles. Despite the appointment of a British Deputy
Commissioner in 1902, and a French Deputy Commissioner the following year, these
problems continued and led to a joint conference held in London in 1905 resulting in the
Convention of 1906. The Convention declared the islands an area of joint influence:
neither Britain nor France had sovereignty and two Commissioners were to be resident in
the New Hebrides representing the national administrations of each. A Joint Court was to
be set up and under this system settlers were tried by either the French or the British,
effectively meaning that neither had authority or jurisdiction over the others nationals.
Islanders were not included in this agreement and were effectively non-citizens under the
terms of the Convention. The Joint Court consisted of a British judge, a French judge and
a Spanish President. The Joint Court set by the Anglo-French Convention of 1906 was to
register land claims. This represented a substantial change from the earlier British refusal
to recognise title.

The land alienation experienced in Vanuatu was on the highest levels of any country in the
Pacific. In 1905, it was estimated that SFNH alone claimed over 55% of all land in the
archipelago (Rodman 1995: 65). Under the terms of the 1906 Convention, no land deed
filed before 1886 (in either Suva or Nouméa) was to be registered. In fact, the Joint Court did not register any land titles until twenty three years had passed; in 1929 it passed its first ruling. At this time there were approximately nine hundred applications waiting processing (Rodman 1995:75). Between 1906 and 1910 the number of French settlers increased, while English settlers remained constant. In 1910 there were 566 French citizens compared to 288 British, and in 1939 the French settlers outnumbered the British by ten to one (MacClancy 1980:86). The majority of French settlers lived on Efate, Epi, Ambrym, Malakula, Santo and Pentecost, while the English settlers were concentrated in the Shepherds, Paama and the Banks Islands.

A second Conference in 1914 modified the Joint Court agreement and increased the administrative presence of the Condominium throughout the islands with the appointment of more Condominium Agents. A lack of unity and co-operation between the two colonial powers can be seen throughout the history of the New Hebrides (Miles 1998; Molisa et al. 1982). The administration was funded by income taxes and import duties, and as a result, had very low revenue. Any decisions made had to be agreed with by the opposite Resident Commissioner and lack of adequate translators meant this was a long process beset with misunderstandings. The administration, centred in Port Vila, effectively left education and hospitals to be provided by the missions. The impact of the Condominium upon islanders varied throughout the group. There were only four Condominium Agents (later renamed District Agents), originally appointed (two French, two English). These agents were based outside Efate and made area tours. Condominium Agents acted as Presidents of Native Courts which were made up of Assessors, men from local villages.

The low level presence of the administration extended to governing land relations:
"The structure of the Condominium kept islanders' affairs largely separate from the formalities of government and involvement with the state, and until mid-century [nineteenth] this separation applied to land in many parts of the colony." (Rodman 1995:79).

Tongoa's experience of the advent of white outsiders differs in comparison to the rest of the archipelago. Although the largest in the Shepherds Group, Tongoa is considerably smaller than the larger islands (Santo, Efate and Malakula for example) which attracted the attention of planters. Because of its small size, no large foreign owned plantations were established. Despite its size however, Tongoa had a relatively high population, and was a target for traders. In fact, early in the twentieth century, Tongoa had too many traders for any of them to make substantial profits (MacClancy 1980:80). Additionally, many of the archipelago's islands experienced devastating depopulation in the nineteenth century (Spriggs 1997). Tongoa, along with the other Shepherd Islands and Paama Island to the north, experienced a population increase. In 1879, Michelsen estimates the population of Tongoa to be 1,150 (cited in Miller 1987:270). In 1881, he amends this to 1,000 in a church report (the dip in numbers was attributed by Michelsen to the labour trade ibid:273), and in 1886 the figure has climbed to 1,200-1,300. Contemporary population figures for Tongoa stand at 2,501, a figure that does not include the considerable number of Tongoans now living elsewhere (Republic of Vanuatu 1991:66).

The impact of the colonial administration upon the regulation of land in Vanuatu differed fundamentally from the experience of other Pacific nations. Unlike other areas such as Samoa and Tonga, the archipelago of Vanuatu had more variation in the principles and practices governing land tenure. The Condominium did not act to substantially codify these principles and impose a universal land policy (Lane 1971; Sope 1974). In other colonies such as Fiji, the colonial government pursued an active programme of codification
of land tenure and chiefly ranks (Jolly 1992; Philibert 1986:11). This resulted in a conflation of chiefs' position and notions of tradition: *Vakaviti* and *Vakavanua* ('the Fijian way', 'the way of the land') become synonymous with the way of the chiefs (Jolly 1992:336). Nevertheless, in Vanuatu, the Condominium and now the national government, have profoundly affected land relations, and the control Tongoan chiefs' have over land as well as other areas of life. The position of Tongoa chiefs has radically altered during the changes of the last one hundred and fifty years. The sacred *tapu* nature of the chieftainship has diminished and contact between them and others is no longer strictly regulated. Their power to direct the affairs of those within the chiefdom has significantly decreased as other structures and institutions have made an impact. Often, however, these structures, such as the church, the education system, national politics and the job market, are dominated by those men who hold high-ranking chiefly titles. It is within the arena of local land relations that the changing position of chiefs becomes highlighted and efforts are being made to tighten the definition of chiefs as the source of all land. The following section examines the relationship between chiefs and land.

### 3.3 Land Relations and the Title System on Tongoa

The issue of land relations is of the utmost importance on Tongoa today. Pressure on land has heightened issues of who has rights of access and the legitimacy of claims to specific land plots. Tensions coalesce around who has rights to be of that *ples* and thus have rights to land as the case of the *pikinini blong rod* from Nguna in the previous chapter demonstrates. The nature of the title system is central to understanding land relations on Tongoa. The system of titles linked to land tenure in the Shepherd Islands has been described by Guiart as a “model”, a working model which is known by all adult members of

---

3 The reference to 'chiefs' indicates the first and second ranks of title, that of *nawota* and *napau nawota*. Tongoans today refer to both these ranks as *nawota* or *jif* ('chief').
the population. Thus, the information supplied by each of Guiart's one thousand plus informants, fitted into a larger "whole without showing any logical fault" (Guiart n.d:8).

The present discussion takes this idea of a model of title-land relations as a conscious frame of reference. The ways that Tongoa people talk about land relations also has such a conscious model, depicted graphically in figure 3.0:

![Figure 3.0](image)

Model of the Title - Land System

In the introductory chapter I discussed the spatial distribution of the Shepherd Island titles and reviewed the dispersed localised chiefdom within this interconnected system. The following section looks at the localised chiefdom, the ways land tenure is organised through the chiefly titles, and the ways that chiefs control the transmission of land. The principle subject of this discussion is the chiefly title of Tarisaliu, *nawota* of Purau village where fieldwork was carried out. Tarisaliu is most often referred to as the *jif* ('chief': the Bislama translation of *nawota*) in everyday speech, more specifically, he is the *paramaon jif*, head of the chiefdom and the titles within it.
As outlined in chapter 2, the chiefdom (namaraki) is made up of a number of smaller units known as namatana, each headed by a napau nawota (napau: head; nawota: ‘chief’) or smol jif (‘small chief’). Each namatana is individually named, often with reference to a farea (meeting house), or a physical feature associated with its position or history (see table 3.0). ‘Farea’ literally refers to the structure of the meeting house where the napau nawota gathers to eat and drink kava with his followers. Farea also indicates the group which inhabits this place. Namatana refers more specifically to this social entity which is anchored to that place by the communal farea and, in the pre-Christian past, the dancing ground (mwala). The napau nawota form the second rank of title below that of nawota who is at the core of the chiefdom. Kitaku (nataku: ‘the back’) are the third rank of title in the chiefdom. Kitaku are the men behind the napau nawota and are sometimes also referred to as takariki (taka: brothers; riki: small).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Namatana</th>
<th>Headed by</th>
<th>Number of Ranks of Title</th>
<th>Number of Titles Within</th>
<th>Average Number of Residents January 1996-May 1997</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Farea Lapa ('large farea')</td>
<td>Tarisaliu</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Ten</td>
<td>Thirteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farea Kiki ki TiMataso (Small farea of TiMataso - this farea officially comes within Farea Lapa)</td>
<td>TiMataso</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Nineteen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Farea Kiki ki Tapau (Small farea of Tapau - this farea)</td>
<td>Tapau</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Four</td>
<td>Seventeen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Namatana</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matana ni Lag ('Matana of Above')</td>
<td>Manaroto</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Ten/Eleven</td>
<td>Forty Six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malapoa</td>
<td>TiMakura</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Eight</td>
<td>Seven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Likosa</td>
<td>Tisa</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Eight</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanomiala</td>
<td>Taripoaliu</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mwalafakalo (Mwala: dancing ground)</td>
<td>TiNapuaroto</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Eleven</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tanobere</td>
<td>TiTongoa</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Three</td>
<td>Uninhabited</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matana ni Tano ('Matana of Below')</td>
<td>Tapagararua</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Two</td>
<td>Uninhabited</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.0 Purau Namatana

The *namatana* is made up of households headed by agnatically related men and their wives. At the time of fieldwork, there were nine inhabited *namatana* in Purau (see table 3.0). There were several uninhabited *namatana*, however, the head and members of which were absent, living in Port Vila, Luganville or beyond. The composition of *namatana* within the chiefdom shifts over time as their membership rises or falls. The relative size of *namatana*, however, is also a reflection of the size and strength of the title which heads it. Some *namatana* are thus much larger than others because the head title has a greater number of titles 'behind' it. For example, within Purau, the *namatana* "Matananilag" (*matana*: singular of *namatana*; *ni*: of; *lag*: above) is headed by the chiefly title Manaroto and is particularly large due, in part, to the substantial number of *kitaku* Manaroto has behind him.
Particularly large namatana can potentially be further divided into a number of separate namatana. The titles which head these potential namatana, however, are themselves held firmly within the domain of the head title of the namatana that they are part of. For example, Tarisaliu's namatana, ‘Farea Lapa’ (lapa: big) is the largest namatana in Purau, and has within it a number of smaller units that are potentially separate namatana: two ‘Farea Kiki’ (kiki: small), each headed by the titles of Tapau and TiMataso respectively. Both of these titles have customary rights to bestow titles that owe allegiance to them in turn. One other Purau namatana has three series of titles within it, “Farea Tapu” (tapu: forbidden, sacred), headed by Mariwota. As seen in table 3.1, Mariwota has four kitaku, two of which, Manamuri and Sasamaki, have extra-chiefdom relationships of allegiance, and takariki (‘small brothers’) of their own. Importantly, they also owe allegiance directly to Tarisaliu himself as well as to Mariwota, head of Farea Tapu. Whilst these third ranked titles Manamuri and Sasamaki have relationships of allegiance beyond the chiefdom it is more usually the case that only second rank titles (napau nawota) such as Mariwota himself have relationships which cross-cut their identity, rooted in place, as Tarisaliu’s men. This situation of cross-cutting allegiances differs in Nguna, as Facey reports, historically, only nawota title holders were involved in relationships beyond the localised dominion (Facey 1981:299).

3.3 i) The nature of the nawota

The nawota (paramaon jif, ‘paramount chiefs’) of the past are credited with having the power of life and death over every man, woman and child in his realm. Sentences of death

---

4 At the meeting of Shepherd Island Chiefs (Maraki Vanua Riki; see below and chapter 4) in May 1996, the use of the Bislama term paramaon jif was debated. The general mood of the meeting was to use and promote local language and a vernacular term was sought to replace ‘paramaon jif’ in the draft of the Maraki Vanua Riki constitution. The following Nakanamaga terms were suggested: nawota vea (‘first chief’); nawota vaki lagi (‘high chief’); napua ni manu (‘head of many men’). None were decided upon, but these terms indicate the nature of the chief vis-à-vis the men behind him.
issued by the nawota would be carried out by his takuari (warriors). People today talk most definitively about this official power of the nawota and the restrictions surrounding him 'bifo' ('in the past', usually refers to an idea of the pre-Christian, pre-Colonial past). The nawota tapu ('taboo or sacred chief') was not accessible to those of his realm: his person was bound about with restrictions and rites controlling who had contact with him, who ate with him and who drank kava in his farea. He had warriors but he himself never fought. Stone seats and eating utensils associated with the nawota were forbidden to all except himself (Miller n.d.a). Although the person of the nawota appears to have been sacred, to have embodied ritual power, his actual ritual power is less clear cut, and the nature of the chieftainship as a ritual entity is somewhat difficult to decipher. Both pre-colonial and present nawota have various 'retainers,' each with different responsibilities. Two of these retainers are of particular importance: the manufasa (speaker) and the atavi (ritual specialist). In the pre-colonial past, the relationship between the chief and his manufasa (speaker), seems to have been a complex one and it is difficult to say just how power - both ritual and secular - was divided between them.

The atavi continues to be responsible for the spiritual welfare of the chieftdom today, and continues to control the tapu (tabu: 'taboo') dimension of the nawota at ritual moments. Miller reports that the atavi traditionally tasted the nawota's food as a precaution against sorcery and was also responsible for cutting the chief's nakoau (laplap pudding) and opening his naniu (drinking coconuts) (Miller n.d.a). Informants today stress the atavi's role in preparing the chief's kava. Guiart's interpretation of the role of the atavi is that he is the alter ego of the nawota (Guiart 1973:97). The atavi's spiritual expertise continues to be vital today in controlling the tapu aspects of the chieftainship. In contrast, the manufasa

---

5 The restrictions surrounding the person of the nawota are no longer observed although there is a very strong dialogue of proper behaviour and respect that is required in one's dealings with him.
may have been more powerful in the pre-colonial past, when he literally spoke in place of the chief and was an intermediary between him and other people. However, just as in the past, the play of power between chief and speaker was played out in subtle ways surrounding the issue of speech, so it continues today with the holders of all ranks of titles who speak at village meetings and court cases with paramount chiefs. Today, the nawota's retainers no longer strictly control access between ordinary people and the chief, but they do intermediate between him and others, particularly, in the context of inter-chiefdom affairs.

Before the adoption of Christianity, the nawota was polygamous and each of the nawota’s wives had specialist roles such as making mats, gardening, or feeding pigs. Certain wives of the nawota seem to have represented his restricted and tapu status. They physically embodied this status with special tattoos that only the chief could look upon (there are a number of stories about violaters of this dictum who were subsequently punished with death. Tattoos are discussed in chapter 6). Today, the paramount chief has only one wife, and neither she nor other women are part of a formal hierarchy which exists alongside the structure of chiefly titles. As seen in the ethnographic review of Vanuatu, this is not the case for other islands, where women achieve hierarchical status by killing pigs (Bolton 1993; Rodman 1981). On Tongoa women receive formal names at marriage in a manner which parallels the way that men receive their new titles in the navuvusakeana, the ceremony to pass on titles. These names are not overtly structured into a hierarchy however. A key element of both men and women receiving new names/titles is the pronouncement that the smol nem (individual’s name given at birth) is finished, and the new name, Manaroto (chiefly title) or Leilasa (woman’s name) for example, has now taken it’s place. The names that women receive at marriage are referred to as kastom nem.
('names of tradition') and move between related women - a woman will pass her *kastom nem* to her brother's daughter (in other words, the name goes back to her natal *namatana*). These names, however, are not as evident in everyday life as are men's chiefly titles which are also referred to as *kastom nem*. Women are not generally referred to by their *kastom nem*, and in some cases when asked, women had to think hard before remembering the *kastom nem* they were given at their marriage.

The movement of names between sisters and their brothers' offspring parallels an older principle of passing on chiefly titles from holder to sister's son (Luders, personal communication). Facey also reports that for early nineteenth century Nguna, the title of *nawota* was transmitted matrilineally, from mother's brother to sister's son (Facey 1981:299). According to Guiart, the Shepherd Island titles are not hereditary at all, but elective, filled by a man whom others in the *farea* have chosen (1973). Contemporary informants on Tongoa, however, insist that titles are inherited by the holder's son, and should ideally pass to the eldest son. Michelsen records in the late nineteenth century that chieftainship on Tongoa was hereditary, passing from holder to eldest son (Michelsen 1892:138). Michelsen goes on to say that if the chief should die before this son has reached maturity, the chief's brother assumes authority, but only with the consent of others within the chieftainship (ibid.). Other instances of passing on titles do occur, however, such as when a man is adopted into a *namatana* in order to fill one of it's vacant titles. The position of the *nawota* itself though is the subject of discussion. High ranking title holders in Purau today claim that they have a crucial role in deciding the successor to this particular title. The candidate can only be selected from a particular group. The defining characteristic of this group is 'shared blood' transmitted in the patriline. Although in

---

6 Guiart states that there are striking parallels between the matai system of Samoa and the titles of central Vanuatu (Guiart n.d).
theory, a nawota can be deposed and replaced, in practice this is unlikely. The reason
given for this is that the nawota kills so many pigs (100 or more) when he assumes the title;
if deposed, the same number of pigs would have to be killed and returned in the stead of
the original ones. It is thus acknowledged to be almost impossible to replace the nawota
once installed.

There is a very real emphasis placed on patrilineal inheritance of title and land today. It is
possible to link this to greater pressure on land resources and a consequent desire to hold
control over plots of land more tightly within the namatana as a corporate land holding
group. The patrilineal namatana structures individual members’ access to land and the
emphasis on patrilineal transmission of land rights thus makes sense. Practices such as
ceding rights over certain fana to accompany a woman at marriage now occur less often
because of pressure on land. Although use rights over such fana may have been granted,
their origin is not forgotten, and members of the original namatana still speak of the fana
as belonging to them. Most such cases of fana rights ceded with marriage in Purau
occurred two or three generations ago.

3.4 The History of Tarisaliu’s Title
The title of Tarisaliu has an oral history which is known to some extent by most adults.
The specialist knowledge of the detailed history is known by fewer people. The title of
Tarisaliu originates in Efate Island and its kastom history is entangled with the migration of
the chiefs to Tongoa. This is a summarised version of the history as it was told to me:

There were three brothers who lived in a very large farea called ‘Aloara’ (rainbow) in Manura, Efate Island. Two of the brothers were twins: Tarisaliu, the eldest, and TiNapua the younger. Their ‘small names’ were Tivivi and Tiruru respectively.
The third brother was Marakipuelemata. Their father's name was TiFate, this is the name TiNapua in the language of Efate.

One end of the *farea* was facing where the sun rises. This was Tarisaliu's end. The other end of the *farea* faced where the sun went down. This was TiNapua's place. In the middle of the *farea* was Marakipuelemata's place. Tarisaliu planted a banana tree named 'Tagi Matakesa' outside the *farea* at his end of the building. TiNapua also planted a banana tree at his end of the *farea*, this tree was called 'Namasori Aloara'. Marakipuelemata planted a banana tree in the middle of the *farea*, by the door. This banana tree was called 'Namatamata'. Another man, whose chiefly title was Marakitapu, brought the three brothers to the taboo water of Manura where the conferring of titles took place. Marakitapu told TiNapua: "*yu stap olsem rod, yu go fastaem*" ('you are like the road, you go ahead first'; *napua*: road). Then he said to Marakipuelemata: "*yu korem, lidim ol man i go*" ('you direct and lead men'). He then said to Tarisaliu: "*yu hae, vu antap long tufala*" ('you are above the other two'; *liu*: above/high).

The three brothers and Marakitapu then walked until they reached Tasiriki (Vila bay). TiNapua and Tarisaliu stayed at Tasiriki, while Marakipuelemata went on to Tasilapa (Pango) (*tasi*: sea; *lapa*: large; *riki*: small). Marakipuelemata then began fighting and he killed all of TiNapua and Tarisaliu's men until only one old man called Tifelis and his wife Leilasa were left at Tasiriki. Tifelis told his wife to go get a particular wood (*nalua*, a species of black palm). When she returned with it, Tifelis fastened it to a *tabu sam ting* ('forbidden thing', *sam ting* is also a euphemism for genitals) and Leilasa gave birth to a son called Niatika. Tifelis made a bow and arrow for Niatika to shoot fish. He told him that he must only fish at Tasiriki and not go to Tasilapa. One day Niatika was fishing at Tasilapa and some *naviti* (servant/slave) challenged him. Niatika got away though and with Tifelis and Leilasa went to Tibenu⁷ (Devil's point). They then went onto Tukutuku. There they encountered the two 'captains' (*kapten*) of a canoe called 'Titinaure'. These two men were called Titirei and Taritalau and were twins. Titirei meaning TiNapua and Taritalau meaning Tarisaliu. Taritalau was at the front of the canoe and Titirei

⁷ Note that *tibenu* also refers to the central seam of the pandanus mat (see chapter 6).
at the rear. At one point in the journey, Taritalau turned his head to tell his brother behind him, “this place is called Mangalilieu”. This was at a place called Nagnisu natai (nagnisu: point; natai: shit).

There is a big cave in Leleppa Island where they slept. Tifelis died at Leleppa and they buried him at Retoka Island. Afterwards they went to Tongoa in the canoe Titinaure (Titinaure karem olgeta: ‘Titinaure carried them’), and they came ashore at Miniwora (wora: pasis, passage, landing or anchorage) at Ravenga village. One man was there already, this was Mariwota of Siwo, Woitas. Mariwota was carrying a namele leaf (cycad, ‘cycas circinnalis’, this leaf is a sign of peace in central and northern islands of Vanuatu) held up in welcome, and they pulled the canoe ashore on the rago (wood placed to roll the canoe ashore). Mariwota put Tarisaliu and TiNapua at Suma ni Maramana (suma: house; ni: of; maramana: world), a very large farea (nakama, stesen) and they stayed here. Mariwota was the first man with TiMakura of Malapoa namatana to find land. Mariwota said that he had found good land.

Also at Suma ni Maramana was Manaroto of Matananilag namatana who had come to Tongoa on the canoe of Chief TiTongoaroto of BongaBonga village. Manaroto gave nasautonga (a pig) to Tarisaliu. After this, Masamori came to Tongoa from Emae Island. Tarisaliu killed the pig the Manaroto had given him and put it at the ‘door’ of Masamori - this kastom is called wago ni rago (‘the pig of the landing wood’). Manaroto was cross at this and with his kitaku (ol man we oli stap biaen long jif, the men who are ‘at the chief’s back’), Masoirangi, TiMakura and Manamuri, left Suma ni Maramana and went towards Purau. Mariwota went with them but told Tarisaliu this and arranged to leave a trail of feathers for Tarisaliu to follow. When Tarisaliu caught up with them, the others then made him Tarisaliu. This is how Tivivi became Tarisaliu. They all came to Farea ni Tafa (tafa: hill) and saw the fire of Malapoa namatana, mo oli stap kasem tede (and they are still here today). (Story told by Joseph Marakitapu 23/9/96 in Bislama, translated by S.Kelly.)
This narrative reflects to some extent the common history of all the titles on Tongoa. The principle factor in this common history is the resettlement of Tongoa approximately twenty generations ago, following the Kuwae explosion (see section 1.4ii). The chiefs’ passage between the islands, the canoes they travelled in, the men accompanying them and the location they came ashore on Tongoa, all structure the chiefly relationships on Tongoa in the present. The narratives also depict the original distribution of land on Tongoa and in addition frame explanations of land tenure on the island today.

The order in which certain chiefs arrived on Tongoa and the relative precedence given to the titles alters with who is re-telling the tale. For example, the kastom histri of the title TiNapuamata, nawota of Lubukuti on Tongoa, tells different versions of the same events in the above narrative which is told from the point of view of Tarisaliu. In TiNapuamata’s account, Nyetika goes on to become Mwasoemaramanu who journeys to Tongoa and subsequently fathers the twin boys who go on to become TiNapuamata and Tarisaliu. The versions place different emphases on the relationships between Tarisaliu, TiNapuamata and Marakipuelemata, but the important twinning of TiNapuamata and Tarisaliu appears in both. In the Namakuran tradition, twinning also occurs, but the ancestral brothers are TiTongoaroto and TiTongoamata of BongaBonga and Mangarisu villages respectively (Tessier n.d).

Despite the different emphases placed upon order of arrival and eminance, all the kastom histories have in common the chiefs’ division of Tongoa into chiefly territories, natokoana. (‘his place’; toko: place). This is the land marked out by Mariwota and TiMakura in Tarisaliu’s history. Tarisaliu’s natokoana is located on the northern portion of Tongoa and is bordered by the village of Kurumabe, headed by Taripoamata on the west, and the
villages of Selembanga, headed by TiPoloamata and Usamoli on the east. The location of Tarisaliu’s *natokoana* on Tongoa mirrors the position of his place in the original *farea Alowara* on Efate, at the place where the sun rises. The *natokoana* of Marakipuelemata in the centre of the island, also reflects his original place in the centre of the *farea Alowara*, while TiNapua’s place, the village of Lubukuti, is in the west, where the sun goes down.

The chiefdom is firmly associated with a particular territory but is not, however, constituted of territorially bounded land but of the titles behind the *nawota*. The men who fill these titles are the *nakainaga* (supporters) of the *nawota* and receive title and land from him. Tarisaliu’s *namarakiana*, or chiefdom, is constituted of fifteen *nakainaga* within Purau and twenty six from beyond (see table 3.1). The word *namarakiana* (‘his men’; *maraki*: man) indicates the nature of the chieftainship as made up of its titles and the support (material wealth and physical labour) the chief expects from them. The translation of *namarakiana* fits in with one chief’s comment that a *nawota* does not have land, he has men. These men, the *nakainaga*, form the distributed chieftainship:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nakainaga - those who owe</th>
<th>Belonging to</th>
<th>Origin of Title</th>
<th>Also owes allegiance to:</th>
<th>Receives allegiance from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tarisaliu material allegiance</td>
<td>Namatana</td>
<td>Malapoa</td>
<td>Malapoa</td>
<td>Malapoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiMakura</td>
<td>Malapoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>MarakiPuelemata of Pele, Tongoa</td>
<td>Tabagasaruru</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiVitini</td>
<td>Malapoa</td>
<td>Emae</td>
<td>MarakiPuelemata of Pele, Tongoa</td>
<td>Tabagakorikori</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mauwa</td>
<td>Malapoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiMakura, head of Malapoa</td>
<td>TiMataso Marakitete Mauwa Marakitete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tisa</td>
<td>Likosa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>No-one apart from Tarisaliu</td>
<td>No-one</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapagararua</td>
<td>Matana ni tano</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>No-one apart from MasoeNapau</td>
<td>TiMataso</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

8 Tessier (n.d) gives ‘subject’ as the translation of *nakainaga*.

9 These *nakainaga* were listed to me by a man from Farea Tapu. The number is consistent with the average *nakainaga* of other chiefdoms of Tongoa (Guiart 1973; Tessier n.d), but I am not assuming that the list given here is necessarily exhaustive.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Village</th>
<th>Island</th>
<th>FROM</th>
<th>NO-ONE APART FROM</th>
<th>Taro Title/Island</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Manaroto</td>
<td>Matana ni lag</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Taripoamata of Woraviu, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. TiTongoaroto of BongaBonga, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Usamoli of Matangi, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TiTongoa</td>
<td>Tanobere</td>
<td>Mangarisu, Tongoa</td>
<td>TiTongoamata of Mangarisu, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TiMakura</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tarisogosila</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masoerangi</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tapauroto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manamuri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Ataviroto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TiMatalo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tarisogoro</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tokai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Taro-arerei</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masoepati</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TiMatalo</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Atavi Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>TiNapaukoto</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tapagatoroa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taisimawi</td>
<td>Farea Tapu</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td>No-one apart from Taro Title/Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manamuri</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tarisogonearu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Manutavivii</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sasamaki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Matapu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapau</td>
<td>Farea Kiki ki Tapau</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td>No-one apart from Taro Title/Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tiro-puali</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kori</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Faratia</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Usamoli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tisa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Tuko</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Nalai</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No-one</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Usamoli</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Masaimanu</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sasamaki</td>
<td>Farea Tapu</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td>1. Marakipuelingata of Pele, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Sasamaki of Tongariki</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**From beyond Purau**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nakainaga - those who owe Tarisaliu material allegiance</th>
<th>Belonging to namatana, village/island</th>
<th>Origin of Title</th>
<th>Also owes allegiance to:</th>
<th>Receives allegiance from:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pueleliu</td>
<td>Lutaviamanu farea, Kurumabe, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>1. Taripoamata of Kurumabe, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku 'behind' him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

144
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tipoloa</th>
<th>Buatama farea of Matangi, Tongoa</th>
<th>Efate</th>
<th>mata of Pele, Tongoa Usamoli of Matangi, Tongoa</th>
<th>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TiNapua</td>
<td>Malakoto farea, Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>1. TiNapuamata of Lubukuti, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Tipoloamata of Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Napau ni manu</td>
<td>Marau farea, Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiPoloamata of Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masoenua</td>
<td>Tovea farea, Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiPoloamata of Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taripoamata</td>
<td>Malanaruru, Farea Lapa, Lubukuti,</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiNapuamata of Lubukuti, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lubukuti, Itakoma, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lagoa</td>
<td>Mwalafakalo farea, Lubukuti, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiNapuamata of Lubukuti, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atavi Rualima</td>
<td>Woitas, Emae Island</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>1. TiNapuamata of Lubukuti, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2. Masamuri of Emae Island</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3. Malesu of Ravenga, Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atavi Nawota</td>
<td>Urata farea, Pele, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>Marakipuelemata of Pele, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maripopogi</td>
<td>Katamanilagi farea of Matangi,</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiMataso of Matangi, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Tongoa</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usamoli Saisailapa</td>
<td>Naroto farea, Mangarisu, Tongoa</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>TiTongoamata of Matangi, Tongoa</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faratia Lapa</td>
<td>Taulia, South Epi Island</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>No-one apart from Tarisaliu</td>
<td>Has nakainaga in Emna, Buninga, Tongariki and Tongoa</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Masoeragi</td>
<td>Makura Island</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapau</td>
<td>Sasake, Emae Island</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td>Faratia of Sasake, Emae Island</td>
<td>Kitaku ‘behind’ him</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manarewo</td>
<td>Eragorago, Efate Island</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nunu naperiki mala</td>
<td>Malapoa, Efate Island</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matokopea</td>
<td>Eragorago, Efate Island</td>
<td>Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tapagamanu</td>
<td>Mele Island, Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usamoli</td>
<td>Mele Island, Efate</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

145
The giving of land is the linchpin of chief - *nakainaga* relations. The principles of land ownership and distribution today on Tongoa rests upon the original allocation of land by the high chiefs who first came to Tongoa with the men that they then gave land to. The ways that land is transferred from generation to generation was explained to me as being very simple and this primarily reflects the ideology of original land allocation. In accordance with this, all the land on Tongoa is divided into owned and named plots called *fanaua*. Rights over these *fanaua* are held by the title holder who receives both title and land from the title holder who bestows his title. When a man receives a title, he assumes both the name and rights over the *fanaua* that accompany this name. These *fanaua* are not necessarily located in one area, but are scattered through the area covered by the chiefdom, and if the title is sufficiently elevated, can be distributed in different chiefdoms, and even beyond the island itself. The title and the land are inseparable and indissoluble, and are within the remit of the title giver to pass on. An example explicates this: Manaroto is the *napau nawota* (head chief) of Matananilag *namatana* and receives his title from Tarisaliu, the *nawota* of the chieftainship of Purau. Manaroto is thus a *nakainaga* of Tarisaliu and
owes allegiance to him. Manaroto in turn has the customary right to bestow titles on the men of Matananilag namatana who are his kitaku, the men ‘behind’ him. The present Manaroto inherited the title from his father and told me that he will pass the title and its land to his son (ideally his firstborn son). He will not do this alone however. Because the title of Manaroto is within the customary remit of Tarisaliu, both Tarisaliu and the incumbent will bestow the title of Manaroto on the new holder. This ceremony (navuvusakeana) effects a transfer of spiritual power and possessions, especially land, from one man to another. The navuvusakeana is a ritual transferral of the immortal title from one mortal man to another and the presence of mats is a crucial element of this transferral (see chapter 7).

All the titles currently extant on Tongoa either owe or are owed material allegiance (nasautonga). The payment of nasautonga is structurally linked to land, as a title holder must make this payment to the title holder who granted him title and land. There are a number of reasons why a title holder owes allegiance other titles. These can be summarised as usually one of four reasons: receiving land from him, coming to Tongoa in the canoe of that title holder, that the two titles have a common history (the two knew each other in Efate, on the journey, or on arrival at Tongoa). A final reason nasautonga is paid is if one’s ancestor (i.e. a previous holder of one’s title) commits adultery with the wife of a chief. The primary reason for making nasautonga to the nawota within one’s local chieftainship is to do with that nawota’s journey to Tongoa and his original distribution of land. Many or most of the cases of Purau men owing nasautonga to chiefs of other villages on Tongoa today is based on the original passage between Efate and Tongoa; these men owe nasautonga because the ancestors who held their titles came to Tongoa in the canoe of this chief’s ancestor. Nasautonga for this is characterised as kastom payment for this
passage, and is contrasted to the payment one makes today on a ship where one makes a single payment and the matter/relationship is finished. Not so with kastom where one continues to pay the original passage every time one makes nasautonga. This is not just a matter of kastom, but also honour and respect (ona mo respek). Dialogues of kastom are considered further in the next chapter.

3.5 Chiefs’ Control over Land Transmission

“Lif i holem man taet long nasautonga” - ‘The chief controls men with nasautonga’ (Joseph Marakitapu 25/3/97)

The payment of nasautonga illustrates how land and title dovetail in the chieftainship system. As seen above, nasautonga is owed to the title holder who has the right to bestow one’s title and land, and has been characterised as a “custom exchange to acknowledge allegiance” (Tessier n.d:27). Nasautonga was explained to me as a payment made in direct response to receiving land. Nasautonga is a payment of a pig which should be paid once a year. No payments of nasautonga were made during the eighteen months of fieldwork however. As I did not witness a payment of nasautonga, I have only a description of the way that a nakainaga gives nasautonga.

Nasautonga is made in the following way: the nakainaga approaches the chief’s (napau nawota or nawota) farea holding a stick of stik tabak (tobacco) with a nakarie (nanggaria, ‘cordyline terminalis’) leaf tied to it. This represents the pig that the nakainaga is giving to the chief. The pig itself remains with the nakainaga and is fed by him until the chief has reason to kill it. The nakarie leaf is deposited in the rafters of the chief’s farea and is left there until it disintegrates. In return for the nasautonga paid to the nawota, the nakainaga receives a return exchange. Described variously as a cooked pig or a live piglet with
cooked food, this is given with a mat and a small amount of money (3-500 vatu; US$3-5.00). The piglet is called natug ni mova (natug: grandchild). In either case, this return is made in the name of the chief, but is actually contributed by his takariki (small brothers) who are the men of the chief’s namatana.

An essential principle of the three series of titles, nawota - napau nawota - kitaku is that while allegiance (and wealth such as pigs) flow inwards towards the nawota, this flow only occurs though the position of the napau nawota. That is, the kitaku who collectively make up the body of the namatana (just as the napau nawota collectively make up the body of the chiefdom) do not, and cannot directly approach the nawota. The pig that the kitaku gives to the napau nawota is described as ultimately destined for the nawota, but this third rank of title cannot give the pig to the nawota because his relationship is with the napau nawota who bestows his title.

3.5i) Pigs and Mats

Both pigs and mats feature in the exchanges that title-holders make with one another. Whilst mats never accompany the nasautonga payment (only in the return), in certain exchanges, mats can represent pigs: “Pig mo mat, tufala i sam mak” (‘Pigs and mats, they are the same’ Marakitapu 19/5/97). The mats that Marakitapu is referring to in this statement are not single mats, however, but nakakafu bundles of 4-5 mats wrapped in coconut leaf mats (katafau). The following exchange illustrates the ways that nakakafu can stand for pigs. In May 1996 a Tongoa paramount chief, TiTongoamata went to Makura Island and made a prestation of a pig, yams and a nakakafu to his nakainaga Masoerangi. TiTongoamata did this because the visit (for the Maraki Vanua Riki) was the first time he had come to Makura since becoming TiTongoamata. This prestation was a
recognition on the part of TiTongoamata of the relationship with his Makura nakainaga. According to informants the nakakafu represented pigs that TiTongoamata could not bring because of lack of space on the inter-island vessel. In this instance mats are a feature of chiefly relations and can refer to pigs. This extends to other situations when people present nakakafu: "oli no karem pig, be nakakafu i min pig...wan pig" ("they don’t bring a pig, but one nakakafu means one pig’ Willy David 21/5/97).

