

Heal, Pray, Prosper

*Practice and Discourse within a Local
Pentecostal Church in Vanuatu*



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Front page photograph: a Survival Church service and baptism ceremony on a beach on Nguna Island at sunrise, April, 2010. Islands of Pele (right) and Efate (left) in the back.

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Maps and figures

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*Hildur Thorarensen
Bergen, May 2011*

Map of Vanuatu

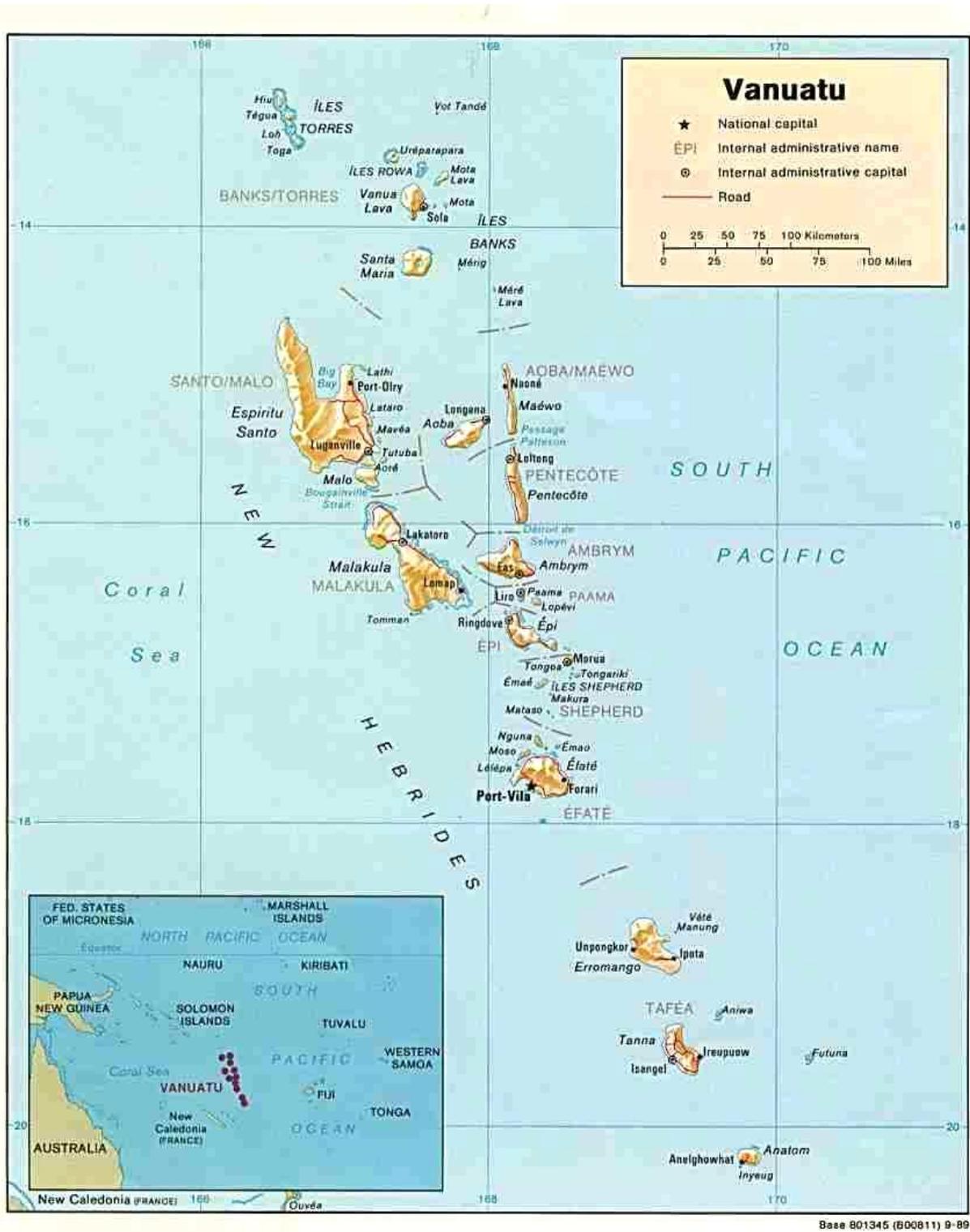


Figure 1: Map of Vanuatu

1

Introduction

Vignette: a Survival Church healing session

The Survival Church, Freswota 5, Sunday January 17, 2010

The church service has been in process for almost an hour. Pastor Aaron has been doing most of the talking, but now he gives the microphone to Pastor Joshua, his older brother. Pastor Joshua, who up until now has been sitting on a chair at the front, takes the microphone and begins to preach. After each sentence he exclaims; “praise your Master”, looking expectantly at the congregations, which replies with a loud “Amen”. Then Pastor Joshua declares that it is time for healing and deliverance, and he asks those in need to come to the front of the room. While people start to get up, the young man at the keyboard starts playing a lively song and the leading choir lady sitting on the front row gets up and starts to sing, the rest of the congregation following her lead. A young boy of about eleven years walks to the front, positioning himself with his back to the crowd. Following him comes an elderly man, two elderly women and two younger women, one of them with an infant in her arms. The six of them stand side by side, with their backs to the congregation. The singing continues, song after song, everyone sings together, clapping their hands to some songs, and moving with the rhythm to others. The youngest children run around inside and outside the church, playing,

Chapter 1

without anyone taking much notice of this, except smiling to them and handing them the occasional piece of candy. Pastor Joshua is praying loudly, and takes up a water bottle that he brought with him to church. Still praying, he pours water out of the bottle around the group of people standing at the front. Following this he takes out a tiny bottle containing oil, which he pours on the forehead of each person (I am told later that this is holy oil and that it is sent directly from God to Pastor Joshua and his wife when they pray for it). Pastor Joshua keeps praying, stopping in front of each person to be healed, laying his hand on his or her head or shoulder. Pastor Aaron stands on the side, also praying loudly, with his eyes closed, and the congregation is still singing loudly.

All of a sudden, a woman wearing a purple dress gets up and begins to make loud noises, shouting unintelligible words. She moves away from her seat with her eyes closed, walking towards the group of people at the front. While she moves forwards she keeps shouting and moving her arms, as if she is hitting something in the air in front of her (a woman standing besides me whispers that this is a *cherubim*; a woman with the ability to be possessed by the Holy Spirit, and heal the sick. She has been sitting in her seat waiting for the Holy Spirit to enter, and the fact that she now has started to move indicates that the Holy Spirit has possessed her, and is among us). The *cherubim* moves to the front of the room, walking around the people standing there, still shouting unintelligible words. She stops in front of each person while she hits the air around them. The young boy looks a bit uneasy with the *cherubim*'s behaviour, occasionally looking behind him to his friends, giggling a little. The other people stand without moving, some looking straight ahead of them, some with their eyes closed; some bend their heads and appear to be weeping. As the *cherubim* stops in front of one of the women, the woman falls to her knees crying, and the *cherubim* seems to spend a little more time healing this woman than the others.

After Pastor Joshua and the *cherubim* have given attention to each person at the front, the healing session gradually comes to an end. The music stops and the pastor indicates that everyone should pray together. Each church member starts praying loudly, everyone with their eyes closed. Some pray in Bislama, others in their own vernacular (mostly Ngunese), but as everyone is praying simultaneously, it is hard to discern more than the occasional word. The praying goes on for a couple of minutes, until Pastor Joshua is the only one left praying, ending with a loud "Amen". The people go back to their seats, the *cherubim* sits down again, and the service continues as before.

Main focus

This thesis is based on fieldwork within a local Pentecostal¹ church in the island nation of Vanuatu. This church is called the Survival Church, and has branches all around the country. My fieldwork was based within two of these branches; one on a small island called Nguna and one in a neighbourhood in Vanuatu's capital Port Vila. The excerpt above is from the very first Survival Church service I attended in Port Vila. This service also included a healing session, a practice which occupies a central position within this church. As will become clear in this thesis, the church's healing practices contain both local traditional elements, as well as global Pentecostal forms of healing.