In the Makura case the pig and mats were shared out by TiTongoamata’s nakainaga. In return, he was given 2 nakakafu (i.e. 10 mats) and 2 or 3 pigs. When people give nakakafu (at a marriage payment, or from one chief to another) it is spoken of as showing respect and is a presentation that affords a suitably weighty return. In the return exchange at a marriage, for example, a full leg of pig is given just as it would be if a pig had been initially presented: "Nakakafu hemi strong samting, sapos wan i faldaon, i minim se bambaewan pig i ded, ia!" (‘Nakakafu are important things, if one is given, it means a pig has to be killed!’ Marakitapu 21/5/97). This case illustrates that the different forms mats are given in profoundly affects their meaning. Another example of this capacity of mats appears in the kastom histri of the relationship TiMatasomata of Meriu village, Tongoa has with Makura Island. Due to misdemeanours on the part of Masoi, a chief of Makura, that led to the deaths of many Meriu men, Masoi made a payment to TiMatasomata. This payment was presented on Makura and consisted of a pig with accompanying food (sugarcane, manioc) and kava. On top of this, however, Masoi placed a halved coconut shell filled with earth. He then took some leaves of wild cane and placed those on top. Finally, he placed a mat over everything. TiMatasomata’s atavi (ritual specialist) then asked Masoi what these things meant. Masoi’s reply indicates that mats can mean different things in different contexts: while the coconut shell represented the island of Makura, the
wild cane leaves represented everything that grows on the island, the mat placed on top referred to all the men, women and children of present and future generations. This idea is picked up in chapter 6 which examines the mat as a material metaphor of people and place. Whilst mats given singly in the navuvusakeana refer to fanua (land plots) and land relations (see chapter 7), when given in the form of nakakafu at marriages, and as an expression of inter-island nawota-nakainaga relations, mats have the capacity to encompass other meanings. Directly symbolising pigs, mats in nakakafu bundles represent and enable inter-island chiefly relations. In this sense, mats and pigs allow the chieftainship to be effective regionally as well as locally.

3.5ii) Other Payments Made in Relation to Land.

Whilst the marital/sexual relationship creates the garden, it is the relationship between land owner and land user that prefixes the fact of the garden on a particular fanua. Villagers state today that one should only make a garden within one’s own namatana. Whilst most of a couple’s gardens are made within the land of the man’s namatana, it is by no means uncommon for gardens to be made on the land of the woman’s natal namatana (especially if she is from the same village), or on the land of other namatana where one has an ancestral link. Informants also state however, that prior to the increased pressure on land, the ‘rule’ that one only makes a garden on a fanua within one’s own namatana was strictly maintained. The contemporary situation reflects a greater pressure on land resources due to higher population density. Guiart’s survey of the Shepherd Islands reports a high incidence of land ‘lending’. This, he claims, allows for the inequalities in land tenure, although Guiart does not state whether this is between titles or namatana (Guiart 1973:171). In addition, such land ‘lending’ means that a proportion of one’s own land can be allowed to remain fallow (ibid.).
The practice of making a garden on the land of another titleholder is widespread. One’s main access to land is within one’s own namatana where one has the right through membership to claim land to make a garden. In practice certain garden land within the namatana is associated with certain families (or people who form a gardening unit) because the overlapping lifecycles of the gardens made by one family in a certain fanua can last a long time. There is also a tradition of land being associated with, and in some ways, belonging to the person who cleared it. A garden is a thing which is made out of nothing in a sense: it is a product of work and a transformation of the land upon which it is created. As noted for elsewhere in the Pacific: “(t)he principle of personal labour creating individual rights obviously applies here.” (Serpenti 1965: 116 quoted in Ward and Kingdon 1995: 43).

The conceptual separation of the garden and the land on which it is made can be seen in the disjuncture between the different payments made in relation to land. Vakasokoro was variously described to me as a type of rent (ren) and was also characterised as ‘first fruits’. The vakasokoro is a payment of an especially large yam or hand of banana which is given to the landowner of the fanua that you have made a garden on. Continuing to pay the vakasokoro is a statement of knowledge that you are not the land owner of that particular fanua. The only case of vakasokoro that I saw made during fieldwork however, was from a woman who had made a garden on the land of another namatana. She was not given anything in return, but according to descriptions of tru kastom (‘real tradition’), the garden maker should receive a mat from the land holder in return for the vakasokoro payment. This principle is expressed in the idiom that they should not go away with an empty basket. Vakasokoro is made specifically in relation to the garden and it’s products (indeed, the vakasokoro consists of produce from the garden).
As seen in the previous section, nasautonga is the payment of a pig, and is directly related to the receiving of rights over land from the chief who bestows one’s title. If vakasokoro is characterised as rent, then in distinction to this, nasautonga is characterised as a type of leasing of land (lis, lisim graon). Another payment made in relation to land use is that characterised as ‘e lua kali’ (hemi karemaito kali, ‘s/he ‘carries out’/compensates the digging stick’). This payment is made by the landowner to a person who has planted coconut palms on the land they ‘rented’. It is usually made when the coconuts reach maturity and underlines the separation of the garden maker from the land, and the association of land with land owner. The e lua kali payment consists of a pig and accompanying foodstuffs, mats, and a small amount of money. A similar payment is characterised as ‘e meri pori naulu’ (hemi mekem ekspens i go bak: ‘s/he compensates the input into the land’). This payment is made when a landowner is compensating a person that they have previously granted land use rights to. Such persons may have made more formal prestations to the landowner as the use rights being granted are longer than a garden cycle. Such prestations are spoken of as ‘e meri pratiginia natano’ (hemi mekem gudfala tingting long graon; ‘s/he makes a promise over that land’). The prestation is a substantial one: a pig with accompanying foodstuffs, kava, mats and around 2,000 vatu (US$20.00).

In the negotiations of everyday life it is the namatana rather than the chieftainship that is most relevant to individuals’ access to land. The namatana is the primary unit of social organisation and it is within this unit that any untitled men (who are still kitaku of the napau nawota) and women (through marriage) seek access to garden land. For men, the

---

10 The verb pori means to turn something back upon itself, e.g. a poria nakau: I bend the stick over.
indissoluble link between land and title means that very often, men of one namatana will have been adopted by another namatana to hold a title. This evens out a situation where one namatana has more titles than men to fill them and another namatana has a reverse situation. Such title holders do not necessarily go and live in their adoptive namatana. It is evidently possible to maintain ties of residence in one namatana but formally be a member of another. Such a situation, however, is spoken of as a man being ‘pulled’ in two different directions. This mirrors the situation on an island-wide scale with a title holder being pulled between allegiance to different nawota (Bonnemaison 1984). Most men within a namatana have a title, will hold one at some point in the future, or have held a title that they have passed on. All have access to garden land on the basis of their membership of the namatana, and their relationship to its head. One cannot be a title holder without land, and conversely one cannot be a land owner without a title; if one does not carry a title, one is said to be eating off the land of another: “hemi kakae long graon blong nara man.” (‘He eats from the land of another man’ Jack Solomon 7/10/96). Men occasionally informally assume the title that will be theirs but which they have not yet received formally. The timing of the formal name-taking rests upon the timing of the ceremony to install a new nawota (navuvusakeana). When a new nawota assumes the title, all his retainers and napau nawota also receive theirs. What this means in effect is that the transfer of land in the chiefdom (tied to the titles) only occurs once every generation.

The overall doctrine that all land comes from the chief is at odds with the assertions that men on the second and third ranks of title holders make today: that the land was ‘shared out’ long ago in the divisions following the original land claims and is now theirs. This is particularly true of the napau nawota (head, small chief) of the namatana. The most often repeated statement of land ownership is that land is associated with a namatana and the

154
namatana is the ‘owner’. The identity of the namatana as a land holding unit emerges clearly during enquires about who a particular fanua belongs to, and the answer is invariably that it belongs to such and such namatana. This does not mean that individual fanua are not associated with particular people or families, but that the napau nawota, head of the namatana, is spoken of as the ‘ultimate ‘owner’. In the case of these individual plots, people (untitled kitaku and occasionally women) sometimes refer to themselves as the ‘landowner’. When questioned further, however, such people acknowledge that they are in a contractual relationship with the title-holder who holds the rights to these fanua (land plot). Such contractual relationships include the obligation to make vakasokoro.

The statement ‘the chief owns all the land’ reflects that the nawota is the symbolic source of land. Simultaneous statements are also made that the napau nawota and other title holders ‘own the land’. Although the second and third ranks of title holder are sometimes spoken of as owning land, they receive both title and land indisputably from the title holder who has the customary right to bestow their title. In any case, the concept of ownership is the idiom through which land holders express the relationship they have over land. Rodman notes for Longanan land tenure in Ambae that Longanans claim that land is individually rather than collectively held. A landholder, Rodman argues however, is that person (most often a man) who is the “pre-eminent right holder for the time being...a person who controls other people’s access to a piece of land.”(Rodman 1995:87). A landholder thus has the right to “allocate its use or to dispose of it” (ibid.: 89). Replying that the chief is the owner to the ethnographer’s queries about individual fanua is the easiest, least contentious, answer to give. In reality, the ‘ownership’ of that specific fanua may be contested. The history of ownership of many fanua, especially along the borders between villages, are the subject of intense dispute and land boundaries between villages
are the main source of contemporary inter-chiefdom/village disputes. Land disputes centre around the history of particular *fanua* and arguments over whether the garden maker currently associated with it holds it in their own name or in the name of another.

3.5iii) Men and Women’s Access to Land

Men and women’s access to land occurs very differently. Men’s access to land primarily occurs through the taking of a title, while women’s access to land occurs primarily through marriage. Consequently, perceptions, relations and engagement with land, is strongly gendered. Mats are a crucial element within Tongoan men and women’s negotiation of land access. As chapters 6 and 7 explore, neither the transmission of chiefly title and land, nor the rites of marriage can take place without the ceremonial presence and exchange of mats. Thus, the relationships through which men achieve access to land are mediated through the exchange of mats, as are the relationships of marriage that women primarily gain access through. In the creation of the reproductive space of the garden, and in the wider arena of social reproduction as a whole, mats would appear to join the necessary principles of male and female.¹¹ As seen above, pandanus is one of the few items planted on the *fanua* of another that remains the property of the planter, and is always associated with a woman. Other items, most particularly coconuts, are fixed to the land plot and are the property of the land owner not the planter (see plate 3.1). Pandanus, however, remains associated with the woman who planted it, and is thus not fixed to the (male) *fanua*, but is mobile, as are women who become mobile upon marriage and move between *namatana*.

When boys are between 8-13 years they are circumcised; this is the rite that makes men and states their future connection to land. The ceremony takes place in uncultivated land some

---

¹¹ And on an empirical level, mats are necessary for human sexual reproduction, as mats are both bed and mattress.
Plate 3.1
Coconuts remain fixed to the *fanua*: newly cleared *fanua* in preparation for planting
distance from the centre of the village. The act itself is carried out with the boy sitting on a
glarge stone that is placed directly upon the ground. The boy is cut with a sharpened
wooden knife (*nasosoava mavisina*). When all the boys are circumcised, this knife is
embedded point down in the ground, and the stone is placed on top. The stone is now
described as *tapu*, and is left, acting as a marker of *plex*, of the boy’s combined social and
geographical identities. This act of embedding the knife directly connects the
transformation of boy into man with the entity of land. It mirrors another part of the
ceremony: when the newly circumcised boys take arrows and spear a large tree,
symbolically miming future sexual union with a woman. To be male is to be connected to
land very differently from women. Men’s identities as title-holder and land-holder mediates
their engagement with land, just as women’s identities as pandanus growers and mat-
makers mediates their engagement with land.

3.6 Changing Patterns of Land Use

Almost by definition, land tenure patterns are not static. Changes occur as the result of
shifts in cropping patterns, labour need and availability and overall land accessibility.
Introduced crops may induce such change: for example, the adoption of sweet potato had a
well documented widespread effect throughout the highlands of Papua New Guinea.
Centuries later, cassava (*manihot spp.*) a fast-growing, high return crop with low labour
and fertility requirements, has wrought huge changes throughout Island Melanesia,
including Tongoa, where it has meant yams and yam gardens no longer occupy the same
position. In the last century, the institution of copra plantations and cattle grazing on
Tongoa have meant further changes. Coconut planting in particular results in long term
shifts in land tenure: an area of land planted exclusively with coconuts might thus be
associated with one particular person or kin group much longer than previously (Rodman 1987).

As elsewhere in the Pacific, in central Vanuatu, rights to any particular plot of land may be multi-layered; different people with different types of rights - to harvest wild or semi-cultivated produce, rights of way, ownership of trees planted there, creator of the garden growing (Ward and Kingdon 1995:39). As seen in the above section on payments made in relation to land, on Tongoa, trees planted on particular *fanua* do not remain the property of the planter. I suspect that this is the case because the dynamic of the chiefly title and land system is to keep an unassailable identification between a particular title and a particular *fanua* intact. The way that land is transferred only once every generation reduces the divergent claims of planter, harvester, and others. This has the effect of keeping the underlying inflexible principle intact whilst allowing a certain amount of flexibility in practice.

Recent publications on the politics of land use in the Pacific have emphasised that the 'customary land tenure' which is so often counterpoised to European legal principles, is not a static system, but:

"has for years been caught up in other widespread and complex social changes" and equally that "land tenure changes have played an important part in bringing about many social changes." (Hooper and Ward 1995:261).

For example, previously, the concept of land boundaries may not have been thought to rigidly define specific plots of land. In contemporary ni-Vanuatu land relations however, boundaries are receiving more emphasis (Van Trease 1987:5). Guiart's recent discussion of land use in the Pacific points out that westerners (anthropologists, colonial administrators) encountering Pacific systems of land use have continually made
assumptions that ownership of land existed. In particular, this meant that because individual ownership of land obviously did not occur in the European legal-jural sense, a concept of the 'land-owning group' emerged where land was held corporately (Guiart n.d:14). Such emphasis on the concept of land ownership in colonial and post-colonial contexts may, however, represent another change in the ways that current land claims and disputes are pursued. Claims by Tongoan Islanders to Efate land have been taken to the national courts. In a recent case (1996), Purau villagers won rights over Efate land that they claimed was originally occupied by ancestors of Tarisaliu and other chiefly titles. In an interesting reverse of the story of migration to Tongoa, Purau leaders in December 1996 were speaking of the imperative to replot the namatana of Purau on the dakbus ('uncultivated land') of Efate.

The contested definitions of land ownership which emerged in the Maraki Vanua Riki (MVR, Association of Shepherd Island Chiefs; the MVR is discussed in the next chapter) meeting between paramount chiefs and small chiefs reflects just such change on a national level. The national government needs to lease land on the islands for purposes of infrastructure such as airstrips and school buildings. Underlying the paramount chiefs' attempts to resist assertions that all the land within their namaraki underwent approportionment long ago, is the fact that complete control over land rights by napau nawaota means that they will have complete control to sublease this land to government and other interests. The government's need to lease land has meant that Tongoan notions of ownership have, perforce, been extended into the national realm. To lease land, owners must be identified and recompensed. Such transactions are not unproblematic: in 1994, for example, the airstrip on Tongoa had been shut down for an extended period due to disputes over who had the rights to claim recompense for the land leased. The tensions around issues of land

160
and rights over land are often pursued within rhetorics of *kastom*. The close association of *kastom* and chiefs on Tongoa and the impact of this on land are considered in the next chapter.
Chapter Four

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Material Culture and Dialogues of Kastom

4.0 Introduction

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) plays a key role in shaping the meanings of kastom ('custom'; an idea of tradition) in Vanuatu today. As a national museum and research centre the VCC has a national project to record and revive kastom (Bolton 1993; Lindstrom and White eds. 1994; Vianney 1991). This chapter considers the definitions of mats as kastom within the programmes of the VCC and examines the implementation of the Women’s Cultural Fieldworkers’ Project (WCP) on Tongoa and how the VCC project of kastom was received more generally on the island. Mats are critical ‘objects of kastom’ in both the VCC dialogue and on Tongoa, but these dialogues differ crucially. Within the dialogue of the WCP mats are objects of women’s knowledge and practice: in short, women’s kastom in distinction to a corresponding idea of men’s kastom.

Examining the introduction of the WCP to Tongoa reveals a number of points of difference between the VCC and national and metropolitan understandings of kastom and local models of kastom on Tongoa. In some respects, talking about kastom on Tongoa articulates the tensions between the demands of the cash economy and customary obligations to ones’ kin. The institution of chieftainship and the control they exert over land occupies a central role in these articulations. As the previous chapters demonstrate changing demographic, economic and political patterns have led to shifting emphases within land tenure relations and issues of transmission and ownership have become heightened. Chiefs on Tongoa today are actively promoting the meanings of kastom as closely aligned with the institution of chieftainship and to legitimate their position as the
source of land. Another facet of Tongoan understandings of *kastom* views *kastom* as knowledge, specifically, knowledge deployed in land disputes and as such, a political resource. Such understandings of *kastom* are fraught with tension as this knowledge is valuable and jealously guarded. It was against this background that the WCP programme set up its first meetings on Tongoa in January 1996.

4.1 *Kastom* in Vanuatu and Melanesia

'*Kastom'* is a Bislama word most often glossed as tradition or custom. In Vanuatu *kastom* is used as a noun to refer to and define institutions and practices associated with the past, a past that is understood to be ‘traditional’ (pre-colonial, pre-nation state, but crucially, not necessarily pre-Christian). *Kastom* is also used as an adjective to describe those activities or values associated with this tradition. In anthropological discourses, working definitions of *kastom* are closer to what we might understand by the term ‘culture’ and have been theorised as such (Linnekin 1992). The word and meanings of *kastom* also exist in other Melanesian pidgins (*kastam* in Papua New Guinea’s Tok Pisin and *kastomu* in Solomon Islands Pijin) and have come to be used in specific ways in local, national and regional discourses (Keesing 1982). The emergence of *kastom* as a reified construct of Melanesian politics was the subject of a special issue of *Mankind* in 1982 (Keesing and Tonkinson 1982). This publication focused attention on *kastom* as a distinctively Melanesian political symbol in the post-colonial era and was linked to a wider intellectual enquiry into the generation of inclusive and exclusive rites of nationhood (Anderson 1983; Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983).

In the Keesing and Tonkinson volume *kastom* is explored as a reified notion of culture; essentially an idea of tradition that is not neutral but has been employed as a highly
A distinctive Melanesian dynamic of cultural 'invention' emerges in the 1982 volume (Tonkinson 1982: 304; Larcom 1982: 336). This notion of 'the invention of tradition' disseminated widely in the social sciences by the 1983 Hobsbawm and Ranger volume has generated an enormous response from commentators on the politics of culture in the Pacific (Jolly and Thomas 1992; Lindstrom and White 1993; Feinberg and Zimmer-Tamakoshi 1995). Debates over the validity of making a distinction between authentic and inauthentic customs and practices have sometimes overshadowed other issues (Handler and Linnekin 1984; Hanson 1989; Linnekin 1991b).

Later work examining kastom within a framework of the politicisation of tradition has expanded to focus more clearly on identity (Keesing 1989; Linnekin and Poyer 1990). Other commentators have located the salience of kastom for Pacific Islanders within local practice rather than national political rhetoric. Foster's account of kastam on Tanga Island, New Ireland identifies the significance of kastam for Tangan Islanders emerging from its opposition to other cultural categories such as bisnis (trade stores, copra production) and lotu (church) (Foster 1992). As such kastam and bisnis represent different forms of exchange and different modes of social reproduction (ibid:289). Fosters' arguments demonstrate that the contemporary meanings and relevance of kastom in the Pacific do not necessarily solely reflect a post-colonial project of nation building.
Kastom is clearly an important political symbol in Vanuatu and other new Pacific nations however (Facey 1995; Babadzan 1988; Philibert 1986). The dissonance between a project of nationhood and the divisive local potential of kastom must also be noted (Tonkinson 1982: 302). The process of independence in Vanuatu was marred by bitter conflict so that 'kastom' was also taken up as a political weapon by the partisan groups that challenged the authority of the fledging national government around the time of independence. Kastom featured as a symbol of local diversity and a source of resistance to the centre of Port Vila within the Nagriamel movement of Santo Island (MacClancy 1980; Miles 1998), and the middle bush 'kastom' partisans' of Tanna (Bonnemaison 1994). In the face of such divisive beginnings the new national leaders invested in an idea of kastom as a focus for identity, simultaneously local and national. In doing so they were investing in kastom as a symbol of being ni-Vanuatu (Larcom 1982). Jolly describes a national revival of kastom that at a village level meant certain practices such as kava drinking, previously incompatible with the Christianity of missionisation, now began to be incorporated into Christian communities (Jolly 1992). In this process, local kastom and Christianity blend together to produce a unique ni-Vanuatu cultural identity in a project of nationhood. This is the sense of kastom that is promoted by the VCC and its programmes.

4.2 The Vanuatu Cultural Centre and the Fieldworkers' Projects

"Ethnography today is inevitably located at the juncture of local and anthropological discourses of culture." (Lindstrom and White 1995:203)

The research project upon which this thesis is based is intertwined with the VCC as an institution and, more specifically, the genesis of the Oral Traditions Program (OTP) and the

---

1 On Tongoa, kava drinking had apparently never been abandoned (Weightman 1989:240). Milne noted that on nineteenth century Tongoa villagers were notoriously still drinking kava and indulging in other 'pagan practices' such as naleoana (singsings) in comparison to the strict stamping out of such practices on Nguna (Don 1927).
Women's Cultural Fieldworkers' Project (WCP). The following discussion of the VCC places in context the aims and findings of the present research and my own involvement with the WCP. The Vanuatu Cultural Centre was founded in 1956 and today has two parts: the National Museum of Vanuatu and the National Library. Following a moratorium on anthropological research from 1985 to 1995 the Cultural Centre has gradually begun to allow a number of foreign researchers into the country once more. The recent generation of anthropological researchers beginning fieldwork from 1995 onwards undertook research through the National Cultural Council's new research agreement developed by the new director of the National Museum, Ralph Reganvanu (National Cultural Council n.d). Under the new research agreement researchers are required to make a return contribution which can take various forms: working with or training "indigenous scholars, students and members of the community", undertaking a "service to the nation of Vanuatu" or, producing "a product of immediate benefit and use to the local community" (National Cultural Council n.d: points 6,7,8).

The fieldwork for this thesis was thus carried out under the auspices of the VCC and the research project took place within the larger programme of the WCP. My request to carry out research into the meanings surrounding mat production and use on Tongoa was positively received by the VCC providing that I would fit into the recently established WCP. Field research would not have been possible without the larger structure of the VCC supporting and defining who I was and what I was doing in Vanuatu. The other aspect of my involvement with the VCC was to help train a women who would then act as the fieldworker from Tongoa in the WCP and document Tongoa women's' kastom. This, in addition to my participation in documenting the old tradition of barkcloth was expected in return for research permission.
This new policy towards foreign anthropology researchers represented a renewed interest by the Museum in co-ordinating research done on ni-Vanuatu kastom. Part of this project is the long running (since 1976) Oral Traditions Programme and the more recent Women’s Cultural Fieldworkers’ Project begun in 1991. Both these programmes are run by the VCC and consist of indigenous fieldworkers who work locally to document their local kastom. The objective of the fieldworker programmes is the “preservation, promotion and development of kastom” (Bolton 1993:132). Since 1981 the OTP fieldworkers have attended annual workshops and have thus had a direct impact on the dissemination of kastom at a local level. The OTP and the WCP reflect the Cultural Centre’s position as a national institution actively involved in shaping the ways that kastom is understood as regionally distinct but nationally important in Vanuatu today. As such, the VCC has a common purpose with national government positions on kastom as a source of national unity and pride within regional diversity.

In November 1995 the Museum moved from its original site on Port Vila’s main road to a brand new purpose-built museum, exhibition centre and offices near the Parliament buildings. The museum opening was an occasion of great celebration and groups from all over the country came to Port Vila and participated in a parade of kastom dancing and singing up to the new site where there was a ceremonial opening of the museum. A group of dancers travelled from Purau village to represent Tongoa; wearing ‘kastom clothing’ they performed dances and songs. The events arranged around the opening illustrate the firm association between the VCC and the public production and consumption of kastom in Vanuatu. From the 1970’s through to the early 1990’s radio programmes produced by the Cultural Centre broadcast kastom stories and ceremonies on national radio (Bolton
1993:106). These programmes drew upon the recordings made by the OTP and emphasised the importance of *kastom* nationally (ibid:119).

### 4.2i Models of *kastom* within the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Women’s Cultural Fieldworkers’ Project

The work carried out by Bolton (1993; 1994) is almost alone in anthropological consideration of the VCC and its programmes:

> “At the VCC there is no issue about what *kastom* is. The issue is what is happening to *kastom*.” (Bolton 1994:147).

> “The central idiom in terms of which *kastom* is understood at the VCC, indeed in most of Vanuatu, is vulnerability to loss, and to identify something as *kastom* is to identify it as vulnerable.” (Bolton 1994:147-8).

These statements by Bolton indicate the gap between the academic project of examining *kastom* and local cultural agency (National Museums, Cultural Centres) projects of *kastom* in the Pacific. For the VCC, *kastom* is tradition: practices and institutions which are either no longer practised or are ‘in danger’ of being lost: “*Plande wok i stap yet forom plande save ia istap ko lus*” (‘Much work remains because much of this knowledge is being lost.’ (Vanuatu Cultural Centre Women’s Unit 1995:3). The sense of *kastom* promoted by the WCP and VCC more generally is as something to be recognised, guarded and documented. This last aim represents a real change in what ‘lived tradition’ might be understood to be, as vulnerable and in need of recording. The main purpose of the WCP project on Tongoa and the involvement of the present research with the WCP was to document past practices and knowledge of barkcloth and mats and as a result raise awareness of the value of *kastom*. Another aspect of the VCC model of *kastom* as past tradition can be seen in the attention paid to material traditions no longer practised. It is this interest that led to the WCP project’s aims to revive barkcloth on Tongoa.
The WCP is a VCC programme begun in June 1991 which aimed to “promote, document and revive women’s *kastom* in Vanuatu” (Bolton 1994:147). The WCP is based to some extent on a similar project, the Oral Tradition Program (OTP), a group of male fieldworkers from the islands who had been recording and discussing *kastom* for some twenty years. The first project that the WCP undertook was a documentation and revival of the tradition of mat-making on Ambae. The WCP programme reflects the approach of the VCC to *kastom* and ‘culture’ more generally; aimed at categories such as material culture, dance, ritual, song, language. Jolly has stated that the VCC has “promoted a more restricted sense of *kastom* as material and immaterial property” (Jolly 1992:343), avoiding contentious issues such as the divisive potential of *kastom* (as witnessed in the conflicts leading up to independence) as locally diverse. VCC formulations of *kastom* are essentially place-based and avoid reference to land (Bolton 1993:109, 142), a potentially controversial issue, as the discussion below reveals.

The WCP is described in some detail by Bolton’s 1993 thesis based on work in the Cultural Centre and Ambae during 1991 and 1992. The thesis looks at the ways mats and other objects of ‘women’s *kastom*’ were incorporated into the Cultural Centre’s paradigm of *kastom*. Bolton argues that prior to the WCP, the OTP and VCC more generally, had: “always asserted male dominance of *kastom* by effectively ignoring women’s knowledge and practice.” (1994:150). Bolton’s thesis argues that the WCP represented a moderation of this understanding of *kastom* to include a concomitant notion of women’s *kastom* (Bolton 1993:147). The WCP thus set up a distinct category of ‘women’s *kastom*’ within the existing paradigm of *kastom* within the VCC. This category is modelled within the same mould as a category of male *kastom*. By working with the premise that there is such a separate object as women’s knowledge and practice, women’s culture in effect, the WCP
in itself was instrumental in creating such a category on Ambae. As the discussion of the introduction of the WCP on Tongoa shows, however, the project had a very different impact elsewhere.

The intertwining of the VCC and my own research meant that when responding to enquiries on Tongoa about my research I often explained my project in terms of VCC work on kastom. Using kastom as a tool of explanation, however, highlighted that kastom is a potentially controversial topic on Tongoa. Simply declaring an interest in kastom was likely to provoke reactions of suspicion as to why I wanted this information and, more pertinent, what I was going to do with it. Even when firmly aligned with the Cultural Centre during WCP meetings this reaction was sometimes evident. This is in direct contrast to the acceptance of the WCP on Ambae; here, Bolton states her association with VCC generally allayed such suspicions (Bolton 1993). The reaction on Tongoa indicates a larger understanding of kastom as a resource which can be commoditised. As such a resource kastom can be displayed during National Arts Festivals, sold to tourists or converted into a product such as a book or film which can be sold beyond Vanuatu without villagers' knowledge. The VCC has a direct impact on these understandings of kastom. During a speech to Purau villagers about the importance of kastom the then director of the VCC reported an incident where a man from one island attempted to sell carvings which were executed in the style of a different island. The carver was judged to not have the right to this kastom and was fined 15,000 vatu (US$150). (Speech by Kirk Huffman, February 1987, recorded by the VCC film unit).

The explanation that I was working with the VCC gave an instant framework to my enquiries, but did not form a fully understandable explanation. This was reflected in the
way that over the period of fieldwork, people whose questions I had answered many times would ask me to explain my purpose once again. Using *kastom* as a ‘tool of explanation’ meant that I was referring to it as a reified construct of the VCC; cultural practices associated with a traditional past. The explanation that I was concerned with women’s *kastom* of mats and barkcloth was not immediately recognised or readily believed. VCC formulations of mats as women’s *kastom* did not resonate with Tongoan understandings of mats are and what mats do. The ways in which being allied to the project of the VCC did not explain my presence illustrate the disjunction between what *kastom* is for the VCC and what *kastom* is on Tongoa.

4.3 Understandings of *Kastom* on Tongoa

Ideas about *kastom* within everyday life on Tongoa are a complex tangle of morals, values and practices which coalesce around certain events and persons. There is no inherent opposition between *kastom* and *sku* (Christianity, education) as ways of life on Tongoa as in other parts of Vanuatu. Among the Sa speaking people of Southeast Pentecost,² for example, *kastom* (as lived practice) is conceptually constructed to be in direct conflict with the practices and values of *sku* (Jolly 1982). On Tongoa the two concepts of *kastom* and *sku* are oppositional in character to each other but they are not deemed incompatible. *Kastom* as a notion of tradition thus has a place within the institutions of the nation-state and modernity that are part of contemporary Tongoan life. Local Presbyterianism, for example, has encompassed certain aspects of *kastom* and this is characteristic of what might be termed Melanesian Christianity; “*kastom* within Christianity” as outlined by Tonkinson (Tonkinson 1981). For example, the ceremony to ordain new Presbyterian

² Pentecost Island, to the north of Tongoa.
church elders and Pastors on Tongoa follows the form of the ceremony to pass on a chiefly title from one holder to the next.

Other contemporary institutions of Tongoan life such as marriage draw upon dialogues of both *kastom* and church. The contemporary marriage ceremony and contract are spoken of as comprising both *kastom mared* ('*kastom* marriage') and *skul mared* ('church marriage'). As detailed in chapter one *kastom mared* today consists most crucially of the exchanges among and between bride's kin and groom's kin and, in particular, the payment of *navagogotoana* (*braedpraes* 'bridal payment'). This traditional *kastom* aspect of contemporary marriage is distinct from but at the same time allied to ideas of the way marriage was performed in the past. This latter is definitely named to be *kastom mared* and is understood within the context of a pre-Christian past (see chapter 7 for a detailed analysis of marriage rites). Just as marriage is an institution that can be referred to as *kastom* in a sense which indicates a pre-Christian past and also in the sense that aspects of contemporary marriage are 'kastom' in distinction to church, so do other institutions draw upon diverse dialogues of *kastom* and modernity. Primary among these is the institution of chieftainship:

"*Long fasin blong kastom blong yumi, ol man Tongoa, rod, hemi jif, pasis hemi jif, nakama* hemi jif*"* ('In our, Tongoa people's, *kastom* ways, the way to do something is through the chief, the way forward is through the chief, the meeting house is the chief') (Chief Malei of Tongoa speaking at the opening of the Purau farea 27th February 1987).

On Tongoa today the institution of the chieftainship and the notion of *kastom* are inseparable. The objects, practices and values surrounding chieftainship are emphatically identified as *kastom* and public articulations and displays of *kastom* occur with specific reference to chiefs. Such occasions include the celebrations surrounding Independence day
(July 31st) and Kastom Chiefs’ day (March 5th). Hereditary titles, the farea (nakamal, chief’s meeting house) and pig killing are spoken of and defined as aspects of life that define Tongoans from the rest of Vanuatu. Other objects that occur in conjunction with these things are also kastom - mats, pig-killing clubs (nagbei, nahnal), speech and ritual behaviour. As such, these aspects of life are identified with a Tongoan history that precedes the arrival of missionaries, colonialism and independence. These understandings concur with VCC definitions of kastom as locally specific and nationally valuable.

Values and modes of behaviour on Tongoa are also evaluated with reference to kastom as a concept that encompasses ideals of respect and propriety. During the opening of the rebuilt Purau farea (recorded by the VCC film unit in February 1987), the welcome that Chief Tarisaliu extended to the guests was referred to as a “kastom welkam.” Ways of resolving conflict involving mats and pig killing are also referred to as kastom. This model of kastom is applied to a way of being, speaking, dressing and acting in an appropriate way. One of the most frequent explanations given to me as to why one gives mats at an event was not only was it kastom but that by doing so one showed honour and respect (ona mo respek), key qualities of following approbatory, kastom fasin (‘kastom behaviour’). Furthermore, not only does the act of giving show these qualities but the mat itself manifests them. Honour and respect are features of kastom fasin and the mat is thus a symbol of kastom in both form and purpose: it is kastom embodied.

The correct way and manner (fasin) of deporting oneself primarily involves respect and doing what one should (following the right rod) according to the dictates of kinship and

---

3 “Chief Tarisaliu igat bik fala hona blong wellkamem yufala long kastom welkam” (It is the honour of Chief Tarisaliu to welcome you all in the kastom manner). This was written on a banner on top of the gate made of coconut fronds that the first guest slashed through to symbolically open the proceedings.

173
titular obligations. This sense of kastom indicates a central theme which is picked up later in the chapter, namely, the notion of place-specific kastom and ples-specific people are conjointly manifested in individual mannerisms and ways of being. This idea of following correct behaviour becomes entwined with ideas of the past and specifically, ideas of how Tongoan people lived their lives in the pre-colonial past. It is within this understanding that weaving and traditional methods of food preparation represent exemplary female behaviour and become aspects of the practice of kastom in everyday life. The products of these activities, mats and food, are objects of kastom that in themselves and in their uses then go on to contribute to definitions of non-everyday contexts, such as lifecycle events, as kastom.

Other non-everyday objects such as dance adornments and dress are defined as kastom within a more reified understanding of tradition. These objects make infrequent appearances and are self-reflexively utilised in a conscious display of Tongoan kastom at events such as the opening of the new National Museum. The age of two particular objects in Purau, a carved wooden dish and an old steel axehead mounted on a handle carved in the manner of a nagbei (nalnal, pig-killing club) placed them soundly in the category of kastom and were often mentioned to me as such. The dish is the patrimony of the Tarisaliu line and one informant referred to it as a “memori blong jif” (‘a memorial of the chief’ Jack Solomon 27/12/96). On the occasion that the VCC film crew visited Purau to record the opening of the rebuilt farea (an occasion understood by all involved to be the VCC recording kastom) the nalnal-axe and the dish were shown to the camera and given a narrative by Manuroaga, former holder of the title Tapau, the manufasa (‘chief’s speaker’). The history accompanying this dish and its links to the histories of both Tarisaliu and Tapau’s line makes the dish a particularly potent object of kastom as do the designs carved
on its surface (see plate 4.0). These designs symbolically represent the *nawota* (‘chief’) and also appear on mats and tattoos, connecting the realm of the chieftainship with other domains. The non-everyday objects of ceremonial dress, *nai=nal*-axe and dish are displayed and cited when Tongoans use the idea of *kastom* to distinguish themselves from other islanders.

Almost any aspect of life, everyday and non-everyday, can be spoken of with reference to *kastom* in certain contexts. This indicates that notions of *kastom* play a complex role in the interaction between lived practice and ideas of reified tradition in Tongoan lives today. As such, *kastom* is a key factor in the self-reflexive production of Tongoan identities vis-à-vis others. Tilley’s discussions of Wala Islanders’ presentation of ‘traditional Small Nambas culture’ for tourists analyses this “performing culture” not as a simple objectification of culture or an invention of tradition on the part of the islanders, but as a construction of a Wala self-image and sense of locality (Tilley 1999:257). In the negotiations that Tongoans make between *kastom* as informing daily practices and *kastom* as reified tradition or presentation of Tongoan selves to external audiences, Tongoans too are creating locality, a locality defined in relation, but also in opposition, to the ‘elsewhere’ of nation and world.

Diverse objects such as architecture, calico and leaves all become associated with *kastom* in this context. Leaves used as adornment in dance (*kastom danis*), used as medicine (*kastom lif meresin*) and used in spell-making (*kastom lif*) all become defined as *kastom* through a number of shifts in context: when associated with public displays of Tongoan tradition, when used in direct opposition to government hospital medicine⁵ and when deployed in attempts to supernaturally change the course of events. All these shifts in contexts have in

---

⁴ Wala Island is one of the Small Islands off the Northeast coast of Malakula Island to the north of Tongoa.
⁵ cf. Shirakawa 1999.
common the opposing spaces of Tongoa versus those of the national government, town (Port Vila or Luganville) and Christianity.

4.4 The Introduction of the Women’s Culture Project on Tongoa

One of the aims of the first WCP project on Tongoa was to document barkcloth production and attempt to initiate interest in making it again. There had previously been a very successful project on Erromango Island to the south of the Shepherd Islands where the work of a fieldworker in the OTP had revived a tradition of barkcloth that had almost completely disappeared without trace (Huffman 1996). This was the background for the Tongoa project. In addition to the barkcloth project the WCP also wanted to document women’s knowledge about mats and weaving, in particular older people’s knowledge that might not be currently widely known (about dyes used before the advent of tradestore dyes for example).

Prior to my arrival as researcher with the WCP Co-ordinator Jean Tarisesei the project had not extended its scope to Tongoa. The project itself had only been initiated in 1991 and was in the process of expanding its network of fieldworkers. In early January 1996, four weeks after I had arrived in Vanuatu, Jean and I travelled to Tongoa. Jean’s visit was aimed at assisting me to settle into my field site and to tour the island to hold meetings presenting the aims of the WCP and to try to enlist the help and interest of local people in the VCC project of documenting kastom. The final purpose of the visit was to select a woman who would serve as the cultural fieldworker for Tongoa. When Jean returned to Port Vila I remained on the island and whilst carrying out my own research aimed to work with and help train the new fieldworker in using recording equipment such as a tape recorder and camera. The selection of the fieldworker was made by the chief of Purau, the
village where I was to be based. The choice of Purau as fieldsite was itself bound up with the history of the Oral Traditions Program and was chosen by the VCC rather than myself. A Purau man named Willy Roy had previously been the OTP fieldworker for Tongoa and this connection meant that I was to live in the house where his mother was living and effectively be based in Purau.

The fieldworker selected was Jenny Solomon, a young Purau woman who had previously worked as a local kindergarten assistant. Although I was to help train Jenny, she of course was helping to train me: language coaching, introducing me to her family whom I subsequently spent a lot of time with (particularly with her mother, an accomplished weaver) and in general helping me move within the space of the island as less of an anomaly than I would have been without her guidance and advice. The first action of the WCP on Tongoa was to contact the chiefs of other villages and request to hold meetings to speak about the interest of the WCP and VCC in *kastom* and the purpose of the WCP. During these first village meetings led by Jean Tarisesei I became aware of another objective of the WCP (and thus the VCC as a national institution); in the manner of a public education campaign to persuade people of the importance of *kastom* as a foundation and stabilising anchor for modern life and *development* ('development'). In the meetings *kastom* was presented as a rock that one's individual and collective identity rested upon and would always be there. Ten years earlier the then director of the VCC had spoken of the work of the OTP in much the same terms:

“this work tries to help record things that are your *kastom*, to try and ensure that they are not lost. Because your language, your *kastom* and your culture is like your foundation and strength”

6 “mekem traem halp long rekodem sam samting long saet blong kastom blong yu...long mekem se i no save lus. From langwis blong yufala, wetem kastom mo kalja blong yufala, hemi olsem stampa blong yufala.” Speech by Kirk Huffman, February 1987, recorded by the VCC film unit.
Huffman went on to identify the problems faced when *kastom* is 'lost:

“If you don’t know your language and *kastom*, you are like a canoe without an outrigger, a canoe drifting out of control...in Vila I see this problem growing...they don’t have an identity” Speech by Kirk Huffman, Purau *farea* February 1987.

One’s *kastom* is thus distinctive to one’s self and one’s identity as a Tongoga. Island specific *kastom* sets one off from others within Vanuatu, and from the rest of the Pacific and world. Within this model *kastom* emerges as part of a rhetoric of national development: something distinctive to Vanuatu, a resource that means the changes and demands of modernity and economic development can be successfully negotiated.

Following Jean Tarisesei’s departure a somewhat two-sided aspect to my presence on Tongoga arose. Firstly, the independent research I associated primarily with Purau, and secondly, the work of the WCP holding further village meetings and interviewing willing people. The pursuit of information for the WCP came to be conducted primarily beyond Purau in other villages. The primary method of this work was done in the form of public village meetings. In these meetings the focus was ‘women’s *kastom*’ which had been identified by Mrs Tarisesei during the first series of meetings as material traditions such as mats and barkcloth, tattoos and mat patterns as well as knowledge about traditional management of menstruation, childbirth, methods of food preparation and clothing. Despite this focus on ‘women’s *kastom*’ the correct road to a village was through the *nawoita* (‘paramount chief’). The result was sometimes that the meeting would fall between the two stools of the chief and his men and the local women’s organisation (either the PWMU or the Tongoga Island Council of Women, now the Lei Maraki Vanua Riki). As a result the village meetings were sometimes difficult to set up; we would arrive to find that

---

7 “Sapos yufala i no save gud langwis mo kastom blong yufala, yufala i olsem wan kenu we i no gat nasama, i save drif olbaot o i save tantanem o saoting olsem...mi luk long Vila nao la i gat wan problem i stap gro...oli no gat aedentiti” Speech by Kirk Huffman, February 1987, recorded by the VCC film unit.
the message had not apparently been received and people had already left for their gardens or were otherwise occupied. Sometimes we would arrive and the chief would want to reschedule to ensure that the men as well as the women were able to attend. This highlighted that my and the WCP's intentions were not necessarily uncontroversial and were being carefully considered and digested. In this atmosphere I was increasingly aware that the intentions and desires of the WCP and myself had to be carefully worded. As a researcher working with the WCP I never got over my reluctance to claim centre stage and appear to demand co-operation and information from people who could conclude that the WCP (and myself) had nothing to offer them, but nevertheless, wanted something in return. The reaction was extremely varied from village to village; in some enthusiasm was evident, in others, polite disinterest and in one case a couple of men reacted with hostility, shouting and swearing at us to leave the village as we were obviously trying to 'steal' kastom which did not belong to us.

This incident was the strongest negative reaction we and the WCP received. The men who shouted at us to leave had not actually been at the meeting but had stumbled into it (the meeting being held under a large banyan tree, the village nakamal ('chief's meeting house') after drinking home-brew. Although the men were drunk this did not seem to be significant in later assessments of their behaviour. People subsequently commented to me that the behaviour of these men was particularly wrong because the WCP had come to the village along the right road (rod), namely, that of the chief. That is, we had approached the chief and received permission and an invitation to come and address a meeting. Secondly, we were not only in the village proper when shouted at, but were actually in the nakamal, the conceptual heart of the chiefly domain and authority. The space of the nakamal itself had thus been compromised and it was this that people seemed to feel required action in
response. A complaint was brought to the Island Council of Chiefs who then heard the case on the day that they next met. Although people from Purau went to this court case the men from the host village did not attend and the matter was not pursued further. An understanding of *kastom* as something that belongs to rightful owners and something that can be stolen becomes clear in this incident. Bolton suggests that the generally positive Ambaean reception to the WCP was rooted in the value Ambae women gave *kastom* as a category that allowed them to act in new arenas, namely, the national arena (Bolton 1993:325). Why was a similar reaction not the case on Tongoa? During the WCP meetings there did not seem to be an overall sense of any gain for Tongoan women by participating in the WCP.

The statements made by people on Tongoa do not indicate that they perceive *kastom* as something vulnerable by it’s very nature (as does the VCC) but, rather, indicate that *kastom* may be viewed as a powerful resource in contemporary life on the island. In this context it has to be pointed out that Tongoa differs essentially from islands such as Ambae and other large islands such as Pentecost, Tanna and Malakula where dialogues of *kastom* form a different part of daily life. As mentioned above there are no communities on Tongoa that live in ‘full *kastom*. Secondly, Tongoa is far smaller and more densely populated than these other islands. Because of this there has been a proportionally greater degree of wage migration, particularly to Port Vila. As a result Tongoa is close to the national centre both geographically and conceptually. Tongoans in the urban centres and the island itself see themselves as well integrated into national political and economic structures. *Kastom* does not seem to be the primary category that Tongoans view as a *rod* (way, opportunity) into participation in national life. *Kastom* thus plays a different part in Tongoan understandings of local and national spaces compared to other islands.
Within Tongoa understandings of *kastom* as a tangible resource not to be shared lightly and often only disclosed in expectation of a return, neither I nor the WCP had anything material to offer beyond the inducement of having a material record of *kastom*. This in itself required a successful campaign to convince people both of the significance of *kastom* itself in the paradigm of the VCC and the importance of a written or taped record. The WCP proposal to record knowledge and practices defined as Tongoa *kastom* represented a novel approach to the safeguarding and transmission of that knowledge. The policy of the VCC and the *modus operandi* of the Oral Traditions Program and the WCP is to deposit all material recorded in the museum in Port Vila to be a living record which can be consulted by present and future generations. Any material that is sensitive or owned by particular families or lineages is kept under locked conditions and can only be seen or listened to by members of that group.

Restricted knowledge of this kind is common throughout the archipelago and, indeed, throughout Melanesia but this did not seem to be a problem that people on Tongoa were specifically concerned with. One explanation for this is simply that it was not raised as an issue in the WCP meetings because no-one seriously considered sharing such information with the project and the VCC. Secondly, there is a distinction between controversial (disputed and competitive) knowledge and non-disputed knowledge within the restricted knowledge that is associated with *kastom* on Tongoa. Knowledge that is restricted to certain periods and certain people, such as knowledge of midwifery, land history or garden magic are all commonly referred to as *kastom* knowledge. Garden magic is no longer considered absolutely vital to the success of fertile abundant gardens however; people

---

* In 1996-97 the OTP no longer had a fieldworker for Tongoa and as far as I know the OTP had not previously conducted island-wide meetings.
profess faith in a benevolent Christian God to fulfil this. Knowledge of land history and the kastom history of disputed land plots is, however, highly charged and potentially controversial. There is, though, a tendency for information and knowledge per se to be viewed as a non-material good that can be possessed and subjected to conditions of disclosure and negotiation.

Neither my research nor previous ethnography done in the region suggests, however, that the transfer through sale (of the rights to particular ritual knowledge for example) occurred between individuals or groups on Tongoa as elsewhere in Melanesia (Harrison 1993). Rather, magical or esoteric knowledge (such as garden magic) was and is held tightly within a patriline and only transmitted to rightful heirs. For Bolton, the tension between the VCC project of kastom knowledge as a thing to be recorded for the public good and the on-the-ground tendency in Vanuatu to view such knowledge as personally owned reveals a “disjunction between kastom and ful kastom” (Bolton 1994:159). Ful kastom in this quote refers to those societies in Vanuatu which consciously follow a traditional way of life identified with the ancestors and consciously eschew identification with national structures such as education. In this kind of society, Bolton argues, there is less need for programmes such as the WCP and OTP to record kastom, as kastom is fully lived and adhered to as a way of life. I argue that the tension Bolton identifies between VCC and local views of kastom knowledge is not necessarily a disjunction between kastom and ful kastom but between two inherently different models of the relationship between the local and the national.

When asked, most Tongoans will agree that mats are kastom. They are not the most visible or immediate objects of kastom, however, nor are they primarily associated with
women, but are objects of chiefs' *kastom*. There was consequently an often somewhat puzzled reaction on Tongoa to the WCP identification of mats as women's *kastom*. Once again this is in contrast to the Ambaean reaction where Bolton reports that the idea of mats as women's *kastom* was greeted with recognition and yet was also a new idea (Bolton 1993:298). Bolton attributes to the WCP an ability to effect change in the way that Ambae women viewed their daily practice of weaving and, indeed, in the way they viewed *kastom* itself:

“By coming to Ambae to promote, document, and revive weaving skills and mats, emphasizing that women have their own *kastom* and contribute to the *kastom* life of the community, we gave women a new perspective on their own activities. Women again and again said to us that they had not formerly recognized that these things were important, that they had meaning - *bifo yumi ting se samting nating* - we thought of these things as unimportant. But during the project women came forward with interest and enthusiasm, recognizing that by regarding mats and weaving as something of no importance they had allowed knowledge about these things to be lost.” (Bolton 1994:160)

This commentary locates the agency for Ambaean identification of weaving and mats as *kastom* within the WCP itself. Thus it is through the WCP that local people came to externalise their cultural practice (recognising weaving as *kastom*) and then to reinternalise it as something important (*kastom* as important and vulnerable to loss). My own involvement with the VCC attempts to implement the WCP on Tongoa suggests a different scenario. Rather than Tongoan women recognising that they had not viewed weaving and mats as important enough and had therefore contributed to a loss of knowledge, mats were emphatically acknowledged to be *kastom* in themselves and vital to the carrying out of institutions and practices consciously labelled *kastom* (*pemaoi wanam* ‘bridal payments’ for example). Further, an understanding of change in weaving practices as simply a case of loss was not present in the way that Tongoa women spoke about their practices.
Similarly, the presentation of the WCP case of barkcloth no longer being made as a case of loss, did not resonate. Barkcloth had not been made almost within living memory on the island. The oldest inhabitant of Purau village, for example, could remember her grandmother wearing barkcloth, but she herself had never made or worn it. In this regard, the information documented by the WCP was gleaned from fragmentary knowledge from a number of informants all over Tongoa (see Kelly n.d). Most of this information related to barkcloth garments worn in the past. These garments were dyed and were worn by both men and women. The ceremonial barkcloth posited by Huffman:

“Central Vanuatu, from Tongoa to Efate, was the area of production (by women) of many types of beautiful fine barkcloth...finely decorated thin barkcloth with feather decorations along the two narrower ends...important for ceremonial purposes, as part of marriage payment, fines and chiefly rituals.” (Huffman 1996:132)

did not meet with general recognition as a Tongoa custom by either male or female villagers. Photos shown at the WCP meetings of Efate barkcloth in the collections of the Australian Museum provoked comment on the patterns at the ends resembling mat and tattoo patterns, but informants (mainly older men) maintained that this Efate-type barkcloth was not made on Tongoa. Tongoan informants predated the demise of this barkcloth making (as opposed to barkcloth made to wear) much before the nineteenth century introduction of calico (cf. Huffman 1996). Statements concurred that with the original migration to Tongoa, this type of Efate barkcloth made with the bark of the namaliafa tree was no longer made. Informants independently of each other consistently maintained that the namaliafa tree (Namakura: nanot; melekri: ‘endospermum medullosum’) did not grow on Tongoa.

The response to the WCP on Tongoa was not one of recognition but often one of puzzlement. Precisely why the WCP was trying to collect information on mats, weaving and barkcloth was not easily or immediately obvious to the Tongoa audience (men and women). Mats were so ubiquitous and so self-evident that the reasons they should merit particular attention were not clear. In addition, mats were also clearly so important, woven so firmly, and it seems irrevocably into the texture of Tongoan lives that the idea of loss did not seem a pressing concern. In this context talks by the WCP on the importance of recording memories of barkcloth before older people die sometimes did not seem important. Villagers have more pressing everyday concerns: how to raise cash in an essentially subsistence economy, how to successfully send one’s children through the school system and how to afford the cost of staples such as soap, salt, sugar and kerosene.

As mentioned earlier in this section the reaction of villagers during the meetings ranged from enthusiasm to polite disinterest to downright hostility. The mood sometimes shifted from one to the other within the space of a single meeting. Identifying those people who assumed a position of authority vis-à-vis the project during the meetings reveals the beyond-island, official status of the project. Such people include the chief, the chief’s wife, or a teacher or leader of the PWMU or Tongoa Island Council of Women. For example, during one village meeting, one particular woman was very forward in her co-operation and her appreciation of the purpose of the project. She encouraged the other women to recall details of past traditions and knowledge of barkcloth and generally supported the idea of the project, namely, that *kastom* was important and should be safeguarded. I later found out that this woman, a school teacher at the local primary school, was not actually from Tongoa, but had married there from the far north of Vanuatu. Her position as a teacher, familiar with the project of national development and understandings of *kastom* as
a national resource meant that she was instrumental in mediating between the WCP interest in barkcloth and mats and the village women. The meeting that day was one of the most successful of all the meetings convened for the WCP. Conversely, not only were there meetings where people did not get excited about the VCC project of *kastom*, there were villages we were unable to visit and personal interviews that we were not able to set up despite many attempts. In such cases we were never directly refused but nevertheless always deferred. As I witnessed the suspicions of individuals and chiefs about the project I came to realise each had made a direct decision that a WCP (and foreign researcher) pursuit of *kastom* was a potential controversy that could be avoided.

4.5 Mats and *Kastom* on Tongoa

The discussion of the introduction of the WCP on Tongoa revealed a disjunction between the understanding of mats as *kastom* within the project and Tongoan understandings of mats as *kastom*. According to Bolton, prior to the WCP, the women of Ambae had not identified mats and weaving as traditional knowledge: "Mats were used in *kastom* ceremonies, but they were not identified as *kastom* themselves." (Bolton 1994:160). This statement contrasts with the situation on Tongoa; here, mats were definitely identified as objects of *kastom* but as such were primarily associated with chiefs’ *kastom* rather than women’s *kastom*. As the following chapters detail, however, mat-making is closely associated with women’s knowledge and practice. This aspect of the tradition of mats was therefore more compatible with the idea of women’s *kastom* presented by the WCP.

Once mats have been completed and left the realm of production, however, they become different objects; exchanged, presented and performing ritual roles, they are associated with ideas of *kastom* in a way now disassociated from women. There is one particular type
of mat that is even more firmly associated with the chieftainship and ideas of chiefly *kastom*. These are single panel mats (*faru sikai*; ‘one side’) worn by men and chiefs on occasions designated or associated with *kastom*. These single panel mat garments are referred to as *kaka* (*telimbele* in Namakura; *mbele*: mat) and are worn wrapped around the waist. *Kaka* are not coloured and often feature older, less common patterns (see plate 4.1). One *kaka* example I saw had been woven by an older woman for her son to wear at the 1990 celebration of ten years of independence in Port Vila. This garment was identified with a public display of Tongoa *kastom* in the national arena. As such, the weaver had intentionally chosen old patterns and had not used dye because she associated the mat with *kastom* (*“from hemia soet blong kastom”* ‘because this is to do with *kastom*’ Maria Lily 18/10/96). *Kaka* are only worn by men on occasions such as public dancing and only worn by chiefs when they are enacting aspects of chieftainship such as making prestations. Such occasions are referred to as ‘making *kastom*’ (*mekem kastom*). The prestation made by TiTongoamata of Tongoa made to Masoeragi of Makura discussed in the previous chapter (section 3.5i) was such an occasion. On arrival at Makura TiTongoamata and his Tongoa *nakainaga* (‘supporters’) donned *kaka* mat garments in order to carry ashore the pig, *nakakafu* mat bundle and special yams that he had brought to Masoeragi. Masoeragi and his men also wore *kaka* to formally welcome the TiTongoamata and the Tongoa delegation. In both cases, the national display of Tongoa *kastom* and the enactment of inter-island chiefly relations, mats are used and situated within a self-reflexive process of ‘making *kastom*’ (*mekem kastom*).

The firm association between mats and the chieftainship on Tongoa is further illustrated by the responses to the photos of an old central Vanuatu mat exhibited at the VCC in 1996 (see diagram 4.0). In July 1996 the VCC hosted the opening of a touring exhibition ‘Spirit
Blong Bubu i Kambak’ (‘The Spirit of the Ancestors Returns’). The exhibition featured some 156 objects from overseas museums and around 50 from the collections of the VCC. The mat had been collected in Efate sometime in the late nineteenth century and was on loan from the Museé National des Arts d’Afrique et d’Océanie in Paris. A number of Shepherd Islander visitors to the exhibition had claimed to VCC staff that this mat was not from Efate but was a Shepherd Island mat probably from Tongoa. In Kaufmann’s introductory essay to the 1996 volume accompanying the exhibition he notes: “Old mat of a style as yet undocumented. Said to be acquired on Efate Island in the 1880’s, but exact origin unknown.” (Kaufmann 1996:18). On Tongoa Jenny Solomon and myself incorporated photographs of this mat into the WCP meetings in order to attempt to establish whether it could have come from Tongoa. The photographs provoked a number of interesting responses and the mat was recognised to be of Tongoa by a number of older informants, both men and women.

In all cases, however, the mat was immediately associated with chiefs rather than women’s kastom. This could be due to a number of factors: firstly, its age and appearance in the VCC exhibition identified it as kastom and as such, pertaining to chiefs on Tongoa. Secondly, the designs on the mat are designs associated with chiefs and the names and associations of these emerged during the WCP interviews (see diagram 4.0). Woven designs frequently represent connections between mats and chieftainship on Tongoa. For example, the fretwork patterns nanako ni olai (‘forehead of the green lizard’), namata ni olai (‘mouth of the green lizard’), and nagogo ni olai (‘chin of the green lizard’) (see
Plate 4.0 Wooden dish carved with chiefly symbols and identified with *kastom*

Plate 4.1 *Faru Sikai* (‘one side’) mat worn by chiefs on occasions of *kastom*
Diagram 4.0 Late nineteenth century mat claimed to be from the Shepherd Islands
appendix 2) refer to the chief specifically. The lizard is a symbol of the *nawota* (chief) and also appears on the wooden dish mentioned above (plate 4.0). The designs *narei nawota* ('face of the chief') and *nafarei nawota* ('forehead of the chief') can be seen on both the old mat and the wooden dish. In the days of ocean travel by canoe these designs also appeared on the canoes. These ocean going canoes embodied the pre-colonial chieftainship's inter-island relations that were limited to *nawota* ('paramount chiefs') (Facey 1981:299).

4.6 *Kastom* as Knowledge of *Ples*

*Kastom* is often glossed as the values and practices of a traditional past in Vanuatu, the way things were done *taem bifo* ('the time before', 'past times'). The above discussion of Tongoan use and understanding of *kastom* reveals a self-conscious understanding and practice of *kastom* as reified tradition when it appears in distinction to other traditions. Oppositions between Tongoa and other places emerge clearly within this understanding of *kastom*. A central theme within this dialogue of Tongoan *kastom* is an understanding of *kastom* as lived practice, a way of being that is grounded literally and metaphysically in the island itself. Both strands contain clear referents to ideas of a pre-colonial past. The enactment of *kastom* (*mekem kastom*, 'making kastom') in Tongoan life today is, however, shaped by and within everyday practice. Purau people relate many aspects of everyday life to an idea of *kastom*; court cases and ways of leasing and passing on land are, for example, couched in terms of *kastom* rules or law (*kastom loa*). Notions of 'making *kastom*’ as lived practice and reified tradition are associated respectively with local and national spaces.

The construction of the island as local space versus the centre represented by Port Vila and national institutions such as the VCC occurs in every domain of life on the island. The cash
economy and the modern education system are the definitive entities identified as ‘not kastom’ by Tonga people today. These institutions both contribute to and are derived from the separate spaces of local and national. When Tongans talk today of the customary obligations one has to kin and others such as chiefs, these obligations are counterpoised to transactions within the cash economy. It is as such that obligations to support one’s kin (with material contributions to the navagogotoana for example) are spoken of as Tonga kastom.

Other practices such as those surrounding childbirth, for example, are distinguished between those associated with kastom and those associated with other structures such as the hospital. Childbirth in the village, attended by a village woman known to have midwifery knowledge and skills is spoken of as a completely different process to childbirth in the small island clinic or Port Vila hospital. The births that I witnessed in Purau were explicitly referred to as kastom in a way that childbirth in the clinic or hospital supervised by nurses (sometimes from other islands) is not. The knowledge that the village midwife has is called kastom knowledge and is spoken of as being of the island. At a village meeting in Purau farea, for example, Chief Tarisaliu spoke of his concern that this traditional kastom knowledge of midwifery must not be lost by an over reliance on external structures; these might, he said, turn out to be ephemeral and the knowledge that is truly fixed in Tonga must not be forgotten. Kastom thus emerges as a way to think about knowledge and identity indigenous to Tonga in contrast to other forms and sources of knowledge which are to some extent viewed to be from beyond the island and deriving from other spaces. This opposition calls to mind the structuring of the alternative spaces for consumption of pig meat mentioned in chapter 2: pork is not considered a suitable
substance for sale in stores but is consumed in the main within the arena of customary obligations.

Clearly, an idea of *kastom* as knowledge of *plies* begins to emerge: knowledge that is of Tongoa, of the *aelan* (island) and *plies*. *Kastom* thus becomes a way of speaking about identity, about being Tongan vis-à-vis other islands and countries. The idea of *kastom* is used to conceptually unite the Shepherd Islands into a homogenous region in the face of the difference represented by the other islands of Vanuatu. The Malvatumauri representative from the Shepherds stated at the opening of the Shepherd Islands Chiefs' 1996 conference that: "*skin mo fasin mo langwis blong man i soem se hu nao i ril man Sepad*" (‘a person’s skin, way of being and language shows whether they are truly Shepherd Islanders’ Tarimasa of Makura Island 6/5/96). Language also links ideas of *kastom* and *plies*. For example, a woman from another island married to a Purau man observed to me that children who only speak Bislama and not *langwis* (‘language’; *Nakanamaga*) do not have the proper respect for elders and the chief as do children whose first language of choice is the local *Nakanamaga*. In this dialogue *kastom* is firmly tied to *plies*: island versus town, Vanuatu versus the rest of the world. *Kastom* is precisely used as a mark of difference between Efate as the national centre and the Shepherd Islands: "*Efate i lusum kastom finis*" (‘Efate has lost it’s *kastom* already’), and they have taken *kastom* from *olbaot* (‘everywhere and nowhere’ Joseph Marakitapu, 25/3/97). The notion of *plies* thus grounds what is real, true *kastom*.

*Kastom* as knowledge of *plies* is also, however, a way of speaking about land and a means of voicing contesting claims to land. In these terms *kastom* as knowledge grounded in, and of, *plies* specifically becomes a resource. To draw upon one’s *kastom* knowledge of land

193
history to speak in court cases is to possess a tangible resource that allows one to speak knowledgeably and convincingly and has the power to positively affect the outcome of the dispute. Chiefs occupy a particular position within these dialogues of kastom and land.

The position of 'traditional chiefs' at a national level has been codified in the form of the 'Malvatumauri' (National Council of Chiefs) and written into the constitution of Vanuatu (Lindstrom 1997). The Council of Shepherd Island chiefs, the Maraki Vanua Riki (MVR),⁹ is seeking to codify the position of nawota ('paramount chiefs') by formulating official policies and passing laws. In doing so, the Maraki Vanua Riki utilises and to some extent appropriates the language of kastom, appealing directly to kastom as a means of reinforcing the ideology of original land distribution and paramount chiefs as the source of all land.

The Maraki Vanua Riki was founded in 1981 on Tongoa following independence and the establishment of the National Council of Chiefs. The Maraki Vanua Riki is conceived of as fitting into this larger structure. The laws and constitution discussed and passed at the 1996 conference are broadly similar in outline to the Malvatumauri public policy on kastom (Malvatumauri 1983; Bolton 1998; Lindstrom 1997). Each paramount chief (nawota) is automatically deemed to be a member of the Island Council of Chiefs and all members of the Island Council of Chiefs are automatically members of the MVR. The MVR thus incorporates everyone in the Shepherds and seeks to define the entire chieftainship system and Tongoa society within its logic:

⁹ Maraki Vanua Riki is Nakanamaga: maraki: man or men; vanua: island; riki: chief (also small).
In May 1996 the MVR held its eleventh conference on Makura Island which lies between Efate and Tongoa. The two week conference was attended by chiefs, delegates and executives of the MVR from Tongoa, Buninga, Tongariki, Emae, Makura and Mataso Islands. The 1996 meetings were chaired by the MVR Chairman TiTongoaroto, nawota of BongaBonga village, Tongoa. The panel (Chairman, Secretary, Vice Chairman, Vice Secretary) sat at a table positioned at the head of the room. Anyone approaching the panel bowed low whilst passing in front of the chiefs as is appropriate to show respect. Respect for the chief is a greatly emphasised aspect of correct kastom fasin ('kastom' behaviour').

---

10 Makura is in the centre of the Shepherds Group and in the past served as a stopping place on canoe journeys between Efate and Tongoa. The fact that Makura is situated at a cross-roads of the Shepherd Islands was not the overt reason that the MVR meeting was held there however. The previous MVR meeting was held on Tongoa and the 1997 meeting was being planned to take place on Emae Island.
The MVR elects its own executive members and nominates candidates for the Malvatumauri and the Provincial Council of Chiefs\(^\text{11}\). Chiefs dominate membership of the MVR and paramount chiefs dominate the executive. Of the six executive positions (Chairman, Vice Chairman, Secretary, Vice Secretary, Treasurer, Vice Treasurer) and the two Assistants to the MVR executive all but one position, that of Vice Secretary, are filled by Tongoan paramount chiefs. The next tier down from the executive in the MVR structure is the Island Council of Chiefs. This is the institution through which paramount chiefs of each village on each island have regular contact with each other.

Many issues were discussed by the chiefs, their \textit{nakainaga} and the other discussants, but attempts by paramount chiefs to tighten land relations and land transmission dominated the 1996 meetings. These attempts formed part of a more general move to codify aspects of what is called \textit{kastom loa} (‘traditional law’) which details the position of paramount chiefs (\textit{nawota}) vis-à-vis other title holders (\textit{nakainaga}). Relations between \textit{nawota} and \textit{nakainaga} were ruled upon: \textit{nakainaga} must make \textit{nasautonga} (allegiance payment of a pig) and \textit{vakasokoro} (payment made to landowner by garden maker) every second year and with every new garden respectively. Great emphasis was placed upon the payments that a \textit{nawota}'s men should make to him according to \textit{kastom}, but there was no corresponding emphasis on the return that the \textit{nawota} is obligated to make: a mat in return for \textit{vakasokoro} and an exchange called \textit{natug ni mova}, consisting of a small cooked pig and \textit{laplap} prepared by the \textit{nawota}'s \textit{takariki} (‘small brothers’) in exchange for \textit{nasautonga}.

Accompanying the general move to codify \textit{nawota-nakainaga} relations was an attempt to codify the \textit{kastom} history of all the titles of the Shepherds including who has the right to

\(^{11}\) Shefa Province which is made up of Efate Island, the Shepherd Islands and Epi Island.
bestow each title ("hu nao i gat raet long strei kastom blong stap holem hed long jif");

‘who is it that has the undisputed customary right to hold the head of the chief’ TiTongoaroto of Tongoa, MVR Chairman 7/5/96). A newly created MVR constitution was also to be approved. The constitution models the system of chiefs, titles and land to be very straightforward as depicted in figure 3.0. The constitution was presented in the meeting as “hemi stamba blong kastom blong yum” (‘it is the root/source of our tradition’ Api Naviti 8/5/96). A recurrent theme in the discussions around relations between paramount chiefs (nawota) and the men who owe allegiance to them was the attempts of the nawota to restate themselves as the source of land.

This attempt by the paramount chiefs to firmly reassert themselves as the source of land and to reassert their control over land distribution did not go unchallenged however. The assertion that only paramount chiefs could be landowners provoked a debate over the term ‘landowner’ itself. A separation between notions of ‘land owner’ and ‘kastom owner’ subsequently developed. This separation reflects the tension between the paramount chiefs who maintain that they are the source of all land within the chieftainship and the assertions of napau nawota (‘small chiefs’) and other nakainaga. These latter men assert that the original distribution of land by chiefs happened long ago and the land is now in their control. The assertion that “graon i seraot fini” (‘the land is already allocated’ Masoeragi 9/5/96) was made when a Mataso Island man distinguished between the paramount chief as ‘land owner’ and the man ‘behind him’ (the nakainaga) who makes kastom prestations (nasautonga) to this chief and ‘carries’ land from him. This latter man he characterised as being the kastom owner. Almost before he had finished this statement, the Chairman of the MVR interjected that the reverse is in fact the case; the paramount chief is the kastom owner of the land because he and only he has the kastom rights to it. Another member of
the MVR committee went on to assert that the land is the property of the paramount chief and title holders are “ overseers” only. The man he grants land to is leasing (*lisim*) the land only and has no *kastom* rights to it. The previous arrival of lower ranking chiefs who initially divided the land and then handed over to the *nawota* is a common feature of many of the oral histories of Shepherd Island paramount chiefs. From the narrative of Tarisaliu’s migration in chapter 3 we can see that this was also the case on Tongoa, with Mariwota and Manaroto already present on Tongoa and already having earmarked land. Tessier’s compilation of oral histories documents a number of such cases, including the villages of Ravenga, Lubukuti and Lupalea on Tongoa (Tessier n.d). At the 1996 MVR meeting, however, the paramount chiefs insisted that the ancestors who held their titles were the first to arrive and ‘ find’ the land which they then distributed to the men who came after them.

As a body the MVR is made up of the paramount chiefs and can be seen to have a vested interest in reinforcing an ideology of *nawota* as the source of and dominant authority over land. The number of people leaving the island has meant serious changes in the constituencies of the *nawota* and the claims that they can make on the *namarakian* (people within the *nawota*’s domain). New opportunities to leave the island have meant that the road to gaining material wealth or status is no longer solely through chiefly titles. For example, Church structures, particularly those of the large nationally established Presbyterian Church, represent significant ways to pursue positions of authority and respect. Such positions also offer prestigious opportunities to travel in order to train or attend large meetings. These changes have seen an accompanying shift in attitudes towards the *nawota*: one young Purau man commented to me that the reason people leave the village and go to town is to get away from the chief and be able to follow their individual ends. In particular, he said, this meant to build up their own resources rather than have to
do the work of the chief all the time. Such comments reveal the tension between the *kastom* space of the title system centred on the island and the spaces of town that offer alternative structures.

The discussion of the VCC pointed out that while the VCC is a central institution in national dialogues of *kastom* in Vanuatu, its programmes such as the OTP and the WCP avoid references to land within its formulations of *kastom* and actively discourage fieldworkers from becoming involved in issues of land. Land is a contentious issue. The reception of the WCP on Tongoa shows, however, that *kastom* also has the potential to be the subject of controversy, and at the very least, is not neutral. Understandings of *kastom* as knowledge of *pies* and specifically, knowledge of land history, is particularly charged. As the discussion of how Tongoans received the WCP's definitions of mats as *kastom* shows, however, mats are not controversial within Tongoan understanding of *kastom*. As uncontroversial objects in the rites of land transmission, for example, mats possibly allow statements about people and land that cannot be made in other ways.

The discussion of the implementation of the WCP on Tongoa illustrates that mats are considered objects of *kastom* on Tongoa, but not within the same paradigm as WCP understandings. Ideas of the meanings and relevance of *kastom* on the island are articulated, in the main, within the institutions, practices and values surrounding the chieftainship. As such, mats as objects of *kastom* are primarily associated with chiefs' *kastom* rather than women's *kastom*. As objects of chiefs' *kastom* mats both produce and derive meanings within the enactment of title-land relations. Within this realm mats are objects of the relations of *pies* on the island and in the region. It is their identity as manifestations of *pies* that the second section of the thesis now turns to.
Section Two

Metaphors of Reproduction

Introduction

The first section of this thesis examined contemporary Tongoan concerns with the connections between persons and places. Land relations assume a central role within the reckoning of such connections and the institution of chiefly titles dominates contemporary land relations. The mutually defining relationship between an individual and the land that is their *pies* which is apparent throughout Vanuatu is, on Tongoa, encapsulated and exemplified in the especial relationship between title-holder and land plot. Section Two picks up these themes of land and *pies* and pinpoints the issues within a detailed discussion of the mat itself. The three chapters of the second section examine how the links between person and place are manifested in mat production and explores how mats are implicated within the social reproduction of connections between people and place.

Chapter 5 examines the processes that bring the mat into being and analyses the technical and social relations of production. The detailed discussion of the technology of weaving reflects an analytical choice: I argue that examining the process through a step by step analysis reveals something of the material and social identities of Tongoan mats. This approach is also particularly appropriate for this material tradition. Unlike other mat traditions in Vanuatu Tongoan mats are not divided into different categories for diverse quotidian and ritual purposes. Therefore, considering what it is that constitutes a mat - its material and technical specifications rather than its colour, pattern or decoration - illuminates what this form effects.
Detailed examination of the processes of production reveals the important cultural connections and affinities drawn between women's productive and reproductive labour and the mat she weaves. But the wider social relations which produce the mat indicate a more important underlying theme: that of male and female principles joining. The discussion of baskets in chapter 5 illuminates an underlying symbolic opposition between pandanus and coconut within another woven form on Tongoa. Like mats, baskets are divided into those made from pandanus, and those made from coconut frond. Unlike mats, however, diverse baskets within both categories reflect different types of social activity and are very clearly divided into those used in conjunction with domestic tasks and those used in presentation and exchange. The opposition between pandanus and coconut reflects a parallel opposition between baskets associated with male and female use.

A theme of symbolic male and female principles joining in social reproduction runs through the second section. Sexual reproduction is adumbrated in the very act of weaving and the substance or body of the mat emerges from the matrix of the reproductive space of the marital garden. Diverse social and spatial domains are pulled together and made co-present in the processes of mat-making: the garden, the namatana, the volcanic edge of the island (a space associated with Kuwae and the original landing sites of chiefs) and the seashore. A theme of the spatial organisation of place forms a second powerful theme within the section.

Chapter 6 pulls these themes together in an analysis of the material form of the mat. The chapter considers the spatial organisation of place on the island and examines the connections drawn between people and the place they inhabit. People and place are mutually defining and constitutive on Tongoa. The important concept of 'roads' between
places becomes the means of orientating people within the world. Mats are important objects and expressions of this process. The references made to people and place within the form of the mat combine in a material metaphor for the emplacement of people and, in effect, the creation of *ples*.

The social and technical specifications of mats in both ceremonial and quotidian use act to effect the attachment and detachment of person to place throughout individuals lives. Lifecycle events are key moments in this process. Chapter 7 examines the ceremonial use and exchange of mats in these events and argues that mats are important mechanisms for creating and breaking connections between people and place. Chapter 7 brings the themes of both sections of the thesis together. The analysis of chiefs and land, and the exploration of mats as material forms that enable the attachment and detachment of persons to place, are brought together in a consideration of the ritual transferral of chiefly titles.
Chapter Five

The Technology of Weaving and the (Re)Production of Mats

5.0 Introduction

One day an old woman was working in her garden, burning all the debris. Closeby there was a tabu stone. Inside this stone lived a bird, its name is namare. The old woman piled the rubbish by this stone and burnt it. The bird, hearing the crackle of the fire flew out in time to escape burning, but when it returned, the mats that it slept on had been burnt. It said to the woman: “look what you have done”. She tried to compensate by bringing it some dry banana leaf and coconut fronds to sleep on. The bird was dissatisfied with this, however, claiming that it was not a real bed. That night the woman slept and in her dream the bird showed her how to pick and prepare the wild pandanus (nakiekieh), and how to weave the simplest weaving style, one over one (nambatisika). It then brought the woman inside the tabu stone and showed her the mat designs marked there. The next morning when the woman woke up she neither stopped to eat nor drink but immediately began to recreate what the bird had shown her. This is how women learned to make mats and the designs on them. Abridged version of story told by Rebecca Pakoa 11/10/96 in both Bislama and Namakura. Translated by S.Kelly and Leibunua Winnie.

A story that accounts for the origin of mats on Tongoa seems a suitable place to begin the technical description of weaving. Tongoan pandanus mats, unlike the mats of Ambae and Pentecost to the north, are not differentiated into named categories according to physical form and ritual use. This lack of differentiation can be seen in the physical similarity of mats used for domestic use, such as sleeping and sitting on, and those used in lifecycle exchanges, fine payments and ceremonial use. Furthermore, this physical similarity is compounded by the fact that any pandanus mat can be used for any purpose: contemporary

---

1 Emerald ground dove (manukaven; sotleg; ‘chalcophaps indica’). This ground dwelling bird has green wings with a white spot (Crowley 1995).
pandanus mats are not distinguished by external characteristics or decoration for particular destination or function. Pandanus mats do differ sharply in form and use from coconut leaf mats (katafau) however. Firstly there is the most immediate distinction of material - coconut and pandanus leaf. This basic opposition can also be clearly seen in the different types of baskets woven on Tongoa. The opposition between the coconut palm and the pandanus palm underlies a number of themes within ideas about weaving and people in Tongoa.

There are seven varieties of pandanus (nakieh, 'pandanus tectorius') on Tongoa. Some are considered and named to be 'wild' and are not cultivated or used in weaving. The following named varieties of wild pandanus and their characteristics are identified on Tongoa today. Firstly, nakiekieh grows in the bush and does not bear fruit. This is the variety of pandanus that the bird showed the woman how to make mats with in the story of the origin of mats. The second variety is named nambarau. This type of pandanus grows on the seashore and has long thorns along each side of its leaves. A third variety is named nafaku which grows in the bush and bears fruit that can be eaten. This variety does not have thorns but rather short palm-like leaves growing at a great height on long trunks.

Two varieties of this wild pandanus grow near the seashore and in the 'bush' (nambarau and nakiekieh respectively) and have thorns growing along the sides of their leaves. The thorns are often mentioned as the reason that these types of pandanus are not considered suitable for weaving, although on other islands thorned pandanus varieties are used (Bolton 1993: 376). There are four or more pandanus varieties planted and used for weaving on

---

2 I was not able to identify each variety according to individual scientific name but give pandanus tectorius as a generic species (following Walter 1996).
Tongoa. They are all called by the generic term *nakieh* meaning pandanus but are further distinguished by their physical characteristics. The physical differences in the cultivated varieties of pandanus are explained to be located in the leaves: two kinds have long leaves, another short, one is distinguished by thorns and the final is known by its pale leaves (*nakietau - tau* meaning white). *Nakietau* is sometimes planted around the house to decorate the area and make it visually pleasing. I did not see this variety (nor the one with thorns) being used to weave with. Another name for the short leaf variety is *nakieh malakisa* (*malakisa*: green). This is no longer widely used and women seem to prefer the longer leaved variety. The varieties are also sometimes distinguished according to their provenance. Thus the long leaf variety is named ‘Atchin’ (Atchin Island to the north east of Malakula Island), and the thorny variety is said to have come from Buninga Island, just to the south of Tongoa.

Of these varieties, the one most widely used on Tongoa is the long leaved variety ‘Atchin’. As the width of the mat is limited by the leaf length women sometimes speak of long leaves being better because one can weave large mats. Conversely, however, a comment by one woman indicated that short leaves means that the mat will be completed quickly. This conversation took place whilst Serah and I were walking through gardens and Serah stopped to admire a particular clump of pandanus. This fully mature pandanus had leaves growing especially high and Serah commented: “*mat i stap krae antap*” (‘the mat is up there crying’). This comment indicates an interesting equivalence between pandanus as material and mat as product. In Bislama pandanus is often called *lif mat* (‘mat leaf’) and I often heard pandanus even though still growing referred to as mat. When I asked Serah to explain her comment, she said that the mat (pandanus) was crying “*from we hemi sori long han blong yumí*” (‘because it was missing the hands of the women who should weave it’).
A conceptual equivalence between pandanus and mat is set up by the means through which one becomes the other, namely, women’s hands.

5.1 The Social Relations and Conceptual Associations of Pandanus Production

Pandanus is cultivated specifically for weaving mats and the processes by which the mat comes into being originate in the establishment of the garden. This fact poses very different connections that mats and mat making have to other aspects of Tongoa culture than would be the case if the raw material was gathered from non-cultivated species. For example, in MacKenzie’s study of the bilum, she lists in detail all the species (including pandanus) which Telefol women use to spin string, but does not mention how these species may or may not fit into wider symbolic structures (MacKenzie 1991). Importantly, however, the species used in bilum making are all non-cultivated. In contrast, the pandanus used to make mats is cultivated in the garden - a highly significant space in Tongoa cultural thought. Tongoa practice can be contrasted with central Pentecost where Walter reports that women have their own pandanus plants located “all around the village” not necessarily within the garden (Walter 1996:103).

Pandanus cultivated for weaving is grown in the garden along with food crops. It is propagated by cutting an offshoot from an established plant. This offshoot is then planted in the earth with its leaves tied neatly together in a bundle (see plate 5.0). Other plants which are reproduced in this way include taro, banana and an important crop in Vanuatu, lif laplap (nalikau), the leaf used to wrap the large puddings cooked in stone ovens. The propagation of these plants can be contrasted with other crops such as wild cabbage, manioc and sweet potato which are reproduced by planting a cutting of a single leaf or stalk. Pandanus is planted around the periphery of a garden plot and thus bounds the
Plate 5.0
Pandanus newly planted in the garden.
garden and all it contains. Along with certain other plants, notably the coconut palm, the pandanus transcends the lifecycle of a particular garden. Very old garden sites that no longer have even banana or papaw trees which also last beyond the lifecycle of a garden will still have coconut palms and pandanus palms. These are left to simply age until they rot away.

As seen in chapter 3, unlike coconut and other fruit trees, pandanus remains identified with the person who planted it when the garden maker has moved on from that plot of land. In conversation with one informant, I asked whether this differentiation between pandanus and coconut existed because one did not eat pandanus, whereas coconut and other fruits are eaten. He replied no, the reason why pandanus is treated differently is because: "pandanas hemi samting blong woman" ('pandanus is a women’s object'). The association between pandanus and woman is in fact a commentary on the strong, almost mutually defining, association between women and weaving. In conversation with a woman some time later, this phrase samting blong woman was used again, this time explained further by stating the reason pandanus belongs to women is because only women know how to make mats. Again, a strong identification and equivalence between pandanus, mat and woman emerges. Just as we can see a tie between women and the pandanus palm either as planter, or otherwise associated as the owner of that particular plant, a counter identification of men with the coconut palm (and also other fruit trees) emerges. The connections between men and land underlines this; while coconut palms remain conceptually fixed to the land and male landowner, the pandanus palm is not fixed

---

3 Other plants that do not remain fixed to the land they are planted on include naowi koa (wild yam) and nalikau (tif laplap; leaves to wrap laplap puddings). The connection between women and nalikau (and indeed, between mats and nalikau as objects used to wrap) is easy to identify. Wild yam is perhaps counterpoised to the domestic yam (naowi) which is the object of chiefly relations and men vis-à-vis men.
to this male entity, but is mobile, (like women themselves who move in marriage) and
'moves' with the person who planted them.

A pandanus plant will usually grow enough for leaves to be harvested and processed to
weave after about one year. The pandanus will continue to grow bigger and develop more
and more branch offshoots over a long lifecycle of fifteen plus years (plate 5.1). One old
woman in Purau who no longer wove because of deteriorating eyesight had planted
pandanus many years before on a *fanua* that had not been used as a garden in over ten
years. At the time of fieldwork, the *fanua* was planted with a coconut plantation belonging
to her twin grandsons (son's sons). There were no other signs that this *fanua* had once
been planted as a garden other than these fully mature pandanus plants. Although
pandanus is sometimes planted by men (usually for their wives) it is harvested by women
and young girls. To harvest pandanus one cuts individual leaves close to the root of the
clump in which the leaves grow tightly clustered together. A large armful of leaves will
then be fastened with another leaf and carried on one's head back to the household or to
*Natorotoro* (a site of volcanic activity by the seashore) in preparation for the first stage of
processing the pandanus (see plate 5.2).

The first stage of processing pandanus is to dry and thus whiten it. There are a number of
ways of doing this: by simply spreading the leaves out in the hot sun, usually on surfaces
such as corrugated iron roofs that absorb a great deal of heat. The volcanic area below the
village known as *Natorotoro* is also utilised as a place to spread out pandanus. *Natorotoro*
is a landscape of bare rock by the seashore that reaches fairly high temperatures (though
comfortable enough to walk on in flip-flops) due to the volcanic activity beneath the earth.
In places close-by one can see steam issuing from fissures in the rock. This volcanic
Plate 5.1
Mature pandanus palm with bundle of *nagaruta* at its base.
Plate 5.2 Carrying pandanus to Natorotoro to dry.

Plate 5.3
Mats and mat-making permeate the domestic space: house interior with rolls of pandanus, partially completed mats and folded mat tucked into the rafters.
activity is related to the Kuwae caldera (large volcanic depression) discussed in the introductory chapter. Pandanus is carried here, usually direct from the garden, and left to dry for a few days. Other ways of drying and whitening the leaves include plunging them into boiling water before spreading them out in the sun. The method that I saw used most often, however, was for the green leaves to be baked in the stone oven (fufu) that had just been used to cook food (usually, though not exclusively, for the Sunday meal).

The fufu is made by building a large wood fire over a shallow stone-lined depression in the earth floor of the peva (cooking house). More stones are piled carefully on top of the fire which will burn vigorously for between one and two hours until all the wood is burnt away and the stones are red-hot. Prepared food bundles of nakoau (laplap pudding) are laid down on the lining of stones and larger stones are piled over them. The whole is then covered with layers of old leaves, fresh leaves, old burlap sacks and mats. After a period of 2-4 hours depending on the number and type of nakoau bundles, (and also experienced judgement of the heat of the stones), the food bundles are removed from the oven, and the still hot rocks are refilled with pandanus and covered up again in just the same manner as was used to cook the food. It is interesting to note that food bundles wrapped up in leaves were sometimes cooked in the volcanic steam of Natorotoro in the past. Connections between food and pandanus are made at the level of everyday practice: uncooked food is carried from the garden in pandanus baskets, seeds from previous gardens are wrapped in pandanus packets and both food and pandanus are transformed in similar ways from products of the garden to more obviously objects of culture. ‘Cooked’ in the same oven, both pandanus and food are rendered softer, and transformed from one state to another.
One exception to this stage of processing is the type of pandanus known as *naguruta*. This pandanus is not a different plant but refers to a different processing technique. *Naguruta* is pandanus collected from the bottom of the pandanus plant where the leaves have been left to dry on the plant (see plate 5.1). *Naguruta* is not then subjected to a further whitening treatment but is left its natural brown colour. It is stronger than pandanus harvested green and is used exclusively to make sturdy carrying baskets (*rekete*). The green pandanus that has been left in the stone oven is removed after three or four days and is sometimes left until the next Sunday meal. One now has a bunch of dried pale pandanus leaves that are crumpled and creased. The next task is to straighten and smooth them in preparation for weaving. At this point, both pandanus that has been dried and *naguruta* are at the same stage of processing. More care will be taken with smoothing out the former however. A round flat shell collected specifically from the seashore (*kai*)\(^4\) is used to scrape the pandanus leaf along its length, drawing it between one’s hand and the edge of the shell. As this repetitive, almost meditative action is carried out, the leaf is turned over and over, thus ensuring that both sides are evenly worked. At this stage of processing, a right and wrong side of the pandanus leaf emerges; the right side is slightly smoother and corresponds to the upper surface of the leaf as it grows on the plant. The wrong side is slightly rougher and more striated and corresponds to the underside of the growing leaf. The right side will be uppermost in the initial weaving process and becomes the right side of the mat that is always uppermost when the mat is spread out.

\(^4\) This shellfish lives attached to rocks along the coast. It is a common shellfish and is popular cooked in the *laplap* pudding cooked on Sundays. Sometimes the shells left over from eating are used in the processing of pandanus but more often a *kai* shell will be collected with this task in mind; large shells with a regular edge and circumference are preferred. *Kai* shells are also passed between women: on one occasion when I was going to Port Vila, I was given a number of *kai* shells by a Purau woman with instructions to pass them to her sons’ wives who lived in town and did not have easy access to the shore nor necessarily the right to collect shellfish. This mirrors the movement of other objects (food, cooking stones, pandanus and finished mats) from island to town that serve to underpin the opposition between these two spaces and highlight issues of identity associated with island and *pies* (see chapter 6).
After scraping the leaves, a woman has a loosely piled heap of straightened smooth leaves. If she is going to store the pandanus for future use, the next task is to roll it into a large flat wheel shape by rolling the leaves one after the other around her hand. When it is about the size of a large plate she will fasten it with a length of pandanus through the central hole and hang it up somewhere in the house away from children, animals and the direct smoke of the cooking fire (see plate 5.3). If preparing naguruta a woman will not scrape and smooth it with a kai shell as the nature of naguruta is its coarseness and strength. Naguruta is simply smoothed out with one's fingers and rolled into a wheel for storage. Pandanus can be kept this way for any number of months, as long a women wants, but will eventually get darker with age and exposure to smoke.

5.2 Technical Description of Weaving

The first task in weaving is to take a slim sharp implement called sieh made of wild cane (nara) and remove the extreme edges of the pandanus leaf. Following this the leaf is divided along its central spine to create two even straight-edged lengths of pandanus ready to split into weaving elements. This division of the leaf into two echoes a motif of pairing that is present throughout the whole process of mat-making and mat use. The finished mat has two identical panels, one must always give equal numbers of mats in exchange and the number of mats buried in the grave must be equal. Continuing to use the sieh, the next step is to slice into the length of pandanus so that from an uncut section at the top, strands or ribbons of even width descend (see diagram 5.0). Depending on how fine a woman wants the resulting weave, or how quickly she wishes to finish the mat (the finer the strand, the more elements and the longer the weaving time) - or as was sometimes suggested to

---

5 The technical term for the process of making Tongoa mats is 'oblique interlacing' (Emory 1980), but I follow Bolton (1993) in using the more generic term weaving as sufficient to describe the process.
me, the more accomplished a weaver she is - any number of strands may be created. The number usually cut is four or five. The resulting length of pandanus is called nalakena (tree trunk; beginning of; reason for). All these meanings come together in the Bislama word used to translate nalakena: stamba. This word not only means tree trunk, but also source, beginning, foundation and essence of. All these permutations make sense in thinking of the essential building block which begins the mat. Further conceptual associations of the nalakena are considered in the next chapter.

The next action is to join these lengths in pairs. Two nalakena are taken and interwoven at their tops at the point where the uncut sections end (see diagram 5.1). Two verbs can be used for the action of making this initial element of the mat: the first (sarakinia) is also used for the action of pinning clothes on the line to dry. The second verb (sokaria) means to 'join together' more generally and is used in relation to objects such as the nalakena and later the two sides of the mat (see below). Sokaria also can be used to indicate the joining together of non-material things such as a story or speech. In one conversation I was told that one could refer to this inter-woven building block as a han (tree branch), but that it is not generally named. Once the nalakena are joined into pairs, these units are laid side by side and interlocked into one long line (see diagram 5.2). This forms the starting edge of the mat and will determine it's overall length. The verb to connect each cross-joined 'han' is vativati. This action forms the starting edge of the mat with one layer of weaving elements crossing a contrasting layer. At this stage, the weaver will place heavy stones called molimoli along the starting edge. These stones are large, flat and smooth and are carried up from the seashore especially for this purpose. Molimoli are not used for anything else. One woman described molimoli to me as a 'ruler' (rula blong mat). They are spoken of as essential for the mat to progress properly; they hold it in place and ensure
Diagram 5.0 *Nalakena* weaving components split into *nambatin*.

Diagram 5.1 *Nalakena* interwoven to create the building block of the mat.

Diagram 5.2 *Nalakena* interlocked to form the starting edge of the mat.
the correct shape. In addition, the molimoli impart to the mat the desired qualities of heaviness and strength.

Beginning at one side of the starting edge, the weaver will start weaving by raising a section of elements. She then separates the contrasting layer of elements and lowers one of the previously raised elements across them (diagram 5.3). It is the method of parting the lower layer of weaving elements before placing down the contrasting element that creates different weaves. There are a number of these patterns ranging from the most simple batisikai (a one over one pattern), to two over one, two over two and combinations thereof. These combinations are also used to create rows of image patterns that are woven to feature against a simpler background pattern. These motifs are repeated down the length of the mat as the weaver works along the length of the starting edge weaving from right to left. When she has reached the end of the starting edge, the weaver turns the mat over and works along the length once more, adding another panel to the first. These panels are called napua (road, ‘path’). Weaving the first of these ‘roads’ is called a pativatia (mi wokem nambawan rod; ‘I am making the first road’), the second is also indicated by a verb, a paratia: mi wokem nambatu rod (I am making the second road). Later roads are referred to simply as napua ketolu, napua kevali (third road, fourth road).

Once the first road is completed, the weaver has a long narrow strip of woven pandanus. The second road usually duplicates the motifs the maker wove down the first ‘road’. Sometimes however, a mat is composed of rows of different motifs, nala ni rarua (canoe

---

6 See appendix 1 for a inventory of weaves and patterns.
Diagram 5.3 Weaving action: taking a weaving element (nambatin) and bringing it down across contrasting elements.
sail) along the first, masoi (star) along the second and so on. This is more common on the single panel mat garments worn by men as kastom discussed in the previous chapter. There are usually three or four roads in the first section of the mat. Older, more experienced weavers can have wider roads and still maintain the quality of the weave, while younger weavers will have narrower roads and thus may have more. Once a woman has reached the end of the final napua, she will close the edge with a finishing weave (see appendix 1). This completes the first half of the mat.

When the bird in the origin story shows the old woman how to weave, it teaches her how to make a one-sided mat. The codicil to the tale is that the woman created the later development of adding a second panel to the first, thus generating the form that mats take today on Tongoa. This second panel is added on the first by the following method: when the first panel is completed one has a narrow oblong that is finished on all sides except for the initial starting edge which has the uncut criss-crossing tops of the initial starting leaves (nalakena) along it (see plate 5.4). The weaver then takes a sharp knife or sieh and slices these uncut tops into short strands (the same number as the rest of the leaf which is now woven into the body of the mat). There is now an upper layer of short strands crossing a lower layer. The weaver then takes single nalakena and interweaves each (sokaria) along the upper layer of strands in the same manner that the ‘han’ were initially created (diagram 5.1). That is, she takes the short strands and interweaves them with the top of the new nalakena. The weaver then turns the mat over and taking more nalakena interweaves (katuturufaki) them with the lower layer of short strands creating the contrasting weaving elements for the second half of the mat. This results in a completed half mat with the long strands of the new nalakena creating new weaving elements extending from a central seam.
Plate 5.4
The first panel of the mat showing initial starting edge on the right.
Weaving the second side mimics the initial weaving action for the first half except where occasionally the contrasting elements are different lengths. The weaver overcomes this by interposing long single elements in place of the short strands, as she lifts up the contrasting elements in the desired pattern (e.g. every other element for a one over one pattern). When the weaver completes the second panel, she now has the basic form of the mat intact. There are a number of different finishing patterns for the lateral sides, leaving fringes \textit{(tataki firi)} for example, and the ends of the mat (see appendices 1 and 2). Different verbs indicate finishing the sides and ends of the mat; the former is referred to by the verb \textit{takisia} (‘closing the edge’) while weaving the end is referred to as \textit{kekelu} (‘finishing the end’). Once the lateral sides \textit{(findina)} and ends \textit{(namatana)} are completed, the only tasks left are to trim the unused part of the pandanus ribbons extending beyond the finished mat and to cut away the tops of the \textit{nalakena} that extend down the central seam. The structure of the mat is thus revealed: two identical panels divided and joined by a central seam (diagram 5.4). An essential structural feature of the mat is that its second half is always, and must be, a mirror image of the first.

\textbf{5.2i) The Making of Katafau Mats}

Both pandanus mats \textit{(nagbanu)} and coconut palm leaf mats \textit{(katafau)} are referred by the generic category of \textit{mat} in Bislama. The \textit{katafau} is produced and used in very different ways to the pandanus mat. The \textit{katafau} is much simpler and quicker to make, is not elaborated with patterns and colour, and it is not exchanged in its own right at lifecycle events. The \textit{katafau} is made from a single large coconut frond cut close to the palm trunk. This frond is usually carried to the house and woven while still green and flexible. No processing is carried out before weaving, other than the woody central spine of the frond
Diagram 5.4 Basic mat structure: two panels made up of roads
being trimmed so that it lies flatter. Other than this, the leaf is simply laid out and, using a one over one pattern, the leaves extending from either side of the central spine are woven. First one side then the other is worked, replicating the framework of producing a pandanus mat. The sides of the katafau are closed off with a weave that turns the excess leaf length inwards on the underside of the mat.

Just like the pandanus mat, the katafau has an upperside and an underside that is determined by the growth of the coconut frond. Nagbanu and katafau are different sizes, the latter being restricted by the size of the coconut leaf frond, but they share the common structure of being constructed around a central seam. In both the context of the house and ceremonial spheres, katafau play an accompanying role to the nagbanu. In the house katafau are primarily used to line the floor underneath pandanus mats - a less visible but essential counterpart to the nagbanu. Katafau are also sometimes used to block the entrance of traditional ekopu ni Tongoa (see chapter 2). The katafau is the humbler of the two, playing a somewhat subordinate, yet equally important role. The katafau mediates between the nagbanu and the ground; when pandanus mats are spread out to sit on under the tapaupau, under the shade of a tree, or in the farea meeting house, katafau are always placed between them and the ground.

5.2ii) Weaving Baskets

---

7 The coconut leaf mat is almost universal throughout other Pacific mat making cultures. It does not always take the same form as the Tongoan katafau however. For example, in Tonga, the coconut leaf mat (polo) is woven with the central spine of the frond forming one side rather than a central seam as in central Vanuatu (van der Grijp 1995:206).
There are a great many more basket types within the Tongoan panoply of baskets than there are of mats. Just as the division between coconut and pandanus leaf is the most important division in the category of mat, the category 'basket' (*nala*) is also internally distinguished into coconut leaf baskets and pandanus leaf baskets. Baskets are just as useful and needed in everyday life on Tongoa as mats. In contrast to mats, however, there are a number of different types of baskets, used in many different ways. People carry different types according to occasion and baskets are distinguished as male and female in weaving and use.

There are numerous types of coconut leaf baskets made by both men and women. Only women make pandanus baskets of which on Tongoa there is one basic shape. The point that only women make pandanus baskets, just as only women make pandanus mats, while men work in coconut leaf hardly needs to be emphasised. Coconut leaf baskets utilise the shape of the coconut frond in different ways. The most common basket used in everyday life, usually in the carrying of food\(^8\) is the *katoro*. This basket type is made by taking a palm frond and splitting it down the centre, weaving a single side in a one on one pattern, using as much of the leaf according to the desired depth of the basket. One now has a flat rectangular shape which the weaver then brings one end of around to form the two sides of the basket. The loose leaves extending from the base are now woven together to form the base. The weaver finishes this off with a small plait at either corner of the base which are then pushed inside the body of the basket. Long strands of *nambeleitu* (*burao*, cottonwood, *hibiscus tiliaceus*) bark are then pushed through the sides of the basket and

---

8 Carrying food is itself a symbolically laden act. Food is carried in baskets from the garden to the house, carried to give in support and in expectation of return at lifecycle and ceremonial events. Food carried to an event is given in a raw state, while food carried back from an event is cooked.
around its base. These strands are fastened strongly at the top of the basket and plaited creating a long handle tied together at the top.

The *katoro* is the same basic shape as other coconut leaf baskets which are differentiated by purpose and name: *fora*, a wider, deeper basket used to collect and dump household rubbish, *tabetas* which is used to move garden refuse, especially the debris of old dry yam vines removed at harvesting. Such baskets used to carry rubbish are of a looser, less careful weave. The *nalafagonda* is used to collect shellfish. This basket is woven as a closed shape; the spine of the palm frond is not split but kept as the closed base and the basket is fastened to one's waist to free hands. The shellfish are pushed into the basket through the weave. All the above baskets are associated with women more than men.

The *bolotuleiana* and the *bolofalagdagoto* are associated with men more than women. The former is the basket a man would make if collecting fruit such as mangoes or *nagmabe* (*namambe*, tahitian chestnut, 'inocarpus fagiferus', a nutlike fruit edible only when cooked) in the bush. Men know how to make *bolotuleiana* and it is one that they use. It is made by taking a frond and bending the spine into thirds. The fronds are then woven to create the body of the basket, each side extending into two long plaited finishes which are tied together to create two short carrying handles. This basket sits upright on it's base (*leiana*, *stanaep*, 'to stand up or be upright'). The second basket *bolofalagdagoto* is shaped differently and the name reflects this (*dagoto*: 'to be across'). This basket is made by taking a section of palm frond and weaving the leaves up from the frond spine to form sides which are not joined together except at the base. The sides extend up to two handles.
which are tied together in the manner of the *bolotuleiana*. The *bolofalagdagoto* is used by both men and women but it’s use by men is more common. This basket is used to carry cooked food, especially *laplap* from an event at another *namatana* or village. It is carried over one’s shoulder with a stick through the handles or it is slung on a stick carried between men on their shoulders.

Baskets made of pandanus are made and primarily used only by women. The main pandanus basket type is the *dogi*. This is made with pandanus by firstly weaving a square base with long narrow strands of pandanus (some of them dyed bright colours) in a one on one pattern. When this is as large as one wants, one turns the strands upwards and begins to weave the sides, forming a large shallow tray shape which is sometimes decorated at opposite corners with an open-work weave (see plate 1). Two of the corners are then looped through with a long double plait of *nambeilu* (*burao*, cottonwood, hibiscus tiliaceus) bark which are tied together at the length one wishes and the two side are drawn up to form a shallow triangular shape basket. The *dogi* is used to carry food from the garden, cooked food from events, and is also used to carry mats when one gives them at an event (see plate 1). Traditionally, *dogi* were used to carry women’s clothes at marriage when she was ‘carried’ to the house of the man, just as today she is carried with a box. *Dogi* were also used to store clothes and are still used in this capacity by older women in the village, although this was considered to be a rather old fashioned habit.

The *rekete* basket is made in a similar way to the *dogi*, with the same shallow square shape, but small sturdy pandanus handles are woven into the body of the basket rather than *burao* bark handles added to it. The *rekete* is made solely with *nagaruta* (strong dry
pandanus) and is not coloured with dye. This basket is used primarily to carry garden produce. The *figerei* basket is a rectangular flat shape and small enough to be carried like a purse under one's arm. These baskets are used to carry books to church and school. They are made by taking a bundle of pandanus lengths and by folding them in half, weaving upwards from this folded base to create a closed shape like an envelope, usually in an one on one weave. *Figerei* are made in uncoloured and dyed versions. *Figerei* are like *dogi* baskets, also decorated with colour, in that these basket types are carried beyond the village and are thus on display to others. The final basket type made of pandanus (*bolo*) was listed by informants as a type of Tongoa basket, although it is a recently introduced style, learnt from Futuna and Pentecost Islands. This is typical of the incorporation of new weaving techniques and patterns on the island: their origins are acknowledged but they are very quickly incorporated into a Tongoan panoply of weaving.

The *bolo* basket is a completely different shape to the other pandanus baskets and not very many women on Tongoa know how to make this style. *Bolo* baskets are commonly carried by women on the island but friends and relatives from other islands are often cited as the source. The *bolo* basket is similar to the Futuna basket discussed by Keller (Keller 1988). It has a flat square base so sits upright when placed on a flat surface. From this base, the sides are woven seamlessly upwards to the required height. At the rim of the basket there is often a more elaborate weave, sometimes culminating in an open-work pattern. The handles are what particularly distinguish these baskets - they demonstrate accomplished weaving with very fine work incorporating multiple *burao* bark handles, very finely plaited and tied together at the top, with long tassels at the very ends where the bark has been
broken into fine strands. *Bolo* baskets are usually undyed, and the desired effect is for it to be as white as possible, made with pale sun-bleached pandanus.

The Tongan word *bolo* that has been applied to these baskets is a component of the names of the two coconut leaf baskets used by men. The connection with the *bolofalagagoto* which is used to carry food from an exchange emerges particularly clearly in the following explanation of *bolo* baskets: “*vumi filimap samting i go insaed, mo taem yu filimap, yu stap tingting long olgeta oli givim long yu*” (We put things in this basket, and when we do, we think about those who gave us these things to us’. Elsy Mauri 3/4/96). In other words, every time you fill up the basket, this act reconnects you to the giver. A further connection between the interior of a basket and the human head is drawn: the basket is like the head in that both are receptacles for one’s thoughts. The form of the ‘male’ baskets means that they are carried very differently from the ‘female’ baskets. The classic carrying pose for women carrying baskets is with the handles looped over the head, with the basket suspended down the back. Extremely heavy loads can be carried in this way. The *fora* and *tabetas* are carried in the hand - probably because they are not carried for long distances. The *nalafagonda* is of course tied around one’s waist but the main baskets used by women when carrying things between places are the *katoro* and the *dogi*, both of which have long plaited handles of *nambeilu* (*burrow*, cottonwood, *hibiscus tiliaceus*).

Women weave pandanus baskets in much the same manner as they weave mats, that is, they sit in the same space of the house or the *tapaupau* and they position themselves and
their materials on a mat spread out on the floor. The more temporary a basket is intended, the more casual its production is. Coconut leaf baskets are sometimes made whilst one sits on a low boulder or stool in the peva or outside the house. These are the baskets which are often made quickly to serve an immediate function whilst in the bush or coconut plantation. Pandanus baskets require that the pandanus is prepared beforehand, whilst coconut baskets (and the coconut leaf mat katafa) are made using the frond that one has just cut. In contrast to women, I never saw a man make a basket whilst sitting in the household area but only in the bush. Dogi are also made specifically in the period following the childbirth, when women gather with the new mother and make mats and dogi (and sometimes figerei) baskets to give to those women who have brought food. Only women carry dogi and it is dogi that are given in marriage exchanges. In the past it was a tradition for baskets to not only circulate among women during the period following birth, but also for young girls to present each other with baskets. Regarding the circulation of katoro (coconut leaf baskets), these are sometimes sold by a woman to others who cannot make them very well, or do not have any interest in making them. These katoro were sold within the village for 40 vatu (about 40 US cents).

5.3 The Symbolism of Pandanus and Coconut

Implicit within the above discussion of mats and baskets is a symbolic opposition between coconut and pandanus. This is particularly marked in the different basket types. Pandanus and coconut co-exist in the garden but each is marked with very different principles of cultivation and ownership. Pandanus is not fixed to the fanua and to the title-land relations that underpin the making of a garden on the land of another. In direct contrast, coconuts are fixed to the fanua and must be compensated for in the 'e lua kali' payment, as outlined in chapter 3. Women are similarly not fixed to plex but become mobile through the
ceremony of marriage payments and move between their natal *namatana* and their husband’s *namatana*. By assuming a chiefly title men become fixed within *plex*, assuming not just the title, but rights to fixed plots of land.

Coconuts not only fix garden to land (with fences made of coconut palm trunks) but land to landowner. A case history illustrates thoughts surrounding how coconut palms connect landowner to *fanua*. A middle-aged Purau woman, Netty, had married to Purau from a nearby village. Netty and her husband made a garden on a plot of land owned by her brother. This garden was planted between fully mature coconut palms that had been planted by Netty’s father before she was born. He had planted them, using nuts from another *fanua* he had lost rights over in a dispute, in order to create a living link between the lost land and the secure *fanua*.

Pandanus and coconut are thus respectively associated with notions of female and male, mobility and fixity. The relationship between pandanus mats (*nagbanu*) and coconut mats (*katafa*) is complementary yet oppositional. *Nagbanu* and *katafa* appear together and form counterparts to each other both in the context of the house and at particular ceremonial junctures. The opposition between *nagbanu* and the *katafa* draws upon and creates the oppositions between coconut/pandanus and male/female. The associated qualities of coconut (male, fixity, immobile) and pandanus (female, mobile) come together in certain moments to make symbolic statements. Most striking of these is the *nakakafa*, the bundle of folded pandanus mats wrapped within *katafa* (see plate 7.3). Joined together in the *nakakafa* bundle, *nagbanu* and *katafa* mediate between yet other oppositions such as inside/outside, good/bad, and hiding/displaying. Chapter three
explored the appearance of this object in chiefly relations and its appearance in marriage exchanges is examined in chapter 7.

5.4 Dyes and Pattern

There is a basic contrast between the use of colour on Tongoa mats and the symbolic elaboration of pattern elsewhere in Vanuatu, particularly central Pentecost (Walter 1996:108; Mabonlala 1996) and Ambae (Bolton 1993). In both traditions however, the use of colour adds specific qualities to the mat. On Ambae, for example, Bolton tells us: “It is the dyeing that completes a mat and makes it new.” (Bolton 1996:115). Pattern is also spoken of differently in the mat traditions of the northern islands. For example, a pattern of central Pentecost named kamatkel (harpoon) has the effect of attracting other mats and this is reflected in the practice of placing mats with this design first into the storage basket (Walter 1996:108). Designs on contemporary Tongoan mats are spoken of as decorative only in intent: “oli mekem mat i flas nom” (‘they only enhance the mat, make it more attractive’ Leipakoa David 3/4/96). In the northern islands, design is also implicated in the transmission and memory of pattern: the “ulun kataptap (cut the design) motif is the one an artist makes first at the start of each weaving session. It then reactivates memory of all the other designs, a memory conferred on her at her initiation.” (Walter 1996:108). As we can see from this statement, transmission of pattern knowledge is mediated by those who already possess that knowledge, and is subject to control. The ritual practices of initiation and apprenticeship are not present in Tongoa. Here, a woman’s acquisition of knowledge is located in her own practice and ability. For example when asked where they had learned a particular design, women in Purau most often replied that they had seen it elsewhere and had thus reproduced it through their own skill and interest, or that they themselves were the genesis of that pattern.

231
One of the major physical differences between coconut and pandanus mats and baskets is that the latter have color incorporated into the pattern. These dyes are bright colors, red, pink, green and blue that are bought at tradestores in Vila and in small tradestores on Tongoa. Such dyes are now firmly established within the Tongoan aesthetic of what makes a good mat, namely, an eye-catching vibrancy which is produced by the combination of color and weaving pattern. These weaving patterns can of course be completed without the addition of colored elements, but the effect produced is somewhat more subtle and the bright result of dye is preferred. During the course of the Womens' Culture Project (WCP) it emerged that in the past, mats were predominately uncoloured. This is reflected in the contemporary mat garments consciously designated as kastom. These garments, as pandanus weavings associated with ideas of the past are always uncoloured and embellished with woven patterns alone.

As the discussion of the nineteenth century mat in chapter 4 reveals, however, a number of traditional dyes were also used. A number of these different dye formulas are remembered today on Tongoa. These are no longer used in contemporary mat-making. In one case however, stimulated by the work of the WCP, Purau women recreated a traditional dye. This example used nataie, a yellow coloured root (turmeric, curcuma longa)\(^9\). This is grated and boiled in water to produce a vibrant yellow dye. The pandanus is then plunged into the dye and held for a short while, before being drained and set aside to dry. This is precisely how contemporary tradestore dyes are used to colour pandanus.

\(^9\) According to Weightman: "Turmeric has been used in Vanuatu since ancient times." (Weightman 1989: 256). He goes on to record that it was traditionally used in the Shepherd Island region for dying calico and mats (ibid.).

232
Other traditional dye formulas include those made from the roots, sap, leaves and fruit of various trees producing red, yellow and black dyes.\textsuperscript{10} The knowledge of these dyes as revealed during the meetings held for the WCP was often fragmentary and often offered by men. That it is men who overtly offered this information regarding what had been defined as \textit{kastom} by the WCP indicates a complex intermingling of ideas about gender, \textit{kastom} and claiming public space. Despite weaving being women's work and knowledge, because these dyes are not common knowledge and through the WCP became associated with \textit{kastom}, they become knowledge associated with men's knowledge rather than women's knowledge.

Precisely how these dyes were used in the past remains somewhat unclear however. Given the claims that mats were not dyed in the past, the emphatic preference for colour in contemporary mats might be considered quite an abrupt change. The discussion in the previous chapter pointed out that Tongoa barkcloth garments and mats associated with the sacred power of the \textit{nawota} (chief) were dyed. In the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, barkcloth ceased to be made, tradestore dyes became widely available and the sacred dimension of the chieftainship diminished. During this time what mats were and meant obviously underwent change and it is possible that the vibrant aesthetic of pattern and colour became more suitable displayed on mats more generally. With a severe lack of

\textsuperscript{10} The following traditional dyes were recorded by the WCP: \textit{nakura} tree roots grated with a \textit{kai} shell and a decoction produced in boiling water. This creates a yellow dye. Another yellow dye (recreated by the women of Purau, referred to above) can be made from the roots of the \textit{nataie} plant (turmeric, \textit{curcuma longa}). The fruit of the \textit{naloa} tree produces a white colour until it is mixed with the leaves from the \textit{nafutifitiforau} plant, when it becomes a yellow dye. Sap from the following trees produces a red dye when extracted and boiled: \textit{nakoka} (this tree is also used as a land boundary marker), \textit{namelekesa} and \textit{natogtog}. Also producing a red dye, this time from the fruit of the tree: \textit{namomokandu}. The juice of the fruit is boiled and pandanus submerged. The fruit of another tree, \textit{nataie ki Sanuenue} also produces a red dye. \textit{Nataie} is a generic word meaning paint or dye. The fruit of \textit{nataie ki Sanuenue} can also be rubbed onto hair to colour it. A black dye can be produced from the young leaves of the \textit{nataboa} (Namakura language; in Nakanamaga this is \textit{Natalie}, in Bislama, \textit{Natavooa}) tree. The leaves are soaked in a coconut leaf basket which is buried for a number of days in mud, resulting in a black dye.
museum collections and earlier published material, the exact nature of barkcloth and historical weaving on Tongoa remains vague.

5.5 The Ways Women Weave

Rainy days are habitually used for weaving. Women talk of these days being ideal because the moisture in the air makes the pandanus more pliable and receptive to weaving. Additionally, on rainy days, people usually do not go to work in the garden, but remain indoors attending other tasks. The sight, sound and position of women weaving contributes to the creation of domestic space. In all the stages involved in mat-making, including pandanus preparation, a woman sits on a mat. Her posture and position only becomes fixed into the one specific to mat-making when she begins the next stage, weaving itself. Women usually weave alone either in their house or outside the house in the area defined by the shade of the tapaupau or under a leafy tree. As seen in chapter 2, the tapaupau is a structure built just outside the house or peva and is an important locus for social activity especially in the hot season when people spend a lot of time outside eating, napping and socialising. In either case a woman needs a certain amount of space for weaving where she can spread herself and her work out. Central to the process of weaving is the fact that a women must sit on a mat to make mats. One informant pointed this out to me when she told me that men tell women that they should not sit on stools but, more appropriately, on the level of the mat itself. This, she said, is because if women do not sit on mats they will not think about mats and making them.

The logic behind this statement lies in the way that women talk of thinking about the mat that they are weaving and that additionally the mat she sits on is a mediator between her intention and her action. A woman must think well of the mat she is making if it is to be a
good mat, one that has the desired qualities of ‘tightness’ and a close and even weave: “sam woman, oli laekem blong wokem mat - spirit blong olgeta i stap long mat” (‘some women, those who really like to weave, their spirits are going into and are present in the mat’ Jenny Solomon 15/10/96). Jenny went on to describe women who don’t put their hearts into weaving: “oli no pulum strong, mat i slak. Oli no tingting gud long mat” (‘they don’t weave strongly, and the mat is loose. They don’t think well on the mat they are making.’). This statement contains a number of idioms: ‘pulum strong’ and ‘tingting gud’ are both actions that people make with regard not only to mats but to other people. Thinking well about someone manifests itself in positive actions such as giving and feeding. Pulling people tightly to you is idiomatic of creating strong relationships and weaving the mat so that it will not be ‘slack’ reflects similar ideas.

Thinking well of the mat corresponds to statements that both men and women make about the relationship between a woman and the mat she is weaving. Women are spoken of entering a different state of concentration, almost a different body state, when they achieve that special or particular connection with the mat they are weaving. That is, they completely forget the passage of time and their own need for food, water, sleep and other bodily functions. Even more telling is that it is said a woman’s children can be crying for food but she will not hear them when she is in this particular state of concentration. So, when a woman weaves, a number of alterations occur to her normal state of adulthood and motherhood: she weaves alone but in a space essentially defined as social and interactive and she does not heed her responsibilities to her children. She thus does not exist as a full member of the social world, nor, in fact is she a full member of the normal experiential world with it’s demands of food, sleep etc.
Ostensibly, the actual tools needed by a woman in order to make mats are few: pandanus, a kai shell, a sieh or knife, and molimoli (weights). The most important 'tool', however, is the body of the weaver herself. It is not just a woman's hands that are needed to weave: her entire body is employed from her hands to her legs, fingers and eyes. If one is to extend the trajectory of these components backwards, the pandanus, the kai, sieh, molimoli and indeed the woman herself, are all products which have themselves come out of other matrices of social relations such as the garden for example. As a tool in the production of mats a woman's body is both the locus of the knowledge required to weave a mat and the means by which it is woven. As mentioned above, when a woman weaves, she sits in a very particular position with one leg bent at the knee with the foot drawn in towards her body, and the other leg extended outwards (see plate 5.5). Positioned between them, she has the section of the mat that she is working on. As she finishes each section the weaver moves herself along (rather than moving the mat along) and raises the next section of upper weaving elements, folding them back upon themselves. She then parts the lower contrasting elements so that they cross over in the desired pattern and draws a upper element down over them and holds it tight under the bent leg. Repeating this action to complete the section, the number of elements held under her leg increases.

The fact that women must sit on a mat to make a new one means that you in fact need a mat to reproduce it's form and it is possible to think of this as making a new mat out of an old one. In the act of weaving the woman's body mediates between the knowledge embodied in the old mat and the creation of a new mat. The technology of reproducing mats is thus located almost solely in the body of the weaver unlike in the reproduction of barkcloth, for example, where a beater and stencil are necessary physical connections between past and future barkcloth pieces. In the reproduction of mat patterns or motifs,
Plate 5.5
Jean employs her whole body to weave
there is no mediating technology comparable to the barkcloth stencil, there is only the woman's memory and her body.

The action of parting the strands of pandanus in preparation to lay the contrasting element down involves a specific movement of the hands and is very characteristic of the weaving process as a whole. As a woman becomes more practised and accomplished a weaver, the faster her hands move in this motion, so that one cannot see specifically how she is creating the particular pattern. The sounds of pandanus strands being swiftly manipulated is immediately evocative of the household space where women weave. This is a salient point, as it is a sound which belongs so thoroughly to this space that it could be thought of as constitutive. Women do not carry their unfinished mats about with them to weave elsewhere as part of their daily habitus (Bourdieu 1977), in contrast, for example, to Teleföl *bilum* making. Teleföl women carry their looping with them to continue work on unfinished *bilums* throughout the day wherever they might be and combine looping with other tasks (MacKenzie 1991:61). On Tongoa, mat-making is restricted to one or more specific places around the household and Tongoa women do not engage in any other activities simultaneously with weaving.

Other aspects of mat-making, however, are combined with other tasks a woman carries out. She will collect pandanus whilst working in the garden and dry it in the stone oven that she has prepared to cook food. All the tasks involved in mat-making from collecting the pandanus, processing it, and finally, sitting down to weave, are part of women's everyday life in the village. It is difficult to estimate the number of hours that a woman spends on mat-making weekly. The time she spends actually weaving can be timed but varies enormously from woman to woman and from week to week. This is partly because
some women are much more industrious and interested in mats and thus spend more time weaving. Additionally, the amount of time a women will spend weaving depends to a certain extent on her particular need for mats at any given time. If she knows that a specific event is coming that she will need mats for, this will dominate her productivity in the days and weeks beforehand.

That a woman can reproduce a new form or pattern simply by seeing it is well known and spoken of. The following incident illustrates this and also illustrates the potential for new patterns to circulate. In April 1996 the Presbyterian Women’s Missionary Union (PWMU) held a meeting in Purau. At this meeting a woman who had participated in a regional PWMU conference was supposed to teach a new basket example she had learnt there. Because of a personal grudge, however, (over a disagreement about reimbursement for travel) this woman not only did not show the method learnt but did not bring the basket to the meeting because she knew that just seeing it would be enough for it to be reproduced. This example not only demonstrates the circulation of weaving innovations in both a formal (orchestrated by the PWMU) and informal manner but also shows that weaving and the products made are not neutral objects but have the potential to be highly charged. This potential can be seen in the domestic disputes which sometimes arise between men and women over mats. A court case brought to the chief’s farea in Purau during October 1996 illustrates a number of cross-currents surrounding mats.

The case of Alick John and Leisongi John: after arguing with Leisongi, Alick was ordered to pay a fine of a bullock (this would be killed and given to be eaten immediately) to Leisongi’s classificatory brother (tai), Pakoa. The reason for this was that Alick and Leisongi had fought and as a result Leisongi had ‘run away’, going first to the garden and
then to Pakoa’s namatana. In doing so Leisongi was ‘carrying her crying’ to her natal kin, an act which contravenes the navagogotoana bridal payment (see section 2.3). A number of things are revealed here: Leisongi herself married to Purau from another village, but was following the road made by her own mother who had married to this village from Purau. When Leisongi made the decision to protest the situation with Alick, she did not go back to her natal village (which would have been much more serious), but instead fled to the namatana that her mother’s sister (Pakoa’s mother) had married to. This namatana then becomes her ples in contradistinction to Alick’s namatana that she married into. The root of the disagreement which triggered Leisongi’s behaviour is illustrative of the points I have been making that mats are not neutral objects but often heavily loaded symbols of other concerns. The argument as unfolded in the farea was that Alick had come upon Leisongi apparently unoccupied in their household area. He had then got angry, asking her why she was not making mats, and what would be given at Manamuri’s navagogotoana? (The wedding of Alick’s daowel Manamuri was imminent). In response, Leisongi had accused Alick of not making any vatu (money), which had escalated the row; Alick replied that this was the island, not Vila, and how was he to get money? As already mentioned, one of the things men are supposed to say to women is that they should sit on mats rather than stools or chairs. That men such as Alick John concern with themselves with whether a woman is making enough mats reveals the extent to which mats are implicated in the tensions within gender relations and the various demands of kinship obligations versus the cash economy.

Although a man can plant and even help his wife harvest or carry pandanus, I only ever saw a man helping to process pandanus once. This was a example of a woman preparing to make a large number of mats for selling and thus raising cash. The work involved in boiling the pandanus was thus more intensive than the usual single batch or bundle that a
woman harvests at a time. The difference in this particular mat-making was that it was something of a joint enterprise between the couple in that they were trying to raise money for a joint endeavour involving their son’s brideprice payment. Selling mats is one of the few methods of raising cash that women have. The market for such mats is usually restricted however to Port Vila and Santo, the two main urban centres in Vanuatu. There, salaried workers need mats for events such as marriages and deaths as well as for domestic use. In my observations of the Tongoan communities in Port Vila, Tongoan people usually purchased mats from a Tongoan woman whom they knew. Mats made for sale are physically indistinguishable from mats made for domestic use or for participation in the ritual economy. The only difference is sometimes that of size. Women have an incentive to make particularly large mats for sale as these can attract higher prices and are what people want to buy. While a medium size mat can be sold for between 500-800 vatu (US$5-8.00), a larger one can be sold for over 1,000 vatu (US$10.00+). Thus mats made for sale are often of a uniformly large size. Although mat-making is a potential cash raising resource for women in the village, their ability to access this resource is limited by the problems of transportation as the mats have to be transported to where the potential buyers are in Port Vila and Santo. This is often achieved by planning around one’s or one’s relative’s trip to either of these towns. Women are concerned to overcome these problems however, as can be seen in the interest shown by Purau women in the presence of the WCP in the village.11

5.6 Reproducing the Mat and Rendering it Absent

11 Upon the arrival of Mrs Tarisesei, Co-ordinator of the WCP and myself in Purau, some of the first questions we faced were about this very issue. During the course of Mrs Tarisesei’s visit it emerged that the National Women’s Council had a store in Port Vila where the products of women’s work such as mats and baskets were sold. Mrs Tarisesei undertook to find out more about the possibilities of sending mats from the village to this store.
Anthropologists writing on art traditions of Melanesian cultures have long commented on the ephemeral nature of the objects created. The production of such objects as the Malangan of New Ireland, for example, is often heavily mediated by ritual restrictions, only for the object to be discarded or left to rot after the event in which they appeared is over (Küchler 1988). Discarding the malangan in the forest, or alternatively, selling them to foreign collectors points to an important conceptual separation in northern New Ireland, between the physical object itself and the images that they portray. For the indigenous participants involved, it is the renewable image rather than the unique, individual sculpture that is important (Küchler 1992:94). What is being reproduced is the image (or parts of the image) rather than the sculpture as an object itself. Similarly, in highlands Papua New Guinea, Waghi wigs are produced only at very long intervals. The wig is inherited property and is worn at the pig festival that occurs only once every generation. It is not the actual object itself that is transmitted, however, but rather, the right to make and wear it (O’Hanlon 1992:597).

The production of renewable images such as the malangan and Waghi wig for display at specific junctures is often accompanied by corresponding ideas of removing the object. Küchler analyses the decomposition of malangan in the forest as rendering the object (and image) absent (Küchler 1992). Tongoan mats do not represent a dual object-image and their lifecycle reflects this: in Purau new clean mats are passed on in exchanges until eventually becoming part of the household for use as domestic mats. Once used in the house mats are used and reused, until fraying and weakened, they are relegated for use in the cooking house (peva). Left here with the partially decaying debris of leaves (natau) and used to cover stone ovens (fufu), the mat is allowed to gradually complete a cycle into decay, until it too disintegrates. A significant exception are the mats that are used to wrap
the bodies of the deceased. These mats have participated in the last exchange the deceased
takes part in and are buried with the dead.

In the case of the wig, it is the right to wear it that is reproduced with each wig made.
With malangan, it is the image (and the right to the image) that is reproduced. The
reproduction of mats takes place within the relations of social reproduction as a whole.
Emerging from the garden and the matrices of male-female relationships and chief-
nakainaga relationships, the reproduction of mats reflects a reproduction of the wider
social order. Continually made and remade in the same image, the distinctive character of
the mat is its substitutability, an object whose specific individual traits are unimportant.
This mode of reproduction is linked to its identity as a metaphor for the connections
between people and ples and, importantly, the need to continually remake these
connections.
Chapter Six
Material Metaphors of Persons and Place

6.0 Introduction

Like the Telefol ‘mouthband bilum’, in certain contexts, the Tongoa mat is “an essentially mundane, utilitarian object” (MacKenzie 1991:59). It is the item of material culture without which no household would be complete: without it, fundamental social processes such as eating, sitting and sleeping could not take place. The mat is used as bed, dining table, and chair. It orders space within the household, partitioning space both horizontally, on the floor/ground and vertically, hung as a room divider. Through its formal properties, the mat is a flat, double-sided, flexible object which can be rolled, folded, layered, wrapped and manipulated in any number of ways. These physical qualities enable the mat to act as a conceptual container and a transporter of things. In certain contexts the mats efficacy is primarily tied to these structural qualities rather than any external symbols encoded in pattern or decoration.

Mats and mat-making permeate the domestic space of the lina, peva and namatana completely - the sounds of weaving, the ‘cooking’ of pandanus in the fufu (stone oven), the draping of pandanus in various stages of preparation over available surfaces and, finally, the laying of mats on the floor. Mats structure the practices of everyday life. In this chapter I wish to examine the profound connections between the making of mats by women and other processes that it metaphorically refers to and effects; the reproduction of people and the reproduction of a social and spatial order. This analysis draws upon recent work on technique and technical processes informing social processes (Lemmonier 1986; Pfaffenberger 1988; Gell 1992; MacKenzie 1991). Mats are understood to be material metaphors (Tilley 1999) that embody these social processes. The use of material metaphor

244
follows Tilley’s discussion of things as fundamentally different to words (Tilley 1999). Things act simultaneously and synesthetically as ‘solid metaphors’ that work like other “metaphoric processes by mapping the structure of one domain onto that of another” (ibid.:267-68). This chapter examines the processes of producing such an artefact to reveal the domains that are being mapped upon one another.

The technical processes involved in bringing the mat into being evoke conceptual associations and thus effect other profound cultural processes. Technical choices are not arbitrary, but intimately intertwined with symbolic and conceptual choices (Lemmonier 1986). The semantic associations produced through the technical specifications and formal properties of mats connect people and ples in a number of very significant ways. The Tongoa mat does this through two distinct aspects of it’s physical self: firstly, the body of the mat refers to the human body, and secondly the surface of the mat refers to the surfaces of the island. Body organisation metaphorically informs social organisation and vice versa (Tilley 1999). Mats are a material interface within this mutual referencing between the human body and the social body, and consequently in themselves, objectify ideas of people and their connections to ples. At the most mundane level, mats literally connect people to the ground they sit, sleep or eat on, and stand on during important ceremonies. Examining the linguistic, habitual and visual associations surrounding the mat reveals it’s fundamental importance as a material expression of cultural concerns with the reproduction of people and their connections to ples. In order to examine these metaphors surrounding the mat, the spatial organisation and meanings of ples on Tongoa first needs to be examined.

6.1 Ples: Spatial Organisation and Identity
As seen in chapter 3, it is a common phenomenon in Vanuatu that notions of identity are expressed through ideas of *pies* (Bonnemaison 1984, 1994; Jolly 1992; Rodman 1987; Rubenstein 1978). Chapter 3 demonstrated that in the Shepherd Islands fixed plots (*fanua*) of land are integral to the chiefly titles held by men and that the title is the land within which it is rooted. The title represents a “territorial identity embodied in certain clearly defined places and pieces of land taken as a whole.” (Bonnemaison 1996b:213). Social identity and territorial identity are thus integrated completely. This concept is expressed in Bislama as *man pies* ('one of the place'). Bonnemaison’s powerful metaphor of the tree and the canoe (1984, 1994, 1996c) provides a perspective to view cultural dynamics of *pies* and identity that revolve around concepts of rootedness versus mobility. Thus, the association of person with place often employs a metaphor of rootedness: for example chiefs are characterised as banyan trees in Tongoa (an archaic saying states ‘*nabaga e sua nabaga*’ - literally banyan has met banyan; chief has meet chief). Such characterisations appear elsewhere in the archipelago; in south Pentecost, Jolly tells us of a local opposition between the ‘banyan’ of *kastom* and the ‘bird’ of European tradition (Jolly 1982:338). In Tanna, a similar opposition appears but this time between the banyan-like male, fixed to place, and the bird-like women, mobile and unrooted (MacClancy 1980:22; Bonnemaison 1994:304).

6.1 Person and Place on Tongoa

The identification of person with place means that there are specific cultural ideas about the ways that persons dwell in a place and are part of it. This attachment is achieved not only through birth and membership, but also through the practices of everyday life: those acts which one carries out in one’s dwelling space such as eating, sleeping and gardening. These practices act to constitute selves that are of that place. Even when one leaves the
village to go work in town, one's identity as man Tongoa or woman Tongoa remains undiminished despite the transferral of self-in-dwelling to another place. In other words, one has not become detached from one's true ples, the island of Tongoa. This is due, in part, to the relationships that one still maintains with other people of one's ples who are still there. Detachment from one's ples and reattachment to new places other than the town - through marriage for example - happens in specific ways. It is precisely because of the strong identification of person with ples on Tongoa and elsewhere in Vanuatu that the rites and practices which surround birth, marriage and death, actively work to attach and detach people from ples. These rites and practices involve mats very specifically and are the subject of Chapter 7. In this section, I look more closely at what exactly makes one 'of the place' on Tongoa.

Being born on the island has a substantive influence on the way that one is identified with that place. Although those children born to Tongoa mothers and fathers in Port Vila are still spoken of as being of Tongoa, those actually born onto the island itself are emphatically spoken of as part of Tongoa. This can be seen in the practice of emphasising those who have never left the island; if they do travel beyond Tongoa, the occasion is specially marked with a festive meal. One woman whose sons, aged 5 and 10 years, had been born on Tongoa and had never left, emphasised their identity as of the island to me thus: "hed blong tufala i stikim graon long ples ia" (‘their heads pierced the land of this place’ i.e. when they were born. Mareta John 10/1/97). This idiom to describe birth employs a metaphor of planting: through their birth on Tongoa her sons were planted into it's soil. Mareta's choice of metaphor reveals the central importance of the act of garden making. In making a garden, one is not only growing food which will become important metonymical aspects of the island when eaten, but one is also actively engaged in creating
the social and spatial constitution (ples) of Tongoa itself. As seen in chapter 3, one usually makes a garden on a fanua that is a part of the namatana of which one is a member. This involves creating a bounded space, defined by one's productive and reproductive capacities. This bounded space fits into, and relates to, a larger order of spatial organisation (garden fits within fanua, fanua within island) and social organisation (married couple within lina, within namatana and finally namarakiana).

Language is another primary factor in being of a place: "taem yu tok Bislama, yu soem se yu no man ples, yu strenja" (‘when you speak Bislama, you demonstrate that you aren’t from this place, you’re an outsider’ MarakiTapu 25/3/97). Relatedness to others of that place is an important means by which oneself is anchored to and of the same place. One is related to others through ideas of shared blood and line, but importantly, also through a shared experience of daily interaction with ples (gardening, fishing, harvesting wild foodstuffs and shellfish) and the shared experience of dwelling in that place; eating together and particularly the idiomatic act of sleeping in the same house (cf. Larcom 1982:334). These sentiments can be see in the following comment on why two Purau women should not argue: "tufala i wok abaot long wan ples nomo, tufala i kakae long wan plat nomd" (they inhabit one place, they eat from the same plate’ Leipakoa David 20/1/97). The following example illustrates how sharing the dwelling space of the lina constitutes relatedness. Reknal explained to me that her daughter Harelin and Roy Bill, the son of Annie and James who lived in the same lina could not marry each other by stating: "tufala i stap long wan ples" (‘the two of them are of, live, in the same place’ Reknal 26/10/96). Despite Roy Bill being daowean to Harelin on his mother’s side and thus a suitable marriage partner, the explanation that the two are of the same place illustrates that they are related too closely to be married. Although Reknal did not express it in this way, it is
because the *lina* and *namatana* are living spaces shared by a group of men (and their families) who are primarily agnatically related to each other that Roy Bill and Harelin are too close. In the case of Roy Bill, on his father's side, he calls Harelin *tai* (sibling) as their fathers' are agnatically related and thus call each other *tai*. This is the second reason Reknal gave for a potential union being unsuitable.

6.1i The Town-Island Polarisation

Tongoa and the other Shepherd Islands are among the most densely populated islands in Vanuatu. This has led to a high rate of urban migration to Port Vila and Luganville, both rapidly growing towns, and the two major urban configurations in Vanuatu; Port Vila on Efate Island, Luganville on Santo Island to the north. The rapid growth of Port Vila and the pattern of settlement - and the characteristics of migration particular to Melanesian culture (Haberkorn 1989; Chapman and Prothero 1985) - has meant areas of 'shanty' housing have sprung up incredibly quickly. Although there are some areas of Port Vila which are defined as relatively wealthy or poor, the particular structures of housing, kinship and residence mean that very often large, well built, houses have less permanent structures constructed in the area beside or behind it. Thus, one man and his immediate family may live in a large house while immediately adjacent are a number of *rum* (rented units) which are rented by both less immediate kin and people from other islands. There is thus an interesting series of parallel juxtapositions of permanent/temporary and solid/insubstantial that run through both people's residential status and the actual dwellings themselves. Running through these juxtapositions is a dialogue of *pies*, the particularly ni-Vanuatu merging of identity and place. Within this dialogue, one's village and island are permanent and solid in comparison to the temporary (however long one has lived there) and insubstantial nature of being in town.
The move to town is not necessarily constructed as a permanent one; a number of long time Port Vila residents from Purau still considered this time as a sojourn. In addition, a high proportion of people move back and forth between town and island quite frequently, pursuing work, or a change of scene, or using each location as an option to remove themselves from situations not to their liking. Thus people are spoken of as ‘running away’ (ronwe) to town, fleeing the consequences of their actions, or voicing a protest at a situation - pressure being put upon them in some way for example. Conversely, people in town who go back to their island are spoken of as either tending to some important business - burying a relative, making a marriage payment - or, as leaving the busy, teeming life of town to get back to the peaceful, more simple life of the village, to spei (have a rest).

Town is also considered to be a place of easy entertainment, alcohol and generally feckless living, where one ‘eats money’ and the statement that someone has ronwe long taon (‘run away to town’) is thus a moral judgement which reflects the way that town and island stand in a moral relation to each other. There is particular disapproval for people who go to town but do not work: town is where one has access to a cash income, whether one works as a housegirl or the National Bank of Vanuatu. Wage labour is a long established reason for leaving the island and is respected.

Recent slang picks up on the growing phenomenon of groups of young people (particularly men) who hang around town with no work - these men are said to be sperem pablik rod, or pounding the pavements all day. Despite such ‘circular migration’ (Bedford 1973) the flow of people to the towns is such that one can see the gaps urban migration has left in the physical makeup of Purau village. There are empty namatana and houses throughout the village. The number of napau nawota behind Tarisaliu thus exceeds the current number of
inhabited namatana in Purau, and Tarisaliu himself lives in Port Vila. The polarisation of ideas of town and island correspond to parallel polarisations between the cash economy and the customary economy of obligations to kin and title holders. Elements of these polarisations are evident through the discourses of ples, ("aelan hemi ples blong kastom, taon hemi ples blong vatu"); the island is the place of kastom and town is the place of money. Leisongi Elsy 26/2/97). Constructing a simple dichotomy, however, masks the way that town and island are of course inseparable conceptual spaces, defined in relation to one another. The oppositions between town and island, money and kastom, articulate the opposing demands of the cash economy and the demands of kin obligations in the kastom economy of funerary payments and bride payments.

The process of becoming associated with ples involves the establishment of relationships with others of that place, and fundamentally, with the land of that place. The expression of such relationships are established through one’s actions, making a garden or giving in lifecycle events for example. Such prestations are one’s thoughts and intentions (merely opaque until this point) made manifest. By living in a place and establishing relationships with others, making a garden and significantly eating food that grows out of the soil of the island, the island becomes incorporated within oneself and one becomes metaphorically incorporated within it (this becomes literal upon burial). In doing so, one becomes closer to being of that ples. For a foreigner like myself, food became the most pertinent aspect of this process, punctuated by frequent comments of how I had put on weight; literally my substance had been increased with the substance of the island. This is a profound metaphorical comment on the nature of belonging and ples.¹ Food and the ideas

¹ In fact, about midway through fieldwork, I went to Vila for a break and ironically almost immediately got sick. When I returned to the island, I had lost a lot of weight. The comments made about this all reflected that island, ples and well-being are intimately connected.
surrounding its production, harvesting, cooking, eating and sharing, reveals profound connections between the individual body and self and the collective domain (Becker 1995). Dialogues of ples are fundamental to these connections; one’s well-being, reflected in health and physical appearance (well-fed, substantial and strong) is directly tied to inhabiting one’s true ples. In two cases during the fieldwork period seriously ill Purau villagers who had been living elsewhere (Port Vila and Nouméa, New Caledonia) returned to Tongoa to seek both the explanation and cure of their illness. The comments surrounding these cases reflects the general understanding that inhabiting one’s ples and eating food of that ples affects one’s well-being positively. The very soil of Tongoa imparts qualities of dryness and firmness to the tubers it nutures. These in turn nuture the human body and similarly impart qualities of firmness and strength. Wet earth and watery tubers are spoken of as making the body weak and loose: “mekem se bodi i slak” (‘making the body weak’ Serah Elsy 18/9/96).

Certain types of food become analogously associated with town and island. This is not just a symbolic reflection of their source, but also of other contingent factors such as availability of other foods and the means of cooking. Laplap is a prime example of food that is identified with the island and village. Thus, even a laplap pudding made in town, with foodstuffs bought from Efate people, exemplifies for Tongoans aelan kakae (island food), and thus Tongoa itself. Such a laplap even in town is made in the particular form of Tongoa laplap (nakoau), using distinctive ‘coconut milking’, wrapping and tying methods. Practical factors such as a relative lack of firewood, and a ready availability of other food in town contribute to the association of laplap with island. Such practical factors mean that laplap is not made at least once a week in town as it is on Tongoa.
Laplap is thus identified as aelan kakae, food which is of the island rather than town. ‘Aelan’ has connotations of local (aelan gayman - local government) and is also associated with clothing - aelan dress, the dress that women most commonly wear in Vanuatu. Thus, through key aspects of individual existence such as food, clothing and language, the notion of aelan is intertwined with that of identity. Through ideas of local vs. national, and difference within unity, aelan is also a key aspect of collective identity, particularly in the context of urban dwellers from all the different islands of the archipelago who live in the capital Port Vila. In the case of difference between ni-Vanuatu and people from elsewhere, the difference is expressed in the Bislama phrase man ples which indicates someone from Vanuatu, a local person, from here rather than the elsewhere beyond Vanuatu.

People talk continually about the polarised spaces of town and island because there is a preoccupation with the management of these domains and the concomitant management of the twin demands of the cash economy and the demands of one’s kastom obligations. The pressures of the cash economy are felt on the island with villagers having to find money for school fees, bridal payments, ship passage, freight, clinic visits, phone calls and store bought foods such as tin fish and rice, both of which are necessary in hosting bisnis such as funerals or weddings. The opportunities to raise cash are limited in the island; copra is a source of income, but due to land pressure and successive cyclones, coconut plantations are not extensive on Tongoa. Trade stores are another potential source of income although these enterprises are typically small with precarious incoming and outgoing expense balances. Additionally, there are only so many trade stores that any one village can support.

6.2 Spatial Organisation and Roads

253
Tongoa is conceptually orientated within the greater space of the islands surrounding it with reference to wind directions, the movement of the sun and moon across the sky, the tides, and the basic fact of land versus sea. Thus wherever one is on the island, landwards or seawards is a basic underlying orientation (see section 1.5). Tongoa as a whole is thought of as lying along an axis of north-east to south-west, with the former representing 'up' or 'above' and the later 'down' or 'below'. This corresponds with the cardinal positions of sunrise and sunset, and the wind directions are named accordingly (see diagram 6.0). The positioning of Tongoa vis-à-vis the sunrise and sunset corresponds to the social organisation of the island as portrayed in chapter 3. The wind direction tokolau (hemi stap long solwota, 'it is from the sea'; elau: sea) indicates that the verb 'to be' (doko, stap) is the same as that 'to be placed' and also indicates the noun for place itself (toko). There is a correct road for the wind to move from Tokolau kiki to Tokolau lapa and on to Ziwo Fate. This is characterised as the wind passing on the right hand side. This characterisation is based on an anthropomorphic sun. Thus when the sun rises it is looking straight ahead and Tokolau lapa is on its right hand side, Ziwo Euta is on its left. This duality based on body organisation mirrors the dual panels of the mat structure.

The delimited island and the open sea surrounding it is a profound undercurrent to island life. It is in an effort to transcend this that the island societies of Melanesia have placed so much emphasis on connections and 'roads' to other places (Bonnemaison 1994). In this view, such societies are made up of multi-places (Rodman 1992 styles this concept as multilocality), that are connected via roads. A statement such as the one made to me about a canoe journey between Efate and Tongoa thus makes perfect sense: win hemi rod (‘the wind is the road’ Pakoa Songi 8/1/97). Roads become a metaphor for all means of connectivity. Roads traverse the space of the island and region, connecting people and
Diagram 6.0
Wind directions and the positions of sunrise and sunset orientate Tongoa within the world
places. They facilitate the connection of places, as we can see in case of the *napua lagana* ('smol rod') traversing the chiefly landscape (*laga*: verb to open; *eu lagati napua - oli openem rod*, 'they open the road'). People, both alive and dead (*natemate*) and spirits or devils (*nateitapu*) travel along such roads, and as such, they must be kept open. *Nateitapu* dwell in stones (*vatutapu*), and roads between these *vatutapu* similarly traverse the landscape of the island. If one’s garden has such a *vatutapu* in or near it, one must make sure to build a gate in the fence surrounding the garden to accommodate the movement of the *nateitapu*.

Section 1 of the thesis demonstrated that Tongoa is constituted of dispersed *fanua*. A Tongoan moving through the landscape of the region is moving through a spatial map of distributed *fanua* and thus distributed *namatana*. Relations of *ples* are also constituted of land relations. One’s perception and experience of the landscape on Tongoa is filtered through who is currently working on that particular *fanua*, who previously worked it and the obligation of those people to the land holder. The potentiality of multi-places within *ples* is mirrored by the potential of multi-orientation implicit within the title system. For example, when TiMakura of Purau turns outward from his *namatana* of Malapoa towards Pele, he is a subject (*nakainaga*) of Marakipuelemata, but when he turns inwards, he is *napau nawota*, chief and receiver of tribute. It is roads that enable this multi-orientation.

The idea of *rod* is also used to conceptualise one’s genealogy. As we have seen in chapter 4, one’s ideal marriage partner is one’s *daowean* or cross-cousin. People do not always follow this rule of course and want to marry someone who is not classified as *daowean* but *tai* (sibling) for example. This is the case of Moti and Ruben. Moti’s mother and Ruben’s mother are classified as sisters (*tai*) because their respective fathers had the same mother
and father. When it became known that Moti and Ruben wanted to marry, this caused much consternation and opposition because it meant that as Moti and Ruben are *tai*, Moti calls Leipoiya (Ruben’s mother) *tete* (mother). This meant that their potential children would have conflicting kin terms for their paternal grandparents: on Moti’s side (*rod blong mama*, ‘mother’s road’), they would be called *tata* (mother’s mother) and *pua* (mother’s father), but on Ruben’s side (*rod blong papa*, ‘father’s road’) the same people would be *tua* (father’s mother) and *tia* (father’s father). This was eventually resolved; children of such unions have to follow either *rod blong papa* (father’s genealogical road) or *rod blong mama* (mother’s genealogical road) if the two are the same. This is because if the genealogical ‘maps’ that *rod blong mama/papa* represent are the same (i.e. the man and the woman use the same kin terms for those people that they are both related to) these two roads cannot coexist in the genealogical map of their child’s own *rod*. The resolution of Moti and Ruben’s case as is usual in such cases, meant that their children would follow the *rod blong papa* rather than Moti’s *rod*. This means that their children refer to others by the kin terms that follow on from the kin term used by their father rather than their mother. For example, although Moti calls Ruben’s mother Leipoiya, *tete* (mother) and her child should thus call her *tata* (mother’s mother), the first child of the union, following Ruben’s road calls Leipoiya *tua* (father’s mother).

What the above case history demonstrates is that people on Tongoa are thought of as constituted of roads. A person is made of the roads of patrilineal and matrilateral connections and of the road of marriage which conceptually opened the way for their existence. Moreover, in one’s life one continually makes further roads between oneself and others, through the medium of giving and exchange, and one makes roads between one’s place and the place of others. Thus, roads make people, but importantly, roads are also the
result of human action. In coming to Tongoa, I was spoken of as making a road between England and Purau, a path that did not exist before and which now has the potential to be travelled upon again by people from either place. In addition, men, as holders of titles, are constituted of the roads that their allegiances represent. This is neatly summed up by Bonnemaison: “In all the languages of southern and central Vanuatu, traditional alliance is evoked in terms of roads” and thus “(m)en define themselves as much by their roads as by their places.” (Bonnemaison 1984:133,135).

6.3 Formal Properties and Semantic Associations

As described in chapter 5, every mat begins as a long straight row of pandanus strips (nalakena - stamba or tree trunk; source; beginning; root of; reason for) interlaced so as to form weaving elements. From this very first action of weaving, the desired future appearance of the mat is intimated: a rectangular shape with straight and even edges. With the exception of single panel mat garments, worn by men on occasions of kastom (see chapter 4), the internal structure of the mat is unchanging and inflexible in the current canon of Tongoan mat-making: it always consists of two panels of exactly the same size. These panels however, are not exactly identical themselves, but form a mirror image of each other, joined by a central seam which simultaneously divides and reflects the image of one panel back onto the other (see diagram 6.1).

6.4 Mat Bodies and Human Bodies

Whenever I had asked the term for the lateral sides of the mat, women had told me that they were referred to as tatakis (verb: takisia - to weave closed). Not until a discussion of the nineteenth century mat discussed in chapter 4 did the term findini (rib) emerge; eu takisia findina (oli wivim rib blong hem, ‘they weave its ribs’). Findini nagbanu (‘ribs of
Diagram 6.1 The two mat panels form mirror images of each other.
the mat’) is one of a number of terms through which the body of the mat may be seen to representationally refer to the human body. The smallest constituent of the mat are the single strands of pandanus that are the individual weaving elements (see diagram 5.0). These strands are called nambatin nakieh (nakieh: pandanus; nambatin: tooth, strand of hair, strand of coconut husk rope) and nambatin thus represents an element of a whole. This theme of parts of bodies constituting a whole is furthered by the addition of patterns that employ corporeal references at either end of the mat. There are a number of these patterns which differ essentially from the patterns on the body of the mat in that they are open-work patterns mostly composed of variations upon a triangular theme. Many of these patterns are named with reference to the face (narei), jaw (nasi), head (napau), eyes (namata), and forehead (nafarei), all of which patently contribute to an double-headed anthropomorphic image (see appendix 2).

The physicality of the mat is further emphasised by the way in which it is conceptualised as having a ‘back’ (natakni nagbanu) and a ‘belly’ (nagbelei ni nagbanu); the underside and upperside respectively. The mat is always laid out with the underside downwards: lying on it’s back in effect. This double sided corporeality means that, like persons, the mat is orientated within the world in very particular ways. It can present its back or its belly, and this in turn means that it has the potential to specifically create interior and exterior spaces when folded or wrapped. Thus, not only does the mat allude to parts of human bodies through these linguistic associations, but, in itself, may be seen to take the form of a double-headed human body, with a belly, a back, ribs and eyes (see diagram 6.2).

Moreover, not only are human bodies referred to, but significantly gendered bodies are indicated within the structure of the mat and the very weaving action that creates it: during
Diagram 6.2 The mat structure refers to the human body
the process of weaving, the upper weaving element is referred to as male (*tea noai* - the male ones) and the lower as female (*tea goroi* - the female ones). The particular actions of weaving involves the repeated lifting and laying down of the upper element over the lower. *Tea noai* and *tea goroi* are thus ‘married’ in the mat ("*oli mared long mat*"; ‘they join in a sexual union in the mat’ Leiwea Rita 2/1/97). Human sexual union is further referred to in the very building block of the mat, the *nalakena* (diagram 5.0). The root of this noun is *lake* which means to marry, to join in a sexual/reproductive union. *Lake* also forms the root of the verb *atulake* meaning to begin something, to start some course of action. By extension, other meanings of *nalakena* also relate to a regenerative theme; tree trunk; one also uses *nalakena* within a question to ask why, what is the reason. *Natulakeana* (noun) refers to the foundation of beginning something and as such can indicate the start of diverse actions such as house building or story telling. Referring to the weaving component as *nalakena*, lexically connected through the root word *lake* to meanings of union, source, and regeneration makes sense when we consider this basic weaving component itself. This component is made up of two *nalakena* lengths of pandanus (each of which is composed of a number of *nambatin*) interlaced and joined or married (see diagram 5.1). The *nalakena* component thus essentially links the production and growth of the mat with the similar capacities of humans.

The ends where the mat is ‘closed’ are referred to as either *namatana* or *namata ni nagbanu*. These terms both contain the root word *mata* (this word is polysemous meaning eye - of humans, of coconuts, window, door; end; unripe) and refers to a number of related themes; *namatarau*: family or line; *namatana*: primary unit of social organisation. *Namata* itself means ‘the eyes’ and thus the reference to closure can be understood (but importantly

---

2 This meaning of *nalakena* is nicely mirrored in the Bislama word for tree trunk *stamba* which is similarly extended to uses such as *stamba tingting*: basic reason or motivation (Crowley 1995).
can also indicate an opening). *Namatana* literally means *ae blong hem*, (its eye/s), but strikingly, *namatana* also refers to the local residential unit that is headed by a *napau nawota* or *smol jif* (see chapter 3). A direct allusive connection is thus made between the entity of the mat and the entity of the *Namatana*. This connection is facilitated by the idea of *ples*; it is not accidental that the ends of the mat are referred to as a place where something happens (an act of closure) and an actual place (the social unit, rooted in a territory or *ples*). By understanding the end of the mat as a place of closure, one can illuminate the meaning of the *namatana* similarly as a place of closure: as the entity where social identity and territorial identity mesh perfectly. The nature of the *namatana* as a patrilocal social unit through which residence and membership is organised is immediately obvious. What is less obvious is its essential nature as a unit through which rights and access to land are structured. I feel that it is this fundamental aspect of the *namatana* which is being highlighted in the parallels drawn between the structuring of the mat and the structuring of the social universe.

In both instances of the word *namatana* meaning mat closure and social unit, an idea of containment is occurring; containment of a created space, and by extension, the reproduction of that space. This theme of containment occurs yet again within the composition of the mat, and the image that its surface presents. The long starting row which forms the initial basis of the mat, is divided into sections by interspersing *nalakena* of coloured pandanus at intervals down the length of the row. The spaces between these coloured *nalakena* are referred to as *roara* (garden). Thus a mats length may be described as having four or five *roara* for example (see diagram 6.3). Furthermore, within the body of the mat and on its surface, the strips of coloured pandanus create regular, contained, spaces of uncoloured pandanus; these areas are also called *roara* and the boundary of
Diagram 6.3 The spatial division of the mat into roara (gardens)
colour is like a fence around this garden ("olsem fanis blong hem"; ‘like its fence’ Rekna\nJimmy 3/1/97). This calls to mind the way that pandanus itself encloses the garden when\nplanted around its edges.

6.5 The Mat as Spatial Ordering Device

The mat thus alludes not just to the human body (and gendered human bodies) but also\nmakes spatial referents to the garden, the fanua and the island. A number of roara make\nup the mat just as a number of roara make up the fanua. This is mirrored in turn by a\nplurality of fanua making up the island (nafanua) itself. The connection between fanua\nand nafanua did not occur to everyone; in the cases where it did, it was often commented\non unprompted. On such occasions, the prefix na- was explained to me as indicating a\nwhole made up of many parts (as we can also see in the terms na-lakena and na-matana).

Less direct allusions can also be seen between the internal space of the mat as potentially\ndivisible into zones of above, middle and below, with the internal space of the house, the\nfarea, the garden and the island which are similarly divided. Just as the mat has a back\n(nataku), so does the house and the fara. In the case of these latter constructions, the\n\nnataku ni ekopu (literally, ‘the house’s back’) is the closed side of the building (see chapter\n2). The house’s back is orientated seaward, and is thus against the wind, while the open\nside (natara ni ekopu: ‘the house’s face’) faces inland. The space within both Tongoa style\nsleeping houses and fara (which have the same basic shape) is divided into zones: namago\ni elag (‘inside of the above part’; elag: above, on top of), nagbalau ni fara or maleputa

265
ni farea (within or middle of the *farea*) and *etano* (below; beneath; the lower part). The orientation of gardens on Tongoa is not emphasised, but the division of garden space is similar to that of the house/*farea* interior. The garden on Tongoa is considered to have a top or head (*napau nako; napau*: head) and a lower end which is called *namele dagoto* (literally, ‘the feet lie across’). The sides of the garden can be called *nadigi ni roara* (side edges of the garden) or *findigi ni roara* (ribs of the garden) which are precisely the same terms used for the lateral sides of the mat. Different *fanua* are differently shaped and the orientation of the head and base of the garden depends on this as well as features such as gradient.

Facey notes similar divisions within the garden space on Nguna (Facey n.d): where the garden is divided into an upper side (*napaunako*) and a lower side (*natagoto*). *Napau* means head (in both *Ngunese* and *Nakanamaga*) and *napaunako* also refers to the end of the canoe. Similarly, Facey notes that *namago* means ‘bottom end’ of persons, baskets, and houses, as well as the stern of ships and refers to the spatial ordering of the island as a whole; *namagoana* indicates the “far side” of Nguna from Malasoro to VanuaTapu (ibid). These clues point to an interesting parallel organisation of space in the diverse domains of the garden and the canoe. The upper side or head of the garden corresponds to the rear of the canoe. We can see the cultural logic ordering this when we consider that the canoe is steered from the rear and that this is the most important site for sailing; this is the position from which the chiefs captained the colonising canoes of Tongoa and Tanna (Bonnemaison

---

3 In *Nakanamaga*, *emago* means ‘inside of’ and similarly refers to that part of the interior of the house that is furthest within, away from the public area, as well as the interior of ships and cars; enclosed spaces in other words. One does not say *emago ni roara* to indicate the interior of the garden space, but *nagbalau ni roara* (within the garden) or *meleputa ni roara* (middle of the garden).

4 Purau land as a whole slopes from the position of the village on the hill down towards the ocean. Although never explicitly stated to me as such this might mean that gardens are generally orientated with their ‘head’ pointed inland, towards the village, while their ‘feet’ are directed towards the ocean.
1984; 1994). Tilley also notes for Wala and the Small Islands off the northeast coast of Malakula:

"(t)raditionally, if a man and a woman travel together in a canoe the woman should sit at the back, at the stern (stump/root) end of the hull, and steer. The man at the front may propel the canoe forward, and be most visible, but the woman governs the course." (Tilley 1999:21)

On Tongoa today, and certainly in Purau, canoes are less commonly used. There is no 'mainland' to paddle to regularly as on Wala and for inter-island travel, planes and ships are used. During the fieldwork period in Purau no canoes were built. In fact, soon after my arrival, there was a cyclone that wrecked the small canoes pulled up on the beach. These single outrigger canoes without sails were used by men for offshore fishing but were not replaced immediately.

As detailed in chapter 5, the mat is made up of a number of napua (road, road). In chapter 3 I demonstrate that the chieftainship itself may be thought of as being constituted of roads. The way the mat is conceptualised as coming into being through the facility of roads directly parallels other entities such as persons and chiefdoms. Further allusions to spatial organisation of place are contained within the body of the mat: the central seam is sometimes referred to as tibenu which is the name for a point of land on Efate Island (Devil’s Point). This is not a commonplace reference, however, and only emerged during an interview discussing the original journey of Tarisaliu to Tongoa which went through Tibenu (see chapter 3). In addition, the noun for the fringe which sometimes is left along the lateral sides of the mat (nadigi) also refers to the edge of a stream (Miller nd.b) and the sides of the garden. The mats edges are thus referring to boundaries other than its own:
those of the house, the *farea*, the *namatana*, *fanua*, features of the landscape such as streams and ultimately the boundaries of the island itself. The surfaces and edges of the mat metaphorically contain an image of the island itself and a parallel image of social organisation.

In its use within daily life, mats contribute to the creation of place more specifically. The noun *nawewelei* refers to the place created by laying down a mat (verb for this action: *pewelei*). In this place created by the surface of the mat one sits, eats, sleeps and weaves, in short, one makes and remakes the social world. The nouns for bed (*wendei*) and the bridal prestation of layers of mats (*naweweleana*; see plate 7.1) reflect this word for mat-place. When a mat is laid out upon the ground to sit, eat, sleep, or weave upon, it must always be placed in the correct manner, underside down in contact with the ground (although as seen in chapter 5 this contact is mediated by the *katafau* coconut palm mat) and the upperside facing upwards. These two sides of the mat’s surface are known as the ‘bad side’ (underside) and the ‘good side’ (uppermost). The right/good side and the wrong/bad side, however, are not immediately visible.\(^5\) Both *katafau* (coconut leaf) and *nagbanu* (pandanus) mats have this two-sided character and *katafau* mats are also always placed underside down on the ground. This is true for both everyday use of mats in the *namatana* and in ceremonial instances to be examined in the next chapter where chiefly incumbents and brides stand on mats.

---

\(^5\) This difficulty in distinguishing the two sides seems to be more true for men than women and certainly more true for foreigners. As seen later in this chapter women have more daily ‘hands-on’ experience of mats and certainly through the processes of weaving itself are deeply and it seems almost unconsciously aware of the two sides of the mats they use. On the occasions when I made a mistake placing a mat out on the ground I was always immediately corrected.

268
One particular instance of the emplacement of mats may be noted here, however, as it seems to contravene the above ‘rule’. The investiture of chiefly titles (navuvusakeana) requires that the new title holder kills pigs. These pigs are laid out upon a katafau mat in order to be killed. At one navuvusakeana I witnessed a man laying out this katafau with the good side uppermost, as one would normally do it. He was immediately and loudly corrected by the people, mostly women, ranged about watching. Reasons for this inversion of the ‘mat on it’s back’ norm are clearly suggested, however, when we see that this katafau becomes a wrapping for the dead pig. The pig is then contained within the mat and the good upperside becomes the outer side, visible, just as it is when laid on the ground.

The theme of right side/wrong side continues from the first processing of the pandanus leaves to the final display and use of the mat. This point was made to me in conversation with Leiwea Robin, a particularly accomplished weaver. I was asking about the different sides of the mat and why it was important for one side to be uppermost all the time. She explained by reminding me that when the pandanus is first prepared a good side and a bad side are already present. When rolling the leaf into a wheel for storage, the good side which will become the good, uppermost (and innermost) side of the mat is facing inwards, while the rougher bad side is facing outwards. This already prefigures the future mat with it’s belly and back. Leiwea Robin’s explanation of how and why the belly (nagbelei) of the mat differs from it’s back (nataku) was that humans can sit down on the belly, or right side of the mat, whilst they cannot sit on the back or wrong side. This is further illustrated by the terms malowia or in Bislama ‘plea we igud’ (‘good place’) to refer to the right side and
malosa⁶ (‘iples we i no gud’; bad place) to refer to the wrong. The theme of good side/bad side corresponds to another theme of inside/outside which is also present from the initially rolling of the pandanus leaves right through to the way the mat is used. When a mat is folded to be put away for storage, for example, it is always folded it in on itself, reminiscent perhaps of the way the human body can fold over on itself, with the belly within and the back outermost.

The mat’s orientation within the world thus mirrors the orientation of the human body: front/back, above/below, inside/outside. Tilley has pointed out that: “(b)asic spatial and temporal categorizations such as inside/outside; near/far; centre and periphery, etc. are based on bodily organization.” (Tilley 1999:38). Tongoa mats represent a material extension of this bodily organisation into the world. As material artefacts they act to orientate the Tongoan person spatially and socially. The possibility of ‘within’ and ‘without’ prefigures the potential of the mat as a symbolic container. Wrapped around other objects, or held over them, mats become containers and transporters. Unlike the Telefol bilum whose capacity as container is visually and functionally obvious, the ability of the mat to act as container and transporter is conceptual; a leap from the physical qualities of its planar flexible surface to the conceptual qualities of transference present in ideas about the mats surface. The potential of the mat to wrap other objects is reminiscent of the way that pandanus itself is planted in the garden: around the edges, bounding, and thus containing it. Wrapped around or held over chiefs, brides, the deceased, pigs, and ritual yams the mat allows the mobility of entities such as titles, land and women that are in the normal course of events fixed: title and land fixed to individual, women to natal namatana,

⁶ Malo: place of; wia: good; sa: bad. Malo refers to the site of things generally: maloworno - ples blong bus (bush); malonaneo - ples blong kokonas (plantation). Emplacement of a particular thing is indicated by the word naleea: naleea ni namanuka - the scar left marking the place of a sore; naleeana: ‘its place’.
individuals to their ples. It is through this ability to wrap that the mat effects the breaking of connections: it wraps the deceased, separating them from both the living and ples, detaching women from their natal ples, severing title from holder. Conversely, the mat also acts as a connector - connecting the living and dead unless properly managed.

The surface of the mat has the agency of transmission - if for example a child's faeces, urine or leftover food is left on the mat a woman is weaving, that mat may not be transacted in exchange, but must remain within the namatana as a household mat. Like other bodily substances, faeces and urine may, in instances such as this, become metonymical aspects of the self transported via the agency of the mat's surface to other domains. The surface of the mat is a highly socialised space that connects diverse spatial domains such as the farea, the marriage bed and the grave. Its planar, seemingly impenetrable, surface in fact contains within it a complicated network of ties, plaits and weaves, all of which indicate important connections between the social surface that the mat space represents and other social spaces in all the domains of Tongoan life.

Such a social space may be seen in the management of childbirth. In an everyday context calico (hung vertically) is commonly used to separate the areas of the house used for different purposes; the main separation being between the area used for sleeping and the areas where people eat and socialise. At critical junctures such as childbirth, however, mats become important spatial dividers. In one case in Purau the newborn and mother remained in an area that was screened off during the day with calico but at night (a more dangerous period) a second partition was then created with mats. A greater emphasis than normal was also placed on the layering of katafau and nagbanu mats on the floor. Additionally, a layer of dry coconut palm fronds (nalesale) were placed between the
earthen floor and *katafau* and great care was taken to ensure the mats covered the entire surface of the floor from wall to wall.

As a quotidian object the mat evokes practical associations with the house, domestic space and gender roles within the *namatana*. As such, mats directly contribute to the creation of this domestic space, in effect creating *ples*. Women perform many of the tasks associated with the domestic space and are also strongly associated with reproductive tasks. The making and use of mats intersect these tasks at different points as seen in chapter 5 (although women do not weave at the same time as carrying out other tasks). Women have more interaction on a mundane everyday level with mats as objects than do men. Women take up mats, sweep floors and shake out and re-lay mats once again. Women fold and store mats away for future use, and most germane of all, women weave mats.

Although the initial preparation of pandanus may occasionally be carried out by a man helping a woman, the latter stages of scraping, rolling, splitting and finally weaving are exclusively women's tasks. Pandanus processing becomes a part of other tasks such as cooking and preparing the stone oven that are strongly associated with women. Thus both activities join together in what it is to be a woman on Tongoa. A woman will usually perform these tasks of scraping, rolling, splitting and weaving alone or with the women of her immediate residential group. Only on very particular occasions do women from different *namatana* gather to weave together. Such occasions are usually connected to institutions other than the residential *namatana* which usually structures work groups (in the garden for example). One such institution is the Presbyterian Women Missionary Union (PWMU). This well established women's group organises women in the village in activities that parallel Presbyterian Church's aims such as fund raising. The possibilities
that a village woman has for raising cash in her own personal endeavour - making mats to sell - coincides with the fund-raising organised by the PWMU.

6.6 Reproductive Metaphors: Making Mats and Making People

Mats, like people, are products of ples. Both the bodily substance of mats (pandanus) and humans (flesh) in their genesis and growth are products associated with the garden and the relationships and labour that create the reproductive space of the garden. Moreover, just as they are both products of ples in this way, both mats and humans initially come into being through the bodies and work of women. Mats and humans are related cultural forms and the close allusion made through linguistic links between the body of mats and the bodies of humans is not accidental but a direct comment upon important cultural themes. In effect, mats are a condensed material metaphor of the generation and emplacement of people.

As outlined in chapter 5, the body of the weaver is both the locus and the means for reproducing the mat. In fact the female body is intimately bound up with the reproduction of the mat not just on this corporeal level but metaphorically as a reproductive entity in itself. This can be seen in the linguistic and habitual associations of the kai and sieh tools used in weaving. Kai, the shell used for scraping pandanus in preparation for weaving, is also a term for female genitals, not an especially vulgar term, but one that can provoke laughter. Sieh is not only the implement used in the preparation of pandanus and in the act of weaving but is also the tool used to cut the umbilical cord after birth. The last action in weaving a mat is to plait off, knot and cut the tassel (piri) from the corner of the mat with

---

7 An example of the use of the word kai in this context occurred after the birth of a baby girl: when one of the mother’s attendants bathed the baby for the first time immediately after birth, she exclaimed “kai nagmabei!”. This was referring to the baby’s genitals as resembling the nagmabei nut. The explanation of this to me was accompanied by much laughter from the women (approximately seven) present.
Although this tassel (see diagram 6.2) was never explicitly stated to me as being comparable to an umbilical cord, the action of separating the woman from the mat is strongly analogous to the cutting of the umbilical cord separating mother from child. Indeed, women do speak of this tie being the place where the woman’s hand leaves the mat, the last place where her hand works the mat.

Just as the female body is intimately bound up with the processes of reproducing the mat, the sexual reproduction of humans is prefigured in the actions of weaving. In this process both the woman’s body as maker and the mat itself are employed in an entire dynamic of social reproduction more generally. The act of weaving becomes analogous to the processes of reproduction. Knotting and tying the corner of the mat is associated with separating the child from the mother (and the woman from the mat) through the action of tying off the umbilical cord (nambutona) with coconut fibre rope (nabatini). After childbirth, the placenta (nambura, also sometimes called nala ni pipia, ‘basket of the baby’, uterus) is buried in the corner of the house where the birth has taken place. This is also the same space that a woman normally weaves and where the women who come to sit with the new mother in the post-birth period weave. There is an obvious but powerful parallel between the burial of the placenta in the ground and of planting. This object (placenta) is emblematic of connecting generations of people, just as fruit trees and coconut palms are also planted and rooted in the ground, becoming part of ples. When a woman marries, there is a practice whereby her father plants a tree in her new namatana where her children will be born. This tree is always a fruit or nut producing tree and is specifically thought of as feeding her children. The house where the birth took place and where the afterbirth is buried is also located on and within this namatana. The child is born into this namatana and is spoken of as ‘coming out of’ it later in life. The social
spaces of the roara, lina and namatana, conceptually connect, and are connected by, the acts of producing people and producing mats.

Mats are thus closely bound to the productive and reproductive capabilities and tasks of women. The conceptual association between women and mats can be compared to another singular item of material culture: the bilum. MacKenzie's study of the Telefolmin bilum thoroughly demonstrates the profound connections between woman and bilum in Telefol life. The visual imagery of the bilum - expandable, strong, flexible, containing - is a feature of the looping technology that produces it (namely, interconnected looping, each bilum being made from a single string). Moreover, this visual imagery is integral to the identification of femaleness with the bilum:

"there is a unequivocal visual similarity between woman and her open-looped bilum. The flat skin of a young woman's belly and the formless loops of an empty ...[bilum] both manifest the same potential for expansion and growth. The bilum swells, and so do pregnant women....This visual affinity is strengthened by a very definite similarity of function, for both woman and bilum swell in order to contain, bear, protect and nurture." (MacKenzie 1991:142).

Similar visual affinities between womanhood and quintessential woman's product don't occur in the case of the Tongoa mat. The visual imagery of the mat is making different statements, primarily alluding to the surfaces and boundaries of the island itself: land, roads, streams and gardens. Just as the expansive, nurturing imagery of the bilum represents reproduction, ancestral transformations, and generational continuity (ibid), however, the planar imagery of the mat represents connections between people and land and the reproduction of a social order. In their making and use, mats indicate and refer to the productive and reproductive labour of both men and women joined together.
MacKenzie notes that the association between woman and the Telefol string bag is reinforced daily in the way that the domestic *bilum (aam bal men)* accompanies her everywhere and is used by her continuously in both productive and reproductive roles (MacKenzie 1991:142). This is not the case for the women (or men) in Tongoa. Mats are not personal objects in this sense nor do Tongoa women use mats in their reproductive roles. In fact preparing pandanus and weaving are inimical to pregnancy and breastfeeding. Pandanus is said to make the unborn or nursing child itch and the position and act of weaving is thought to harm the unborn child. Furthermore, women do not make mats peripatetically like Telefol women make *bilums* but *only* in that domestic space of the *namatana* which itself is partially created by the mat that she sits on to weave. Mats allude to human bodies not just in a metaphorical reference to the reproductive role and capacity of women but in a dual allusion to people on, and within, *ples*.

6.6i Patterning the Connections between Women's Bodies and the Social Body

The potential of the human body as the most immediate and because of ideas of natural givens, a most powerful, generator of images for the wider entity of society has been thoroughly explored by Mauss (1973) and Douglas (1966; 1970). Images of human bodies become mapped onto social bodies and indeed in the case of phenomenon such as tattooing, vice versa. Tilley explores the idea of the body as the most basic of 'material metaphors': "The body is both the Same and Other, an object and a subject of practices and knowledges, a tool and a raw material to be worked upon."(Tilley 1999:37). Tilley is not speaking specifically of tattoos here but the idea of the body's surface as representing a canvas "to be worked upon" is a powerful way to view the practice of tattooing (cf. Gell 1993). Both women and men on Tongoa were traditionally tattooed in the pre-Christian past (Miller 1987:164) (see appendix 3 for examples of tattoo patterns). In the case of
both men and women, tattooing appears to have been associated with high ranking chiefs and their wives. Informants on Tongoa today most often stressed to me however that it was women who were traditionally tattooed on their chests, calves and upper inner thighs. Tattoos on a chief’s upper thighs was most often cited as an attribute of chiefly rank. An often repeated story tells of a chief’s wife whose tattoo pattern reveals her adultery: her lover, having seen the forbidden pattern, unwittingly reproduces it by biting into a *naropo* (wild kava, this plant is related to kava but is not drunk) leaf which is then found by the chief. Both wife and lover are consequently condemned to death. That the pattern is the medium through which the chief discovers the betrayal is unsurprising given the potency of intricate visually compelling imagery (Gell 1992). The power of pattern on mats and women does not lie in magically imbued technical processes bringing them into being (as in the Trobriand canoe prows that Gell illustrates his argument with), nor that the means (dyes, piercing implements) are likewise enchanted, but simply in the effect that visual intricacy has on the human eye. In effect, the message here is: once seen, never forgotten.

Designs on mats are also tattoo designs. *Namindiria* is the noun given for mat patterns (and also for the written word). Tattoo patterns (*wortu*; also called *maki* which is derived from the Bislama word *mak* for tattoo; *mumu* - this word means ‘picture’ and is also used in reference to photographs and video images) are visual references that appear not just on mats and women and men’s bodies, but also on carvings, armbands, leaf patterns produced by biting into a folded *naropo* leaf and decorative knots used to ‘decorate’ *farea* and house. These knots are referred to as *fuagoro* which also means to carry something so as to conceal it in the palm of one’s hand*. Such knots are tied around the ‘forehead’ beam of the *farea* but must face inwards, concealed within the interior space of the *farea* as within a

---

*Facey gives the following translation of the verb *goro* in Nguna: to block, to be in the way (Facey n.d b) 277*
palm. What these diverse objects all have in common is chiefly power and sanctity. The tattoo high on a chief's wife's upper thighs is called *narai nawota* or *nafarei nawota* (literally 'the face/forehead of the chief') and this too is hidden from view. The design *narai nawota* was explained to me as the mark or signature of the chief. *Narai nawota* does not necessarily refer to a single fixed design but a number of related designs. Some of these explicitly represent female genitalia (see appendix 3). The zigzag pattern on the nineteenth century mat (see diagram 4.0) and a very old wooden dish (see plate 4.0) were also named *narai nawota*: informants stated that the zigzags were akin to the creases on the chief's forehead. This zigzagging is precisely the geometric patterning that is a feature of women's tattoos.

That the same patterns appear on mats and women attenuates further the affinity between women's bodies and mats that we see in the act of weaving. With these patterns, the surfaces of both women and mats become inscribed with social designs literally and metaphorically. Whilst the structural form of the mat employs corporeal metaphors, the dyed patterns woven on it's surface metaphorically connect, via the body of the mat, women's bodies with the wider domain of the social body. The motifs that appear on and constitute the mat are thus repeated across a wide range of cultural products: houses, women, carvings and armbands. These common motifs set up resonances between these objects and wider cultural processes. These resonances connect the everyday with the ritual, and the chiefly *mana/tapu* with the common. The ability of the mat to refer to diverse domains and make them co-present is exemplified in its appearance during the lifecycle events considered in the next chapter.

---

9 In *Namakura*, designs are also named 'face/forehead of the chief: *nanakon nawotalam*. 278
Chapter Seven

Mats and the Attachment and Detachment of Persons to Place

7.0 Introduction

Previous chapters have established that the system of chiefly titles and land tenure on Tongoa feature centrally in the reckonings that connect person to place more generally on the island. Chapter seven examines these connections more closely to reveal just how mats are effective in the processes that attach and detach persons to place. The analysis of the person-place relationship in chapter 6 demonstrated the strong identification between person and place on Tongoa. The moments where this identification becomes most attenuated are lifecycle rites. The management of birth, circumcision, marriage and death actively work to attach and detach persons from places. The connection between person and place is particularly heightened in the case of chiefs’ attachment to land. This attachment - the title is the land as seen in chapter 3 - must be broken in order to pass on the title. The ritual transference of title and land from a chief to his successor (the navuvusakeana) illustrates this process of detachment. Mats appear in lifecycle events and the navuvusakeana in a variety of guises: as exchange objects, mundane practical items and ceremonial pieces. All these guises can be analysed to be involved in the making and breaking of peoples connection to their ples.

As we have seen in chapters 5 and 6, the everyday use of the mat as a domestic object is centred around the household and its social relations. Mats either come into this domestic space from exchange transactions or from women weaving within the household. Once a mat has been used within this domestic context, however, it cannot then leave to become an object of exchange and ceremony. The removal of the mat from this sphere therefore
represents a change in its social form: it is now a mobile object which is not fixed to the namatana. In these circumstances the mat embodies meanings and knowledge differently than it does within the context of the everyday. Such disparate embodied meaning is reflected in the diverse forms mats are presented during exchange. When exchanged for example, there are five basic ways that mats can be presented and given: folded, concealed within a coconut leaf mat (katafau) or rolled up and formally presented to an honoured guest. In other exchanges where mats are laid out and layered with other mats, a point is made of their display. Another important variation of the presentation of mats in exchange is the holding of an unfolded mat by the corner to hand to the recipient.

When a stored mat is taken out and carried to an event to be given, its fold is maintained and the mats received by the ‘diary’ man or woman will be piled up still in their neat folds (see plate 7.0). Other presentations as outlined above variously deploy the physical possibilities of the mat’s form: mats are unfolded and formally held at one corner to give to kin that have come to the nafitawiriana (marriage ceremony where the navagogotoana or exchanges from man’s kin to woman’s kin occurs) or the navuvusakeana (installation of a new chief). In another exchange of the nafitawiriana the bride’s mimi (father’s sister or mother’s brother’s wife) and/or the groom’s mimi or sister, makes a large presentation of mats and calico layered upon each other, forming a presentation called naweweleineana. In such presentations, particularly vibrant, impressive mats are used. Another method of presenting mats utilises the capacity of mats to wrap and conceal. Nakakafu bundles are given in wedding and chiefly exchanges. As seen in previous chapters the nakakafu are made up of 4-5 folded pandanus mats (nagbanu) wrapped in a katafau mat. In this instance the underside creates an interior hidden space, concealing the nagbanu within it, while the uppermost side becomes outermost and visible, facing the world.
The most relevant feature of the mat in the exchanges it features in beyond the *namatana* is its quality of interchangeability or substitutability: namely, a mat can stand in for any other mat. Unlike other mat-making traditions elsewhere in the archipelago, Tongoan mats are not distinguished by form or decoration into specific categories that can only be used in specific contexts. Not only are Tongoa mats not separated into different categories, but they are not individuated objects with 'biographies' (cf. Kopytoff 1986). Tongoa mats do not become more valuable or distinguished with age and they are not inherited as the fine mats of Samoa are (Kaeppler 1978; Linnekin 1991a). When a woman makes a mat, she is not at this stage making a mat distinguished for any specific function. That is, the mat is not necessarily destined for *either* ceremony/exchange *or* domestic use according to its form, or the woman’s intention. Once the mat is completed, however, a decision is made whether to use it immediately in the context of the household, or more commonly, to carefully fold it, and put it away for future use, domestic or ritual. Once a mat has been used as a domestic object, however, it is never transacted in exchange.

I had assumed that the reasons for this were based in the assertion that only new clean mats can be given in exchange (this being the response to my direct questions on the subject). Only by observing a woman (Mareta) agitatedly push her toddler away from the mat she was weaving did another powerful reason for domestic mats remaining domestic mats emerge. As explained in chapter 6 bodily substances such as urine, faeces or, by extension partially consumed food, may be transported via the agency of the mats surface to other

1 I do not mean by this that women do not know how they will use the mat they are in the process of weaving but, rather, that the future identity and role of this mat is not necessarily determined during its production or by its technical specifications. Indeed, women do make mats with a distinct need in mind. In response to my questions of how they planned to use the mat they were weaving, women generally did have a purpose in mind, but significantly were often reluctant to state specifically that they were merely creating a stockpile of mats (see chapter 2).
domains. Mareta explained to me that if Pakoa dropped food that he had been eating, or
relieved himself on the surface of the mat, it could not be exchanged but would have to
remain in the household as a domestic mat. The cultural logic behind this relates to the
burial of human bodies with mats. Once unwittingly placed into circulation, a mat soiled
with food leavings could later be used in a funerary exchange and be buried with the
corpse. If this were to happen Pakoa would sicken and could ultimately die. This example
illustrates the potential of the mat's surface to form an effective path between the diverse
domains of Tongoan life. As an object the mat has the ability to connect the space of the
grave with the world of the living via its surface. Thus, mats that corpses are laid out on
prior to burial and mats that the coffin has rested upon, must accompany the body into the
grave. If they continue to be used in the world of the living and people sit, sleep and eat
upon their surfaces, sickness and ultimately death will be the result.

Therefore, whilst any mat may potentially be used for domestic or ceremonial/exchange
purposes, there is a point in the lifecycle of the mat that it becomes explicitly associated
with one or the other sphere. This moment is when it is used within the namatana and
subsequently becomes fixed to it. Food leavings and other body products fix the mat
within the namatana. When they become objects of exchange beyond the namatana mats
acquire a mobility and become fluid forms whose future use cannot be anticipated. It is
precisely because its future movements are not subject to control and its participation in
future exchanges is unknown, that mats are detached from the namatana and the woman
who made it. The makers and givers of individual mats are not remembered in exchange
after exchange and the mat is ultimately an alienable object from the matrix of social
relations which produced it.
7.1 Mats Resist Attachment to Persons

Mats appear in every lifecycle event. They act as practical items, perform ceremonial functions and are exchanged. When mats are given in large scale events such as funerals, they represent the coalescing of kin groups that are specific to that event and unlikely to reappear in exactly the same form in the future. When a death has occurred, kin from other villages are informed by means of a letter. Such a letter notifies them of the death and obliquely indicates that their support is expected at the funeral. Although only people who have close ties to the deceased will be formally notified they are not the only people who will go to the funeral ‘to cry’. People with kinship and other ties to those formally notified, will indicate their support by making prestations of mats, calico and money to these principal mourners. Such prestations are expressions of support for the principal mourner to whom these individuals have closer ties than they do to the deceased’s direct family.

A case history illustrates the main points: on 26/11/96, a man from Lubukuti village on Tongoa died. The next day, 14 people from three different namatana of Purau went to his funeral (namateana; mate: dead). Of the three Purau namatana two held principal mourners: Pastor Rarua and Leinasu Katy Timo, siblings to the deceased’s wife. Three women from Leinasu’s namatana each gave her mats to carry to the funeral in addition to her own contribution. Similarly, three women (each from different namatana) who did not go to the funeral supported Pastor Rarua’s contribution with mats. Upon arrival at Lubukuti all of these mats were not given individually, however, but in two bundles. The prestations made by Leinasu and her brother thus represent a series of smaller prestations within each of them.
Presenting in this way is said to make the contribution 'heavy' and represents the socially approved principle of people acting in concert. Similarly, very large exchanges such as those which accompany marriage are themselves composed of a series of smaller exchanges 'behind' and supporting it. These supporting exchanges are not directly visible but are later acknowledged. Thus, when Pastor Rarua and Leinasu arrived at Lubukuti and presented the mats, calico and money to the host (deceased's brother), the offering was made in their names and the names of the six women who had given mats were not recorded. Their act of support was noted very carefully by Pastor Rarua and Leinasu, however, and the bullock quarter they received from the deceased's family was in turn butchered and distributed upon return to Purau.

Neither the mats given by Pastor Rarua, Leinasu or their unnamed supporters are destined to be remembered as given by them once the particular funerary exchange is made. When given in exchange, the mat does not remain associated or identified with the specific person who gave or made it, beyond the context of that particular exchange. This is the case elsewhere in the archipelago: on Ambae once a women gives a mat her authorship does not remain attached to her product (Bolton 1993: 261). As such, it does not set up an ongoing relationship between giver and receiver. In all lifecycle exchanges on Tongoa when mats leave the hands of the giver, the mats are piled up (see plate 7.0) and subsequently re-enter circulation. Many will be used in the same event, although if the giver is to later receive a mat, care is taken to ensure that they do not receive the very same mat they initially gave.² This principle holds true for all arenas of exchange such as the exchange of laplap between households on Sundays; the offered laplap pieces are placed with the laplap that the recipient family has cooked and different pieces are then selected and given in return.

² This depends on people, usually women, who view each mat as it comes into the event.
Plate 7.0 The ‘diary man’ and his assistants recording gifts of mats at a marriage

Plate 7.1 Preparing the *naweweleiana* presentation
When a mat is given at funerals, one sometimes sees women taking a moment to cut one of the knotted tassels at its corner (*piri*; see diagram 6.2). If a mat is to be buried with a deceased person, at least one of these knots must be severed, thus severing the (anonymous) weaver’s connection to it. This symbolic separation is explained as a literal one: the plaited knot *is* the hand of the woman and if this separation does not occur the weaver may experience a numb sensation in her hand. The ultimate consequence is for the weaver to die. The numb sensation is a direct reflection of the decaying of the corpse in the grave.

The corners of the mat are thus important sites. Holding a mat by its corner is one of the ways that mats are presented at exchanges accompanying the transferral of the chief’s title (*navuvusakeana*) and the arrival of the bride at her new *namatana*. Mats held in this way are always given in conjunction with shaking the hand of the recipient. At funerals, relatives give mats in this way to the deceased. Such exchanges are the last that the deceased will participate in. When relatives arrive at funerals their first action is to centre around the deceased who is laid out in state inside a house of their *namatana*. Crying loudly to express their sorrow with the hosts, these relatives approach the body in *namatana* groups and give the deceased mats and lengths of calico, holding the mats and calico by a corner and shaking the right hand of the deceased.

In comparison with the giving of mats, when Melpa and Telefolmin women give *bilums*, they give a part of themselves: MacKenzie has shown how *bilum* production, specifically spinning string and looping, establishes an identification between women and the bilum. Following Strathern (1972; 1981: 1988) MacKenzie shows this identification to be
metonymical - the *bilum* stands for detachable aspects of the woman (MacKenzie 1991:142). As seen in chapter 6 an association between woman and mat is established through the processes of production on Tongoa. But the identification is not metonymical and there is a different sense of objectification and authorship at play here. When a woman finishes a mat the last place her hand leaves it is the final knot at the corner. This knot is a metaphor for her hand and thus only a symbolic connection exists between her and her product. Through this view, the mat emerges as a symbolic extension of the weaver’s body into the world rather than a detachable aspect of her person (cf. Strathern 1988). Despite the strong association between the body of the weaver and the mat she weaves, individual mats are not metonymical aspects of an individual woman in the exchanges she participates in. She is not remembered either at the point of the initial exchange when the mat she has woven leaves her namatana or at later exchanges that it circulates in. Mats are recognised to have the potential, as extensions of women’s’ bodies, to remain attached to their persons but this is a metaphysical recognition of the nature of mats and the nature of women, rather than an inalienable tie between producer and product. Cutting the *piri* knot at funerals severs this metaphysical connection. It is as ‘person-like’ things (described in chapter 6) rather than detachable aspects of persons that mats must be severed from the human realm that produced them in order to be given to the dead to carry into the domain of the grave.

In contrast to this is the position of the *bilum* as inalienable from the women who produced it. Thus:

“As a gift which is not removed from the social relations of production and exchange, the string bag becomes a link in a never-ending chain of obligation which serves to maintain the relationship between donor and receiver.” (MacKenzie 1991:150)
On Tongoa, the exchange of mats is always directed to a specific and immediate end and, rather than being envisaged as a never-ending chain of obligation, the exchange takes place within a dynamic of immediate return. A stress is placed on maintaining a status quo, so that an exchange creates a debt which is only considered extant until a return exchange is made. Once this return occurs, however, the debt is considered ‘dead’ and does not intimate future exchanges. In comparison to the way that MacKenzie documents Telefol women giving each other string bags, Tongoan women do not exchange mats with each other in an affective exercise to establish or strengthen a friendship for example (although women do give each other baskets in this capacity). Women do give each other mats as an indication of respect in a formal situation however. For example, when Jean Tarisesei left Tongoa after her visit introducing the Women’s Cultural Fieldworker Project a Purau woman named Annie gave her a mat that she had made during Jean’s two week visit. In doing so Annie was expressing her regard for Jean and showing how well she thought of Jean and the relationship that they had established. Both women and men give mats as a gesture of respect in a formal context such as public meetings to welcome or send off an official. Giving mats is also the appropriate way to open convenings such as the Maraki Vanua Riki (see chapter 4).

In other instances where a rupture of the norm has occurred, great emphasis is placed on a swift return to normalcy. In the case of a person suddenly becoming dizzy or afflicted with *ae i dak* (swooning or fainting) they are shouted at to get them back to a normal state and they are urged to eat throughout this. Eating underlines a normal state of being: food is a vehicle for the maintenance of the status quo of social relationships. An example of this: when villagers return from an event in another village where they have received cooked food in an exchange, no matter what time of the night it is, their immediate family (who have contributed to the exchange but not travelled to the event) are woken to share the food. Similarly, when disputes are talked over and settled, the dominant theme is of a complete return to a status quo of friendly relations. The mat is instrumental in this process of reconciliation, and is in itself credited with the ability to effect the participants not only forgiving each other, but actually forgetting the dispute:

“If you make some trouble involving me, you can’t bring anything other than mats to ‘look me in the face’ and make restitution. When you do this, it is as if you are killing a fire, and we are able to forget the dispute, really forget it” *(Sapos yu mekem wan trabol long haos blong mi an yu no save tekem narafela samting, yu mas tekem mat blong mi luk long fes blong mi an taem yu karem mat i kam long fes blong mi, long nasara blong mi, olsem yu kilim wan faea...mi luk, mi glad. An samting ia, fogetem, taem yumi sek han wetem mat, fogetem evriting - fogetem gud, yu nomo tingbaot...Olsem yu kilim wan faea wetem mat”* Marakitapu, interview 19/5/97).

In this context the mat is a mechanism of reinstating a social equilibrium.
According to MacKenzie, the Telefolmin *bilum* is: “invariably thought of in terms of who made it, for whom, and on what occasion.” (MacKenzie 1991:151). This connection is present in Tongoa when people speak about the origin of particular mats and women in particular are almost always able to state how the mats within their households came to be there (this includes those mats stored for future exchanges). I suggest, however, that the mat is not *invariably* thought of in these terms. Although mats are recorded as coming from a specific person in a lifecycle exchange this does not necessarily mean that it is the maker herself giving the mat. This is obviously the case for male transactors: in one exchange accompanying a marriage payment in Purau 29 people (6 men, 23 women) gave mats in their name. All except one of the mats given by men were actually carried to the ‘diary man’ by a women, most often their wife, but also their sister or son’s wife. Even when women are giving mats, however, the connection between producer and product is already broken at the moment of exchange. This differs essentially from the case of the Telefolmin *bilum*:

“The inalienable relationship of producer to the product, that Mauss (1954[1925]:11) made us aware of, is evidenced in the way that the bilum, once exchanged, is a constant reminder of she who made and gave it” (MacKenzie 1991:152).

This is not the case in Tongoa: here, at the moment of exchange, women transactors do not make any distinction between a mat that they have made and one they have acquired from elsewhere to give.

The resistance to commoditising the *bilum* on the part of Telefolmin women contrasts sharply with the concerted efforts to sell mats by the Tongoan women who weave them. MacKenzie explains the Telefolmin situation through the desire of Telefolmin women to
'see the face of the recipient' while they are looping the bilum - so that they can "invest their labour in a social return" (MacKenzie 1991:155). Every time Tongoan women and men give mats, they are restating their social connections and positioning themselves anew within the social map of *pies*. Because the mat does not represent an inalienable tie between producer and product, however, in exchange it does not embody the social relationship between giver and receiver. Rather, it is an index of sociality itself. The mat is not inalienable, but something that Tongoa people explicitly liken to money: "*mat hemi mane, kastom mane blong yumi*" ('mats are money, our traditional kastom money' Chief Tarisaliu speaking at Purau village 'kastom' court 25/10/96).

If Tongoans liken mats to money as a standardised index of value, statements such as: "*mat hemi olsem vatu*" ('mats are like money' Leiwea Rita 7/3/96) not only indicate that money and mats have the capacity to operate in similar fashion, but also that they can act as each other. To a certain extent, money and mats are modelled as interchangeable: "*sapos vu no gat vatu, vu save givim mat*" ('if you don't have money, you can give mats' Annie Leiboto 7/3/96). Annie offered this opinion to me as we walked to another village to attend a marriage payment. When I asked whether the reverse was also the case, she and the other women (seven altogether) agreed that yes, in principle, one could give only money if one did not have mats. In observing and recording the actual prestations that Purau people made, however, I found that this rare in actual practice: for the most part people give a combination of mats and money, less often mats alone, and only in a few cases of contributions to bridal payments made by urban dwellers, money alone. Giving a mat has a social weight to it that money alone does not have: older people, particularly women, tended towards this view: "*yumi no save karem mane mo kaliko nomo, i mas gat mat*"
Mats represent an index of social value and as such can indicate abstract entities such as 'respect' and 'tradition': "Kastom blong mifala long man Vanuatu hemi mat, kava, pig. Emi mane blong, valu blong, ol man Vanuatu olsem...mane blong mifala, nao, mat."

('Mats, kava and pigs are the kastom of ni-Vanuatu people...these things are our money, the way we value things' Marakitapu 19/5/97). The social agency of mats is not based within an objectification of the giver-receiver relationship (as may occur if they were inalienable), but in their position as an index of that relationship at the moment of exchange. As such (like smoke is an index of fire), this indexical reference is momentary. Once the initial mat has been received and a return made, the identity of the giver is not attached to the particular mat that they gave. This mat re-enters circulation, severed from the initial giver.

A recent study of material culture in Southeast Asia models the connections between people and things based on a category of personally meaningful possessions or 'biographical objects' (Hoskins 1998). Such objects are distinct from public commodity, gift, heirloom, or ancestral regalia, and are instead those objects that people tell their stories through. Using this category of object Hoskins examines the narrative creation of self through the vehicle of objects. Not individuated themselves, mats are not appropriate objects to narrate personal biographies in the way described by Hoskins. While the bilum of Papua New Guinea and the betel bag of Indonesia are integral to the self of women and men respectively, the mat is not a ubiquitous companion and part of the person in this sense. In the bilum producing cultures of Papua New Guinea, the bilum is attached to
personhood very specifically through the marking of one’s social identity (Telefolmin girls wear pubic bilums at menarche, men wear particular bilums as they achieve the stages of hierarchy in male initiation cults). In other words, the bilum is a personal possession which marks one’s movement through the lifecycle. Mats are present at all lifecycle events and thus also mark the passage of Tongoan individuals through life stages, but they are not intensely personal possessions.

7.2 Processes of Attachment and Detachment to Place: Mats and the Management of Lifecycle Events

Humans are accompanied by mats at all the events marking their passage through life: people are born onto mats and are ultimately buried in mats. At birth, the new namatana member is born into a space defined by the mats covering the floor in layers. During the ten day post-birth period women of the namatana and village, and female kin from other villages, come to the house and bring (uncooked) food. This called eu piari (‘they do this’; piari: to visit new mother and child, to make mats, dogi and figerei baskets during this time). At the dudumani event ten days after the birth, mats, calico and money are given to the women who have attended the mother and baby. Women and sometimes men with a particularly close relationship to the woman, such as mother’s brother, bring mats, calico, money and small gifts such as nappies. In return they receive a piece of the meat butchered by the host namatana. The mats and other items exchanged represent the beginning of the new baby’s life as a social individual. Similarly, at funerals when mourning relatives present the deceased with mats and lengths of calico (and receive meat portions in return) this exchange is explicitly modelled as the last exchange the deceased participates in, the last of the exchanges that have constituted their social selves.
The alienability of the mat in exchange demonstrates that mats resist attachment to the people that make and exchange them. Rather than becoming aspects of persons circulating through the medium of giving and receiving, mats primarily act to effect the attachment and detachment of persons to place during lifecycle events. The ceremonies and exchanges of marriage, for example, fundamentally detach a woman from her natal namatana and reattach her to her new place, the namatana of her husband. Mats appear in a number of guises in these ceremonies and exchanges.

7.3 Transferring Women Between Namatana at Marriage

The following is a description (collated from a number of informants’ descriptions) of how kastom mared (‘traditional marriage’) was carried out in the past. The process begins with a parent choosing a girl who they want to marry their son. They then give a pig to the girl’s family which is matched with a pig given in return by the girl’s family. This exchange (‘wago tipapiri’) marks an agreement between the two families that their children will marry. The pig given by the boy’s family serves to blokem that girl (prohibit her from any other union). At this time, which is before either the boy or girl are ready to marry, the girl’s family plants yams in preparation and the girl’s mother makes nakakafu, the bundles of pandanus mats wrapped in coconut leaf mats. On the day of the ceremony, the girl’s family and boy’s family exchange food which they have cooked. The man’s family then carry the pigs which have already been killed and cleaned (so that only meat is given; all the innards and guts etc stay at the namatana of the boy), along with kava, sugarcane, manioc, banana, yams and mats to the farea. These pigs form the navagogotoana payment.

The ceremony itself takes place at the namatana of the girl’s family. The girl’s mother carries a red yam that she has roasted and the skin is scraped off into a basket (figirei
type). This yam is handed to the chief who stands in front of the couple. The chief gives the head of the yam (napau naowi) to the girl and the end of the yam (nandobuna naowe) to the boy. The head of the yam represents the fertility of the union (it is the head which is planted to produce more yams). The chief then moves his hand in a downward motion as if to break the yam and the couple break it into two and eat it. The girl then sits on the nakakafu bundles which are placed on a mat that her mimi (father’s sister, mother’s brother’s wife) has put down. The number of nakakafu given matches the number of pigs given by the boy’s family in the navagogotoana (‘bridal payment’). The girl then shakes hands with her family and gives each of them a mat, held by the corner. Informants diversely report that the girl wears barkcloth made from nasiasi bark or a single panel mat wrapped around her (today she wears calico; see below). This completes the part of the ceremony conducted at the girl’s namatana. She is now ‘carried’ to the boy’s namatana by her kin, walking in their midst as they sing. The mat that she was on while she shook hands with her natal relatives is held over her head as she walks. As they approach the namatana of the boy a man of his family stands outside it and calls to the group in welcome.

The group of natal relatives who are said to carry her to her new namatana bring with them the things that accompany her: dogi pandanus baskets which are hung on tungali (pig’s lower jaw bone with tusks) - as many as 20 or 30 dogi are hung from the tusks. In addition, they carry nambura natasi (coconut shells filled with saltwater) are fastened in pairs with rope made of nambeleilu bark (burao, cottonwood), mondaki (tongs made of the bent spine of the coconut frond), used to move the heated oven stones and kura (a long piece of wood with a bent shape at the end) used to rake the smaller oven stones. All of these have obvious connections to the processes of cooking and are intended for use in the
new namatana. When the girl arrives she is seated again on the nakakafu bundles and the men of the boy’s namatana give speeches. Once again she shakes hands with mats: held by the corner she presents mats and greets the members of her new namatana.

Many features of the above ceremony form that part of the contemporary marriage that is designated kastom. The contemporary church ceremony seems to have taken the place of the ceremonial breaking of the yam. As seen in chapter 2 the wago tipapiri exchange still takes place between the two sides but this exchange now occurs when the couple are adults. The central features of the contemporary kastom marriage are the payment of the navagogotoana to the woman’s family (see plate 7.3) and the ritual transferral of the woman to her new namatana. Mats feature in both. Before a woman leaves her natal namatana she sits on the boxes (placed on a mat) that her brothers have bought and filled with household goods such as plates, cutlery, pots and glassware. These boxes are carried with the bride to her new household and have replaced the mondaki, kura and nambura natasi mentioned above. The red wooden boxes accompany the nakakafu bundles and like these bundles contain a wealth of things. Also accompanying the woman on her journey are the mats given to her in the naweweleiiana presentation (‘the making of the bed’). The naweweleiiana consists of layers of mats laid out with calico, bedsheets and blankets (see plate 7.1). A money payment (between 6,000-10,000 vatu (US$60-100) also accompanies the layered textiles. Each of these items (including the money) must be a even number. The naweweleiiana presentation is made to the bride by her mimi (father’s sister; mother’s brother’s wife; e pewelei: ‘she puts down the mat and makes the bed’; wendei: bed). The presentation is then folded up and accompanies the woman as she is brought to the man’s namatana. The naweweleiiana is a statement made by a woman’s family: “gel ia hemi kamaot long mifala” (‘we are this girl’s origins’ Rachel Leinagisu 4/7/96); a statement of
who she is and where she comes from in the face her leaving to become incorporated into another group.

Before a woman can leave her namatana, however, a crucial ceremony must take place. She must be wrapped in the natali ki loloa (‘rop blong angkel, ‘uncle’s rope’). This rope is a 42 yard length piece of calico cloth which has had pieces of 2 or 4 yards of calico tied all along its length. This massive bulk of calico is wound about the body of the woman by her lolua (mother’s brothers⁴) as she stands under the tapaupau shelter with the boxes, nakakafu and dogi baskets (see plate 7.2). The rope of calico makes the bride ‘heavy’ in preparation for her to be carried to the man’s namatana. The end of the rope is hidden and when she reaches the new namatana an atavi of that ples must find the end and unwrap her. This is like saying “woman ia eni blong haos ia naq” (‘this woman is of this house and place now’ Marakitapu 15/10/96). It is after a woman has been wrapped in calico that she individually shaking hands with members of her natal namatana and kin. This action where she presents a mat to each person by holding it at the corner as she shakes hands mirrors how relatives say goodbye to deceased kin.

When a woman’s natal kin carry her (eu momori: ‘they do this’) to the husband’s namatana she walks in the centre of her kin who sing and hold a mat over her head (see plate 7.4). This mat is either one from the naweveauiana presentation or the mat that she has sat upon to shake hand with her relatives. The mat held over her head signifies that she

⁴ A woman’s lolua have purchased the calico rope which in itself encompasses once again a series of exchanges behind it. When a man knows that his sister’s daughter is marrying and he is responsible for the calico rope, he kills a bullock and makes presentations of meat to his dispersed kin. In return, these people will bring a length of calico to the marriage ceremony and tie it on the 42 yard length. Similarly, the naweveauiana presentation made by the woman’s mimi represents mats that her kin have given to her. In both cases, loloa and mimi are presented with an exchange in return. The uncles receive mats and money from the woman’s parents; one example received at a Purau marriage was 6 mats and 3,000 vatu (US$30). The aunts who give mats, calico pieces and money receive in return the original presentation doubled.
Plate 7.2
Marriage prestation of four nakakafu bundles with dogi baskets
Plate 7.3 Carrying piles of mats from the groom’s kin as part of the navagotoana marriage payment

Plate 7.4 Transferring a woman from her natal namatana to her husband’s namatana
is being moved from one namatana to another. Importantly though, this mat also has the ability to connect these two namatana and thus the bride’s natal and affinal sides: the mat that the bride is transferred under (see plate 7.4) is then used in the making of the marriage bed and is characterised as prompting the woman when she sleeps upon it to think of her family that have helped her in the past and to help them in the future. Recalling the initial wago tipapiri exchanges of pigs between the girls’ family and the boy’s, we can see that these do not include mats; it is only at the moment of detaching the women from her natal namatana that mats are exchanged and used in ceremony. The navagogotoana and the ceremony surrounding it act to sever the woman from one namatana and reattach her to another.

The pivotal moment when she is ‘carried’ by her uterine kin (eu momori) to her new namatana is effected by the mat that they hold over her head. Underneath the space of this mat, she is transferred from one namatana to another. This process is called eu puagoro nagoroi (oli blokem, kavemap woman; they protect, cover her). It is interesting to note here the similar qualities of women as heavy when wrapped in calico for this process and the very same qualities of heaviness desired of a mat. Both woman and mat thus capture the duality of heaviness and mobility when moving from one ples to another. The nakakafu (mat bundles wrapped in katafau mats; see plate 7.2) transacted in the bridal payments\(^5\) underscore this transferral; through this exchange, her ‘bones’ are compensated for and will be buried in her new place. The bride sits on the nakakafu to shake hands (with mats, holding them by the corner) with her natal kin whom she is now leaving. When she arrives at her new namatana she once again sits on the nakakafu which have accompanied her and greets the members of her husband’s ples, once again shaking hands

\(^5\) Nakakafu form an important part of the exchange. There are as many nakakafu given as there are pigs, and each of these objects refers to the other (see chapter 3).
and presenting mats to each. This mirrored process taking place in each namatana reflects her detachment from one ples (her natal namatana) and then reattachment to her new ples. Death requires that individuals are detached from their place (namatana, garden land, farea) also. It is at the handing over of the chiefly titles that these processes of attachment and detachment to land become most emphasised.

7.4 Mats and the Making of Chiefs - Analysing the Ritual Process of Transferring Chiefly Titles

The centrality of mats within the relationship between persons and place is exemplified by the process through which land relations are transmitted in the passing on of the nawota title. As discussed in the first section of this thesis, the ties between people and land are of primary importance in Tongoa today. The pressure of a fast growing population on limited land resources means that access and rights to land is a matter of great interest and concern. When contested during disputes, the history and boundaries of fanua are subject to intense debate. Mats are not individuated, but fanua are. This enigma is at the heart of the navuvusakeana ceremony. Navuvusakeana refers to the ceremony that passes on the titles of both nawota (‘paramount chief’) and the lower ranking napau nawota (‘small chief’). In the case of the former, the term naleiawana is also used. Naleiawana indicates a feast or lafet (special occasion) more generally.

The navuvusakeana or naleiawana represents the transferral (and reproduction) of sets of land relations from one generation to the next. One of the first statements I noticed people make spontaneously about mats on Tongoa concerned the situation following the death of a title-holder who had not passed on his title. If a chief (of whichever rank) dies without passing on his title, the transferral of title to heir has to take place while the pair share the
space of a mat: the dead incumbent lying and the chief-elect standing. That this process cannot take place without mats is the subject of this section.

The navuvusakeana is described in Bislama as *karemaot nem, putum long niufala jif* (‘to take out, remove the name and put it on/in the new chief’). This indicates the nature of the transaction: a tangible entity is detached from the person of the incumbent and attached to the successor. This is the reason why the name must be detached before the body of a deceased chief is buried. In the case of a transferral between the dead title holder and his heir, the mat which has effected the transferral is then wrapped around the body of the deceased and buried with him. The following descriptions of the investiture ceremony draws upon a number of sources: Facey 1981; Guiart 1973, contemporary informants’ description and explanations and my own observation of the only navuvusakeana to take place during my period on Tongoa.  

In the case of a chief passing on his title whilst he is alive, both he and successor also stand on mats; in the Tevala case, there were 4-5 mats layered on top of coconut palm mats (*katafau*). The old chief places his hand on the heir’s head and emplaces the title by speaking a variation of the following: ‘today, the small name of Songi is finished. Now, you are TiMataso’. In this hand he holds a small amount of money (around 500-1,000 vatu: US$5-10) which he then gives to the new chief. At the old chief’s side there are mats folded and piled up (depending on the importance of the chiefly title the number could be between 20 and 30 to over 100). These mats are also given to the new chief, in return for the pigs, mats and money that he has given to his predecessor in exchange for the title. The recipient of the title always gives more in these transactions; it was stressed to me that

---

6 This was the investiture of the head (*napau nawota* or *smol jif*, ‘small chief’) of Tevala farea, Pele village 1/5/96
this is because “**evri samting, nem mo graon**” (‘everything, title and land’) is being transferred to the younger man (Leipakoa David 18/12/96). The fact that ‘everything’ is transferred perhaps illuminates informants’ explanation of the names that title holders assume after passing on the title itself. For example, the holder of the title ‘Tarisaliu’ assumes the name ‘Manasakau’ after he has passed Tarisaliu to his successor. The general characterisation of these names is “**hemi nomo save mekem wan samting**” (‘he can no longer do things’ Willy David 18/12/96). The social agency to act in exchange, receive and make **nasautonga** is located within the title and it’s resources (land and the title holders ‘behind’ it) rather than within the person himself.

The handing over of the title of a **nawota** of a village as opposed to the smaller entity of **namatana** is a much larger affair and one that requires years of planning. The preparations are characteristically stated to begin with feeding pigs. In the past, this period of feeding pigs was circumscribed by a strict six year taboo on killing pigs within the chieftainship. This taboo was pronounced with a material marker: a pig’s lower jaw bone (**tugali**), fastened with **neeki** rope to a post of **narara** wood planted near the chief’s **farea**. The period where the chief and his **napau nawota** plan for the **naleiawana** is called **du kitano** (**oli lefitemap jif**: ‘they lift up the chief’; **Natano** is the noun for land). The chief and his **napau nawota** discuss arrangements in his **farea**, checking on the progress of gardens planted with banana, taro, yam, sugarcane and kava for the event. Messages are sent to other **nawota** telling them of the upcoming ceremony. Today this message is sent in the form of a letter, but in the past the messenger carried a **namele** leaf in his mouth. On arrival at the **farea** of the recipient **nawota** this leaf was removed from his mouth by the

---

7 **Narara**: Indian coral tree, this tree makes several appearances in the **naleiawana** and is discussed later in the chapter.

8 **Namele** (‘cycas circinnalis’); this leaf is a sign of peace in central and northern islands of the archipelago (Crowley 1995).
nawota and the message was then spoken: when to come, how many pieces of wood to bring to carry pigs home. The following discussion of the navuvusakeana will take the case of Tarisaliu nawota of Purau village.9

On the day of the ceremony chiefs from other villages and other islands come to Purau. Those with close links with the title of Tarisaliu through their kastom history will bring (or be expected to bring) pigs to support his navuvusakeana. For example, TiNapua of Lubukuti is expected to give pigs, as his title is particularly entwined with that of Tarisaliu as can be seen in the narrative of the migration to Tongoa (see chapter 3). This relationship between Tarisaliu and TiNapua is expressed in the statement that the ‘two are one’. As the visiting chiefs arrive, there are large dances (nambalas) and singing. The visiting chiefs give their pigs to Purau napau nawota, while the pigs they will be given in return are lined up with piles of yams, sugarcane, manioc and navara (germinating coconuts). These coconuts are referred to as navagavaga and specifically indicate the age and status of the pigs to be given: nagmo ni naneo (young coconut that has no flesh yet, just water) indicates a pig that is fully grown but without tusks. A navara with an emerging but undeveloped leaf frond indicates a pig whose tuskers have just emerged, while a navara with fully developed fronds means the pig has tusks which have grown fully into a circle. Tarisaliu’s atavi (ritual specialist) walks down the row of pigs, food and navara calling out the names of recipient chiefs (the verb for this action: sakeaki). In his hand he holds a stick of narara wood to point at each pile as he calls out the recipient. The atavi is also responsible for removing the dangerous sacred power from the presentation of pigs and food and the narara stick is later ritually thrown away.

9 The last navuvusakeana to pass on the title of Tarisaliu took place in May 1982. The present holder Samuel Tarisaliu inherited the title from Pakoa Roy who had held The event is still well remembered by Purau villagers as a large event that
After the pigs have been given a large mat is laid out over others layered underneath it at Purau farea. This mat can be specially decorated with white chicken feathers at each end, a decoration that is associated with the nawota who also wears white chicken feathers tucked into his hair on either side of his head. In contemporary navuvusakeana, both the nawota and his napau nawota wear lengths of calico wrapped around their waist and tied diagonally across their chests. Informants on Tongoa state that before the advent of calico a mat garment called bakaievo was worn across the chest in the same way. Guiart states that, previously, chiefs wore a “mat belt” and were painted with “ceremonial motifs” (Guiart 1973:62). Pig tusks encircle the chief’s upper arms. In addition to chicken feathers, the nawota wears a wooden comb (seru) and is crowned by the atavi with a circle of nakena vine. This thin vine grows around the trunks of large trees and has small leaves along it at intervals. The nakena is only worn by the nawota when he assumes the title and the land accompanying it and the atavi only places it on his head immediately prior to the ritual transference of title and land. The nakena symbolises the chief’s relationship with this land: “nakena emi olsem graon, graon blong jif” (‘the nakena is like the land, it means the chief’s land’ Marakitapu 19/5/97). Ringed around the large mat are smaller mats which each have other mats layered underneath it. The napau nawota who are to assume their titles form a row that flanks the new Tarisaliu-to-be and his atavi. Holding a nagau leaf, the atavi leads them to the farea (atavi e surue nawota paki farea) until they place their feet on the mats. The chief stands on the large mat while his napau nawota ring around on the smaller mats.

Speaking the same formula as in the Tevala case cited above the old holder of the title places his hand on the new Tarisaliu’s head and states that from today ‘Samuel’ is finished
and ‘Tarisaliu’ takes his place. Another man then takes the name Tarisaliu from the old chief and emplaces his new name, Manasakau. This is always the name taken by the man who has passed on the title of Tarisaliu. Manasakau refers to and employs the imagery of a reef. Nasakau means reef and links ideas of the reef that grows ceaselessly and stands firm whilst waves crash upon it with the genealogy of the title Tarisaliu. After this title has been passed on, the new Tarisaliu goes to each of the new napau nawota ringed around him and with the previous holder of each title puts his hand on the successor’s head to emplace the title with the same speech formula. Each old title holder then receives his new name, the title which succeeds that of napau nawota.

Chiefs today, both nawota and their napau nawota, receive their titles upon mats. Mats appear in the variations of this ceremony reported by Guiart (1973) for Makura Island and by contemporary informants for the title of Masamori of Emae Island. On Emae, the title of Masamori is passed on upon a stone which lies in the sea at the passage named Worarana. This stone is reached by a narara tree trunk placed with root end on the stone and leaf end on the shore where a mat is laid down. The narara tree makes several appearances in the ceremonies to pass on chiefly titles. As seen above it is the wood used to indicate and assign the pigs, food and navara given to visiting chiefs. The symbolic relevance of the narara tree in the ceremony is that narara is also planted to mark boundaries between fanaa.

After the name has been emplaced, the new Masamori, his atavi and napau nawota step back along the narara trunk to the shore/mat. Masamori and Tarisaliu share an atavi, ‘Atavi Rualima’ of Woitas, Tongoa. Masamori is a title that wields important influence on both Tongoa and Emae and the fact that his navuvusakeana takes place in the sea reflects
how the title is pulled between the two islands. After the ceremony both narara trunk and mat are thrown into the sea by the atavi. This is because of the dangerous power of the nawota and if used the mat would make people ill. The same principle is at work with the treatment of the mats used in Tarisaliu’s navuvusakeana. These are ‘cleaned’ of the chief’s dangerous sacred power by the atavi and placed in the chief’s farea, a restricted space.

TimakataMata of Emae Island is reported by Guiart to receive his title standing upon a branch of d’érythine placed from a stone (maka vuvu sake) (Guiart 1973:97). MwasoeRangi of Makura Island is reported to place his right foot upon a stone (navat va’a hean nawotalam) whilst his left foot rests upon a mat (ibid:62). The navuvusakeana employs combinations of ephemeral mats and immovable stones uniting to emplace titles. The fixity of the stone with the attention paid to the presence of mats highlights the ritual attempt to control an immovable entity (land) by using the movable mat. The presence of mats within the navuvusakeana is to act as movable metaphors for the immovable famua. The mobility of the mat within the realm of exchange informs its appearance in the rites to install land and title. The mat has the ability to embody the qualities of mobility and fixity simultaneously: woven in the namatana mats become free and mobile when they leave this space in exchange. Once used within the namatana, however, mats are fixed to this place. Mats are thus mobile yet with the implicit capacity to become fixed-in-place. Chiefs also have a dual nature as local and rooted in the place of their farea but also wide ranging in their affiliations and identities.

Recalling the discussion of weaving in chapter 5, stones are also crucial components in making mats: the molimoli stones used to weigh the mat down and hold it in place and are an agent of the desired outcome that the mat be ‘heavy’ and ‘strong’. Both these qualities
reflect and draw upon qualities of the land, namely fixity and heaviness (Munn 1986). The finished mat is destined to be mobile however: when women make mats they rarely do so for immediate domestic use. The mats used in the namatana have usually come to it through paths of exchange in lifecycle rites and other events. So mats have a metaphysical conundrum at the centre of their very existence: transformed by women from pandanus (both mobile entities) into ‘heavy objects’, mats nevertheless become detached from place and circulate freely before once again becoming fixed with a namatana.

After the new Tarisaliu has received the title he remains standing on the large central mat and the piles of mats placed next to him are taken individually by the atavi, opened and handed to the new nawota. The atavi then calls out the name of the recipient and Tarisaliu gives each mat in turn, holding it by the corner and shaking hands with recipient. He gives these mats to the chiefs who have come to the ceremony and supported it by contributing pigs. In addition, by witnessing the ceremony, they have given their backing to the succession. Tarisaliu seals his succession to the title by killing the pigs that have been laid out in a row on katafau mats (he either kills them himself or taps them on the head, symbolically performing the act which will then be carried out by the atavi).

The enthronement of the chief gives him the right to the title (Guiart 1973:97). More specifically, it is by killing the pigs that the title holder assumes the authority and position of the title. At the ceremony when the nawota kills pigs, he does so in the name of all his napau nawota who also receive their titles: “i min se, olgeta evriwan ia, oli purumbut long mat blong jif” (‘this means that all of them are putting their foot on the chief’s mat’ Marakitapu 19/5/97). This statement, draws a metaphorical connection between the surface of the chief’s mat, the chief’s person and his killing of pigs. At his naleiawana
Tarisaliu kills pigs in the names of his napau nawota: "ten o leven napau nawota, be hemi kilim pig olsem we i putum graon long olgeta evriwan" ("there are ten or eleven napau nawota, but he (Tarisaliu) kills the pigs like this and thus installs land on all of them’ Marakitapu 19/5/97).

Facey notes for Nguna that in the ‘pre-contact’ “investiture ceremony”:...“the central element in the rite was the ‘pulling up’ of the sacred spirit from the predecessor and the installation of it within his successor.” (1981:300) Facey does not mention the use of mats but with the information from Tongoa and other Shepherd Islands, mats assume a critical position in the transferral of sacred power between incumbent and successor. Mats are a essential material aspect of the process, an aide without which the transferral is incomplete. When the transferral takes place between an incumbent who has died with the title and its land still attached to his person, the role of mats becomes particularly stressed. When a man must stand on a mat to receive title, the mat’s function is to underline and facilitate the ideally seamless transition of the immortal name from one (mortal) man to another. The mat acts to separate the holder from land and attach this land to the person of the new title holder: “From hemi purumbut long mat blong em i min se nem i stap long pikinini blong hem...afta oli kavremap papa blong hem long mat, i go daon, be pikinini i tekemaot nem finis” (‘because he puts his foot on his father’s mat, the title stays with him...then when his father is wrapped in this mat and buried, the title has been removed already’ Marakitapu 19/5/97).

In the navuvusakeana, the layered mats that the chief (old and new) stand upon, effect a material link between the title and the land at the moment both are transferred. In doing so, they are metaphorically bringing together the dispersed famua of the title and re-
attaching them with the title to the person of the new holder. This layering of mats models
the situation of *fanua* that are the dispersed foundation of the title and the source of the
men ‘behind the title’. Recalling the discussion of the title system in chapter 3, these titles
can also be seen as layered. ‘Behind’ the *nawota* are his *napau nawota* who in turn are
supported by a layer of *kitaku* behind them. In the *navuvusakeana*, layered mats act as a
graphical means through which the distributed *fanua* and relationships of the title can be
brought together at these cyclical moments. As such, mats can be compared to the
Yekuana baskets of Amazonia that:

> “are part and parcel of the transformation of the world into a coherent and ordered
reality, making a sum, a whole, out of seemingly disparate parts.” (Tilley 1999:72
on David Guss 1986 *To Weave and Sing: Art, Symbol and Narrative in the South
American Rain Forest*)

The reason that the *navuvusakeana* of *nawota* or paramount chiefs are so much bigger is
not just because of the greater status of these *nawota* but because what is happening at
such events is the simultaneous transferral of all the land (land rights and land relations) in
the domain, from one generation to the next. As such, it represents a huge undertaking,
with connections to the entire process of social reproduction. The *navuvusakeana* is a
massive pulling together of the relationships, *fanua* and roads that constitute the title. The
title cannot be transferred unless these disparate aspects of itself are drawn together and
momentarily reunited.

When chiefs stand on layers of mats to receive their titles, the referencing between the mat
and the *fanua* is clear. Another instance of transferring land underlines the connection
between mats and land and makes it explicit: ‘*e laigai nagbanu natano e lua Esau asa*’
(*hemî openem mat blong graon i go long Esau;* ‘he opens the mat of the land and gives it
to Esau’). This phrase was described to me as legitimating the bestowal of rights over
particular *fanua* from a landholder to someone other than his heir (in the case above, the recipient is Esau). Esau’s mother’s father, Pakoa Roy had died in recent years. In addition to holding the title of Tarisaliu before handing it to the present holder, Pakoa Roy held the title of Tapau, *manufasa* (speaker) to Tarisaliu. The title of Tapau itself is accompanied by around 4-5 *fanua* but, as a *napau nawota*, the title Tapau has men ‘behind’ it whose titles and land are bestowed by Tapau. Tapau thus has directive rights over a larger number of *fanua*.

By granting rights to work this land (2 *fanua*) to his daughter’s son, Pakoa Roy was bypassing his direct heirs (his three sons, the eldest of whom inherited the title Tapau), to grant rights to land outside the patriline. Following this bestowal Esau has undeniable rights to this land but still must pay *vakasokoro* (‘first fruits payment’) to the holder of the title the *fanua* accompanies (in this case, the title holder is Esau’s mother’s brother). Nevertheless, the rights bestowed by these means: ‘*laigai nagbanu natano*’ (‘opening the mat of the land’) are undeniable: “*Toktok ia i strong, i hevi, hemi olsem stamp*” (‘this talk is serious and has weight, it is like a binding seal’ John Rerik 3/2/97). The verb *laigai* does not mean to literally unfold the mat and is not used to describe other actions of opening, rather the translation of *laigai* as ‘to open the mat’ is metaphorical. It is a metaphor for the opening of the landholder’s mouth and the speech granting these rights emerging. This speech is described as *kastom toktok*, a kind of formula and a binding action in itself. The reference to mats (*nagbanu*) is explicitly explained as representing the plots of land given. The verb *lua* in the formula means to *karemoot*, to transfer. If we recall chapter 3, it is

---

10 In his inventory of Shepherd Island titles, Guiart lists Pakoa Roy and names him both *manufasa* and *namataisau* (builder of the ocean going canoes, roofs and carver of wooden implements and weapons) to Tarisaliu (Guiart 1973:206). In contemporary explanations of the roles of Tarisaliu’s *napau nawota* that of *namataisau* is rarely mentioned. Large sailing canoes are no longer built and roof finials no longer carved.

11 The verbs to open comparable ‘parcels’ are different: *ka savagia nakakaifu* - you open the parcel of mats. *Ka fukei rubaki* - you open the *laplap* pudding parcel.
also the verb used in the payment that a landholder makes to the gardener who has planted fruit-bearing trees on his land: *e lua kali* (*hemi karemaot digging stick*, 'he transfers and compensates the digging stick').

When chiefs wear mats wrapped around their person during the *navuvusakeana* it is one of the few occasions that mats are worn. In the context of the *navuvusakeana*, it is as if chiefs are symbolically wrapping themselves in *fanua*. Bodies are also wrapped in mats for burial. Death is the other principal occasion when people are wrapped in mats and the only time that women are. The funerals that I attended on Tongoa reflect the situation reported by Miller for the late nineteenth century: “Burial was normally by wrapping the body in many pandanus mats. When a chief or his wife died Milne [nineteenth century missionary to Nguna] made a wooden coffin at his own expense.” (Miller 1987:193). Coffins are used today on Tongoa but only in cases when the family has the resources for wood, nails and paint, or even more expensively, to fly a coffin from Port Vila. The management of death and the transmission of land relations on Tongoa contrasts sharply with the following case cited by Rodman for a ‘master of tradition’ in Longana on Ambae Island to the north (Rodman 1987).

In Longana, the culmination of the one hundred day cycle of *bongi* feasts following death is a crucial moment in the distribution of land to heirs. The *bongi* feasts are held at five day intervals and are the scene of exchanges between heirs and other kin. During the cycle the spirit of the dead person is thought to hover near the tree tops to watch the exchanges of food, mats and pigs. The exchanges are competitive, as it is through them that access to land can be secured from the heirs of the dead man (usually his sons) by members of his matriline (his sister’s sons or his own brothers) or other more distant men (Rodman
These competing claims are played out in the exchanges that must take place. The heirs of a dead land holder must validate their claim to his land in front of the deceased’s matriline. Members of this matriline come to the bongi cycle with gifts of food and mats. The heirs must match and return each of these gifts with holata (compensation) payments of pigs and mats. If full reciprocation cannot be made the claims heirs are making to their father’s land are forfeited. It is when matrikin make a return gift (vulunqatu) of pigs that the hovering spirit of the deceased is released from the treetops and the land itself: “The bongi cycle serves as a customary process whereby a dead land holder is slowly detached from his place and others attach themselves to it.” (Rodman 1995: 90). Pigs and mats are obviously key objects in this process.

Rodman describes how large land holders who have acquired and consolidated substantial areas of land act to control it’s distribution to direct heirs rather than matrikin by ensuring that their debts (in the sphere of either the graded society or the bank) are paid off. This means that their heirs do not have to incur funerary debts to kin and consequently cede land. Rodman describes the manoeuvres of such ‘masters of tradition’: “One old leader even insisted on being buried in a coffin instead of mats in order to reduce the bongi expenses” (Rodman 1995:103). This instance is not reported by Rodman as anything other than a straightforward calculation of debit and credit on the part of the old leader. If we view this act symbolically, however, by understanding how mats act to detach the man from his land/place, the old leader is resisting complete detachment by eschewing mats. Even after death, he is attempting to maintain control over his land. On Tongoa, the distribution of land to heirs is not the subject of competitive exchanges and the symbolic

---

12 Rodman’s wider discussion is of the ways that certain men in Longana have acquired large areas of land for coconut plantations through gaidamu (knowledge of the history of land relations) and manipulation of customary land tenure practices (cf. Rodman 1987).
statement made by wrapping a dead landholder in mats is very different. On Tongoa, the burial mat acts to detach the man from the *famua* he held.

Death and the *navuvusakeana* are the only instances of the body being wrapped in mats and thus separated off from land and title. Wrapped in mats for burial, the body and social individual is separated from their land and *ples* and separated off from the patrilineal and matrilateral ties that constituted them. Mats perform a powerful symbolic function of making and breaking connections, in bridging the separation between the visible and non-visible worlds. The emphasis placed on severing a woman from the mat that she weaves echoes the equal emphasis placed on separating her from one *namatana* to another upon marriage. In fact, as seen above, mats become a primary means of this separation. There is a parallel drawn between woman and mat as inherently mobile entities that nevertheless have the potential to become fixed-in-place (within the *namatana*). Mats become material metaphors for the Melanesian tension between rootedness and mobility. Constituted of roads, as seen in chapter 5, this metaphorical quality of the mat enables it to act as an agent of transmission of title and land. Its mobility yet ever-present potential to become fixed, allows immovable land to become momentarily mobile in the *navuvusakeana*.

The *navuvusakeana* acts to fix a *nawota* and other title holders even more firmly to their *ples*, *namatana* and land. This is exemplified when a new title holder walks the boundaries of the land he receives. Facey also notes this principle of transmitting knowledge of land boundaries from one generation of title holders to the next on Nguna Island (Facey 1981:298). Relations of land and *ples* form the distributed chieftainship system. The ideology of fixed titles, with correspondingly fixed land plots and network allegiances, reflects a social order in which there is a dynamic of continual reproduction in its own
The social order is itself partially created by the pre-existing set of historical relationships between titles. Due to the dispersal of allegiances over a wide geographical area, an interesting tension develops between localised ties and wide-ranging regional ties. Cross-cutting obligations over an inter-island region contradict the localised allegiances demanded by the fixed place of the title. The allegiances of the title beyond its local place varies with orientation: “Often the social position of a man varies according to the direction in which he turns. He will pay a gift to the east, but receive one from the west; he will be subject and chief in turn.”(Bonnemaison 1996b:215). The higher ranking the title, the wider ranging its relations with other titles. These inter-island allegiances are like roads between places, roads along which people and things may travel. Through their ceremonial use and exchange, mats act as actual containers and actual roads within this system and enable chiefs to be both inward and outward looking, locally and regionally effective, simultaneously rooted in a plurality of places. Mats in their making and use articulate the tension between rootedness and mobility and actually allow the management of fixity versus mobility within the chieftainship and wider society. Within this system mats are a material manifestation of the reproduction of people and their relations to plex.
Chapter Eight

Conclusion

This thesis analyses the ways that the Tongoan pandanus mat articulates cultural concerns about the reproduction of people and the reproduction of connections between people and place. It is a study of a singular material tradition, focusing on the objects themselves. In the broadest sense the question asked in this thesis has been: why do Tongoans make mats? The very materiality of the mat is at the centre of this analysis and the conclusions reached about the effectiveness of this object are primarily based within the ways that it is made and used, rather than the ways that it is talked about.

Secondly, the thesis addresses the question, how does this essentially simple form make such diverse appearances in all areas of Tongoan life? The preceding chapters have shown that the pandanus mat is absolutely essential to all processes of Tongoan life. It is a fundamental presence in the household and necessary to all aspects of daily life: eating, sleeping, socialising, cooking. Mats are also required in order for individuals to become members of the *namatana*, for women to become wives, men to become husbands and most importantly, for title holders to assume title and land. At each stage of the lifecycle the presence of mats is required. The truly fascinating dimension of these objects lies in the blank template they present: once woven they may be employed as domestic objects or they may be employed in the most profound statements. The answer to the mats versatility lies in the simplicity of its material form. A mat is a double-sided, planar, woven rectangle. It may be uncoloured or dyed, large or small, patterned or plain. The very simplicity of its form allows its diversity of effect. Rolled, folded, laid flat, wrapped or held by a corner, the mats material qualities allow it to be in effect different objects in different contexts.
The thesis draws a major division between the contexts that the mat appears in. These are, firstly, the domestic context of the namatana and, secondly, the context of exchange and ceremonial use. The mat enters this latter domain from the namatana that is its origin. In this realm beyond its original namatana mats achieve different things; it is now a mobile object that moves between namatana in ongoing exchanges until its identity changes once more and it becomes fixed within a namatana by being used there. The thesis argues that the processes and the events that mats appear in beyond the namatana of their origin or final destination achieve the maintenance, severance and reproduction of the links that men and women have to place: namatana, famua, tabu ples, seashore and island.

Tongoa is made up of dispersed relations of chiefs and nakainaga, and patrilineal and matrilateral connections. It is part of a landscape of islands created from an original whole, Kuwae, which was destroyed by volcanic explosion. The migration and resettlement of the islands as outlined in the histories of chiefly titles endeavoured to reconnect the dispersed parts through a interconnected system of titles. In this metaphysically fragmented space, the other Shepherd Islands can be understood to recede and advance in proximity to Tongoan persons according to the maintenance and lapsing of relations between title holders. Tongoa is thus bound up in a regional system where the boundaries of culturally recognised space coincide with the horizons of the world as defined by alliances and journeys (Bonnemadein 1984). This perspective points in turn to the ways that notions of dispersed ples inform the identities of Tongoans as islanders.

The political and economic changes of the last one hundred and fifty years have had a great impact upon land use on Tongoa. In the face of these changes the management of land
relations and the transmission of land rights have become of the utmost concern. Land relations are the subject of conservative efforts by paramount chiefs to keep the associations between chiefs and land intact. The processes by which individuals claim rights to land have become highlighted due to pressure on land resources by an increased population. Even taking into account the large number of Tongaans who live and work elsewhere, the numbers on the island today are double those recorded a century ago by Michelsen (1892). The thesis argues, therefore, that heightened attention is being directed towards the processes by which Tongan men and women are attached and detached to land and ples.

Furthermore, the thesis argues that mats are crucial within these processes of attachment and detachment. In their production mats are established as material metaphors for the emplacement of people within the island. By metaphorically pulling together the diverse domains of the namatana, land plot and garden, mats are able to have the effects that they do in ceremonial use in the navuvusakeana and momori rituals. Within the context of the domestic space, mats also achieve very particular effects. I argue that mats in fact partially create this domestic space. Pandanus processing, preparation and weaving permeate the spaces of the sleeping house, cooking house and tapaupau shelter. The finished product spatially defines and organise the activities within the namatana as a whole.

The giving and receiving of mats underlines Tonga society. The thesis argues, however, that we cannot adequately understand Tonga mats by analysing them within a framework of exchange alone. The identity of mats as objects of exchange is crucially linked to their identity as alienable from the relationships that produced them, differing significantly in this from other singular items of material culture such as the Telefolmin bilum. The mats
nature as an alienable product thus informs the relationships that it sets up in exchange. These relationships are momentary and do not formally continue beyond the moment when a return is made. Because the mat is alienable from the social relations that produced it, it does not contain or evoke memories of past exchanges when it circulates. Despite that Tongoa mats make symbolic references to people, and are widely exchanged, their most salient feature is not the relationship between transactors, but the references that they make and enable between persons and place.

In their physical form mat bodies refer to human bodies. Like people, mats have fronts, backs, heads, eyes and ribs. Through these parallels with human bodies mats can be orientated within the world as humans can. This indicates another important parallel with people: mats move through the world between places. Like humans, mats travel along roads between places and events, and in doing so, create further paths. Indeed, like humans, mats emerge from and are constituted of roads: rodlrong mareed (‘the road of marriage’) sets up the relations that produce the garden, the roads of patrilineal and matrilateral connections constitute a person’s two sides (saed) just as the two panels of the mat are woven in roads (napua). This indicates the second theme in the material analysis of the mat form: the references that they make to place. Within the outlines and contents of the mat structure, mats represent the social and spatial organisation of the island: garden, fanua, namatana and chieftainship. Like people, mats are products of these places, products that come into being through the bodies and labour of women.

I include both men and women in the initial question: why do Tongoans make mats? This refers to the wider social processes that make a mat what it is. As products of women’s labour, knowledge and practice, mats make women as well as vice versa. To be a woman
on Tongoa is to be a mat-maker. Associated with womanhood, like women, mats acquire a mobility beyond the namatana that was their origin. I argue that once mats leave the realm of their original namatana, however, they become detached from the women who wove them and acquire different identities and have different effects. As objects of title-land relations, for example, mats refer to chiefs and chiefly relations. Within this latter realm mats make connections with other objects of chiefly relations such as pigs and enable the transferral of title and land.

Following on from this, I argue that mats become a material metaphor for and mechanism of the reproduction of people and land relations within the chieftainship. Mats are a means by which people become identified with their ples: one is attached to a namatana at birth, women are identified with their husband's namatana and men are attached to dispersed land plots at the navuvusakeana ceremony. Mats are also a means of detachment from ples: men become detached from the land that accompanies the title they pass on, at marriage women are detached from their natal namatana, and ultimately, all are detached from their ples at death. In the case of men, this detachment at death becomes particularly heightened if they have yet to pass on their title and consequently are still attached to the land of that title. Mats form an essential material link in the passing on of title and land from one generation to another. Forming a physical connection between past and present title holders via its surface, the mat is a means of bringing together the dispersed famua and relations that the title constitutes, in order to transfer it. Mats thus restate and reproduce the dynamic of land relations within the chieftainship each time they are used in the navuvusakeana.
The above reference to a regional system of alliance and journeys defining the horizons of the world (Bonnemaison 1984) refers to the Shepherd Islands. These horizons, of course, have always extended beyond the small archipelago that is the Shepherds. The contemporary horizons of Tongoan alliances and journeys extend into a very different space however: a national centre. The study of mats in this thesis focuses on them as objects within the relations of place on Tongoa. This is not to say that Tongoa can be considered in isolation however. Nor does it mean that Tongoan mats do not also have a national dimension. This thesis does not examine Tongoan mats as objects of the politics of tradition at either local or national levels, although they undoubtedly have this capacity. As objects associated with conscious displays of Tongoa tradition vis-à-vis other islands Tongoan mats are associated with *kastom*. These conscious displays of Tongoan *kastom* are explicitly associated with the chieftainship system on the island. I argue that approaching Tongoa mats as women’s *kastom* in the paradigm of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre and Women’s Culture Project (cf. Bolton 1993) does not illuminate their primary identity as objects of chiefs *kastom* and land relations on Tongoa. Understandings of mats as *kastom* on Tongoa are not explicitly voiced in verbal exegesis of how mats are important, how they are *kastom* however. This indicates a central theme in the present approach to their study: what mats are and the effects that they have is located in the material statements they allow rather than the ways that Tongoa people speak of ‘the meanings of mats’.

Little recent work has been done in Vanuatu that focuses on the material traditions of the archipelago (Bonnemaison et al. 1996 is an important exception; see also Bolton 1993; Keller 1988; Tilley 1999). This thesis is the first to examine in depth a singular object of material culture in Vanuatu within a detailed examination of the processes of everyday life.
alongside their role in ceremonial spheres. This is a previously unexamined area. Bolton's thesis is the only comparable work done on ni-Vanuatu mats. Bolton's investigation into Ambae mats primarily considered the impact that redefinition of mats as women's *kastom* had on Ambae. Bolton concludes mats have become a means by which Ambae women make and maintain relationships in the national sphere. Elsewhere in Melanesia, Annette Weiner's interpretation of banana leaf bundles as women's products that reproduce the cosmological order when exchanged at funerals (Weiner 1976) makes similar points to the present argument that the making and use of Tongoan mats reproduces a social and spatial organisation of place. The investigation into mats as women's products in this thesis differs in that it also considers how this object effects a reproduction of the wider social order not just in ceremonial spheres but also within the realm of daily practice. One of the conclusions reached is that the quotidian presence of mats informs the effects they produce in ceremony.

The arguments made and the conclusions drawn about the Tongoan mat in this thesis are based in an ethnography of their production and material presence in the events and exchanges they appear in. The analysis of the processes by which the mat comes into being is based in detailed ethnographic data of the social relations of the garden, the *namatana* and social organisation of Tongoa. The analysis of the distributed chieftainship underlies this social organisation and joins together the two sections of the thesis: 'Dialogues of Island and Place' and 'Metaphors of Reproduction'. The distributed chieftainship and potentially multi-orientated title (receiving allegiance from one place and paying it towards another) is based upon dispersed land plots (*famua*) and men (*nakainaga*). In their ceremonial use in the *navuvusakeana* mats are a graphic depiction of the land relations behind the distributed chieftainship system. As such, mats are a visual system of
representing the title system that organises land and place, and are a means of reproducing that system. Through the material form of the mat the relations of place that make up the island and region are made manifest. An intellectual property system (cf. Harrison 1993) of knowledge of land and the history of land relations is encoded within the imagery of the mat: an object whose visual imagery of surfaces and wrapping enables the transference of titles and land. Mats act as crucial material links in the transmission of this knowledge when a title holder passes on the title, land and relationships accompanying it. This insight to the role of such apparently mundane objects in transmitting and reproducing intellectual property has not been made before for a study of ni-Vanuatu material culture. Lindstrom’s examination of knowledge as intellectual property and political resource in Tanna reveals that knowledge is organised in part by place on Tanna (Lindstrom 1990). This consideration of a system of knowledge does not consider the fundamental role of material objects within such systems. The insights into mats as objects that make manifest the relations of *ples* on Tongoa illustrate the role of material culture in reproducing intellectual property such as knowledge of land.

Furthermore, the insight into mats as material counterparts to the system of land knowledge and transmission on Tongoa can be contrasted to elsewhere in the archipelago. In the overview of political systems within Vanuatu in the introduction to this thesis, I draw a delineation between systems of hierarchy in the north and centre. In the graded societies of the northern islands, men’s names are not formally linked to land tenure. Control over land on Ambae, for example, comes through specialist knowledge of land histories, and inheritance of land is the subject of competition with mats (Rodman 1987). Hierarchy is therefore articulated not with reference to ranks of land plots as in Tongoa, but through a different medium: the graded societies where men and women attain rank by
mastery of material resources, including mats. By contrast, the articulation of hierarchy in the islands of the centre is fixed to clearly bounded and individuated relations of land plots that are inherited by successive title holders. The fixity of hierarchy within land relations on Tongoa is accompanied by a mat tradition distinguished by its lack of differentiation into different types. Mat do not require elaboration on Tongoa because the land system that they are a counterpart to does not require differentiated objects in order to reproduce itself. In contrast, on Ambae, mats are highly differentiated and ranked, forming a material parallel to the social organisation of hierarchy and land. Given the difference between Ambae and Tongoa mat traditions, the thesis suggests that the reason for this might lie in the different articulations of the links between hierarchy and land on each island.

As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, focusing upon a singular item of material culture, necessitates that other objects of study do not receive full attention. The connections that mats contain and evoke are analysed as a web of relations that mats are suspended in. Inevitably some of these connections are privileged over others in the analysis. In considering areas for future research, the relationship between mats, barkcloth and calico over the last one hundred and fifty years could illuminate further the historical development of mat as objects of land relations today. Obviously what mats are and do is not ahistorical; their meanings and effects are not stable and unchanging, but emerge relative to emphases placed on other objects and social forms. By examining how the identities of contemporary Tongoan mats emerge from the social relations that produce them, the thesis concludes that their material qualities both inform and are informed by these social relations.
Future research is required to consider the ways that Tongoan mats move between local and national spaces and, as such, become a foci for investigating Tongoan engagement with global processes. As objects poised between the *kastom* and the cash economies mats are suspended within the tensions surrounding Tongoan negotiation of customary obligations and participation in national and global capitalism. Mats are objects likened to money and sold as commodities. Nevertheless they are also firmly aligned within the institutions and practices of *kastom* that are opposed to the ‘non-*kastom*’ realm of the cash economy. This duality makes them particularly appropriate bearers of Tongoan concerns about managing tradition and change.

The land policies of the Vanuatu state have yet to successfully codify and legislate the proclamation in the constitution that all land belongs to ‘custom owners’ (Rodman 1992). The problems faced by the state in codifying principles of customary land tenure has meant that the management of land has been left to local leaders such as chiefs (Larcom 1990). The management of land access and the debates surrounding rights over land will inevitably continue to occupy a central position in Tongoa concerns. The changes wrought by national policies - or lack thereof - and national needs to lease land for infrastructure purposes means that dialogues surrounding ‘customary ownership’ will continue to be intensely negotiated. These dialogues draw upon *kastom* as a legitimating framework. The thesis has outlined how the paramount chiefs of the Maraki Vanua Riki have employed a language of *kastom* to legitimate their control over land. This examination demonstrated that understandings of *kastom* on Tongoa are closely associated with the institution of chieftainship and thus land relations.
The thesis argues that mats occupy a central position as objects of chiefs *kastom* in the enactment of land relations on Tongoa. This thesis has considered land holding and land transmission primarily from a chiefly (and subsequently male) perspective. It has drawn out the connections between the products of women's labour (that nevertheless emerge from male-female relations) and the institutions of land tenure dominated by male title holders. Further research is necessary to draw out the connections between land use from the perspective of women as wives, sisters, daughters and mothers, and their role as mat-makers. The research project and the Women's Culture Project have also contributed to a dialogue of mats as women's *kastom* on Tongoa. The changes that this will potentially have on the ways that mats are perceived remains to be seen.

In encompassing all the domains of Tongoan life, mats bring together the ceremonial and quotidian, chiefly and common, male and female. In doing so, the mat refers to, and contains, the horizons of the Tongoan cultural universe. Reproducing this particular material form means reproducing a particular set of social and technical specifications and a set of social relations. In effect, reproducing the mat is a reproduction of the wider social order. This thesis has brought together a thorough examination of the Tongoan pandanus mat with an analysis of the attention paid on Tongoa to the relationship between people and their *plies*. The thesis combines these two enquiries to argue that the mat is a material expression of the need on Tongoa to continually make and remake this relationship between people and place.
Glossary

Atavi ritual specialist; figure who controls the dangerous sacred power of the nawota (paramount chief)

Bisnes event or undertaking such as hosting a marriage, house building or funeral.

Daowean cross cousin; child of one’s mother’s brother or father’s sister. Eligible sexual/marriage partner

Ekopu house, inside (house), the place within

Fanua an individual plot of land associated with a title holder; varies in size.

Farea meeting house of the chief or small chief, can also mean namatana.

Kastom noun and adjective used to speak of ideas of tradition in Vanuatu today.

Kitaku the third rank of title in the Shepherd Island title system; those men ‘behind’ the napau nawota (small chief), whose titles and land he bestows.

Momori the ‘carrying’ of the bride by her natal kin to her husband’s namatana following the navagogotoana payment

Lina the area around, and including the house. Also means household and refers to a clear space in the bush.

Nagbanu double panelled pandanus mat.

Nakainaga chief’s men/supporters; those a nawota has given land to, and who owe him allegiance

Nakoau pudding made of grated or chopped root vegetables and meat or shellfish wrapped in nalikau leaves and baked in a stone oven.

Nakakafu parcel of 4/5 pandanus mats folded and wrapped within a katafau (coconut palm leaf) mat.

Naleiawana special occasion or feast. Also refers to the ceremony transferring the title of nawota

Namarakiana the chieftdom of nawota or paramaon jif. Maraki refers to men.

Namatana the main unit of social organisation under the chieftainship. Headed by a napau nawota and made up of a number of lina/households.
**Napau nawota**
second rank of title in the Shepherd Island title system; ‘small chief’, head of the *namatana*.

**Napua**
road

**Nasautonga**
tribute and an exchange owed to dominant title holders. Consists of a pig and accompanying foodstuffs.

**Navagogoana**
the large marriage payment made from man’s kin to woman’s kin. Characterised as *pemaot woman* (bridal payment) in Bislama.

**Navuvusakeana**
the ceremony to pass on the title of *nawota, napau nawota* and all their followers’ titles.

**Nawota**
the first rank of title in the Shepherd Island title system; ‘paramount chief’ of the village.

**Paramoun Jif**
Bislama for *nawota* or highest ranking chiefly title in the Shepherds

**Peva**
cooking building built separately from the sleeping house.

**Ples**
‘place’ combining ideas of territory and identity.

**Rod**
‘road’. This word also indicates path, manner, opportunity.

**Roara**
eary to mature garden

**Rubaki**
bundle of *nalikau* leaves used to wrap *nakoau laplap* pudding. Also refers to the pudding parcel itself.

**Smol Jif**
Bislama for *napau nawota* the rank of title holder behind the paramount chief.

**Tapaupau**
the structure built for shade adjacent to the sleeping house.

**Vakasokoro**
a payment associated with land use: made by a garden maker to the owner of the land.

**Wago tipapiri**
marrriage exchanges between the woman’s and man’s family made before the *navagogoana* payment. The *wago tipapiri* consists of a pig (*wago*) with accompanying foodstuffs given by the woman’s family to the man’s. A return of 2 or 3 pigs should then be made by the man’s family. No mats or money are included.
Appendix One
Examples of Mat Patterns

*Leimasiga namindiria*
"Leimasiga's pattern"; named after the woman who first made it.

*Nateriteri*
'Flower of the coconut'

*Lau napalapala (Narikita Wuatu)*
'Leaf of the black palm'
Nala miruru (Naworlo nala)
'Sail of the canoe'

Kolomo (Naigbabaet)
'type of ridged seashell'

Pepe (Navarin natan bembe)
'Butterfly'
Maraisulu ('tracks of the caterpillar')

Faka Buninga e du leiana
'Standing up in the fashion of Buninga Island'

Faka Buninga batdolu eu dagoto
'Lying across in the fashion of Buninga Island'
Batina (Nambe linvat)
'Two over two' ('Efate mat')

Tongoa Varu
'Short Tongoa'

Tongoa Varu
'Long/tall Tongoa'
Lagadolu
'Three cross each other'

Vaka BongaBonga
'In the style of BongaBonga Village'

Batisikai (Nambatisika)
'One over one'; the most basic mat weave
Faka Laika (Nafa Laika)
'In the fashion of Laika Island'

Nasoso nadi (Nalutu nave)
'Flower of the banana'
Appendix Two
Patterns Employing Imagery of the Face and Head

*Mata turuturu*
'Broken end'

*Namata ki sata or Nagogo ni olai*
'Chin of the green lizard/chief'

*Mataleleisata*
'Straight eyes'
Nasi napau (jawbone')

Nanako ni olai
('forehead of the green lizard'; the lizard is an iconographic reference to the chief)

Nagmele ni gogo
('foot of the gogo' a migratory bird whose cry is heard from inland at the time of planting new yam gardens)
'Narai Nawota' ("Face of the Chief") Tattoo Patterns
References


Anon. (1891). *Tusia nalegaana pae Nguna go Tongoa ni New Hebrides* Dunedin: Caxton Printing Company


___________. (1994) The Tree and the Canoe: History and Ethnogeography of Tanna South Sea Books, Honolulu University of Hawai‘i Press


___________. (1996b). ‘Graded Societies and Societies Based on Title: Forms and Rites of Traditional Power in Vanuatu’ in Bonnemaison et al (eds.) Arts of Vanuatu Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press


__________. (1962). *The Polynesian language of Mae (Emwae), New Hebrides* Auckland: Te Reo Monographs

Casey, Edmund.S (1996). ‘How to Get from Space to Place in a Fairly Short Stretch of Time: Phenomenological Prolegomena’ in S. Feld and K.H Basso (eds.) *Senses of Place* Santa Fe, New Mexico; School of American Research Press


Don, Alexander. (1927). *Peter Milne 1834-1924 Missionary to Nguna, New Hebrides 1870-1924 from the Presbyterian Church of New Zealand* Dunedin: Foreign Missions Committee P.C.N.Z.


Facey, Ellen. (nd). ‘Ngunese vocabulary’ Unpublished compilation of Ngunese words


Haberkorn, Gerald. (1989). *Port Vila: Transit Stop or Final Stop?* Canberra: National Centre for Development Studies, Australian National University


Jolly, Margaret and Nicholas Thomas (eds.). (1992). *The Politics of Tradition in the Pacific* Special Issue *Oceania* 62(4)


Kanegai, N (1994) *Ambae Tatoos* Port Vila: Vanuatu Cultural Centre


Layard, John W. (1928). 'Degree-taking Rites in South West Bay, Malekula' *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 58:139-223


_________ (1991b). 'Cultural Invention and the Dilemma of Authority' *American Anthropologist* 93: 446-449


Macdonald, Rev. Daniel. (1889a). Three New Hebrides Languages (Efatese, Eromangan, Santo) Melbourne: Public Library  
______________. (1889b) Oceania, Linguistic and Anthropological Melbourne and London  
______________. (1892). Efate, New Hebrides Australasian Association for the Advancement of Science (4):720-733


Miller, J.Graham. (n.d.a). ‘Field Notes from Tongoa, New Hebrides 1941-1947’ Microfiche 1025/1051, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Australian National University

___________. (n.d.b). ‘Tongoan dictionary and notes on other Vanuatu languages compiled 1941-1947’ Microfiche 1028, Pacific Manuscripts Bureau, Australian National University


___________. (1981). *Book Two, Church Growth to 1880* Sydney: Presbyterian Church of Australia
Book Three, Recruiting Era, expansion of the church, teacher training. Port Vila: The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

Book Four, Medical services, the southern islands, Tanna Port Vila: The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

Book Five, The Central Islands, Efate to Epi, from 1881-1920 Port Vila: The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

Book Six, The Northern Islands Port Vila: The Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu

(1996) personal communication


Otto, Ton and Nicholas Thomas (eds.) (1997) Narratives of Nation in the South Pacific
The Netherlands: Harwood Academic Publishers


_________. (1926). A comparative study of the Melanesian island languages
Cambridge: Cambridge University Press


Shineberg, Dorothy (1967). They Came for Sandalwood: a study of the sandalwood trade in the South West Pacific 1830-1865 Melbourne: Melbourne University Press

Shirakawa, Chihiro. (1999). 'Dengue Fever Outbreak and the Place of Traditional Medicine among the People of Tongoa, Vanuatu' Man and Culture in Oceania 15:45-64


353


Tessier, M.C. (n.d). 'Tinabua Mata (Farea Lapa) and TiMataso (Farea Lapakiki): Chiefly titles of the Shepherds Group' Unpublished papers, Vanuatu Cultural Centre archives, Port Vila


Tryon, Darrell T. (1996b). Dialectical chaining and the use of geographical space in Bonnemaison et al. (eds.) *Arts of Vanuatu* Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press