The main focus of this thesis has been on the interplay between the local and the global; more specifically I have looked at how this particular local church reacts and relates to global flows and external influences, in particular the global Pentecostal movement. The Survival Church's history goes all the way back to colonization and the arrival of the first missionaries, but is also connected to more recent developments of particularly the Pentecostal movement; a movement which has been presented as a leading globalizing force (Robbins, 2004b). On a different level, the church is also influenced by global neoliberal capitalism². Whereas in earlier capitalist thinking the focus was mainly on labour as means of gaining economic profit, neoliberal capitalism focuses on the idea of consumption, investments, and instant economic returns (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000). Such thinking also influences and is reflected in the case of religion; while Calvinism (as presented in Weber's *Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930)) places a focus on hard work, accumulation and an ascetic lifestyle. One could perhaps say that within neoliberal thinking hard work is replaced with instant returns, and accumulation is replaced by consumption. Pentecostalism, as will become clear, has a stronger focus on what is considered correct Christian morality and belief in order to attain economic profit; a more "mysterious" approach to earning money, which can be seen to be influenced by neoliberal ideas. The implications of such changes in economic thinking, combined with traditional views on value, reciprocity and sharing are among the questions I will take up in this thesis. Further, I will consider questions related to which ways the local church community takes up global flows of ideas and values, and to what extent can the community be seen to preserve local traditions How can global

¹ Pentecostal denominations, often described as Evangelical, appear in many different shapes and sizes, but can briefly be described as churches and congregations that emphasize a personal relationship with the divine through gifts from the Holy Spirit such as healing and speaking in tongues (Coleman, 2000, Anderson, 2004).

² Neoliberalism is defined by Comaroff and Comaroff as something which "aspires, in its ideology and practice, to intensify the abstractions inherent in capitalism itself: to separate labor power from its human context, to replace society with the market, to build a universe out of aggregated transactions" (2000:305).

ways of neoliberal capitalist thinking, as presented through the Pentecostal movement, influence people's economic rationality and behaviour on the local level? Moreover, what are the consequences for the people involved?

Historical Background of the Survival Church

Christianity in Vanuatu

Like most countries in the Pacific region, Vanuatu was exposed to intense Christian missionization from the early 1800s, and in most parts of the country people have been Christian for at least a hundred years. The first missionaries to Vanuatu came mostly from Anglican, Catholic and Presbyterian denominations. Although the geographical boundaries between these were often blurred between the three, generally speaking one could say that the Anglican Church became strongest in the northernmost islands of Vanuatu (the Banks and Torres groups, Maewo, Ambae and Pentecost), the Presbyterian Church focused on the south (Efate, Aneitum, Erromango, Tanna and the Sheperds), while the Catholic Church had greatest influence on the space in-between (Santo, Malekula and Ambrym) (Miles, 1998:92).

The missionization of Vanuatu took varied forms, as the different missionary denominations applied diverse methods in their work, at times competing internally. Presbyterians and Catholics were known for using strict methods in their missionary work; rooting up customs, practices and rituals they saw as a hindrance to Christian conversion, while Anglicans missionaries applied a more sensitive approach; not interfering with customs they saw as compatible with Christianity (Kolshus, 2007:137, Miles, 1998:88).

Following the initial Christianization of Vanuatu, other denominations gradually began to appear in the early 1900s, such as the Seven Day Adventists (Miles, 1998:110). Later, from the 1960s onwards, Pentecostal Christianity arrived in Vanuatu, mostly through the so-called Revival-movement³. The Pentecostal churches can be divided into two main categories; those that are part of international branches (mostly based in Australia or the United States), and those with a local origin; based in Vanuatu. The latter can be referred to as "local" or "independent" churches, in accordance with their own emphasis on their locally based origins, as well their independence from the mission churches (Eriksen, 2009b:177). The independent churches started to appear in the years following Vanuatu's independence in 1980 as groups of people began breaking out of the main churches in the local communities.;

³ Barker (n.d.:4-5) describes this period as the "third wave" of Christianity in Melanesia, where most Melanesians had already become Christian, and new missions began to arrive, including Pentecostal and fundamentalist sects.

Common characteristics of Pentecostal churches world-wide is their emphasis on a break with the past; being born again as a true Christian, and leading a better life (Meyer, 2004). Included in this may be a focus on morally correct behavior; strong faith in Jesus, God and the Holy Spirit, working hard to provide for one's family, dressing properly, in addition to not drinking alcohol or kava⁴ and not smoking. Healing, receiving spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit (for example the gift of clairvoyance or discernment, of healing, of teaching or preaching), spiritual warfare, and speaking in tongues are also central aspects of the independent churches' practice.

The local churches can thus be seen both as forming part of the global (the international Pentecostal movement), at the same time as they can be seen as representing something entirely new and local in Vanuatu. I will now give a brief introduction to the history of the two Survival Church branches I studied.

From Farealapa to Port Vila: The Freswota Survival Church

The Freswota Survival Church originated as three brothers (Aaron, Moses and Joshua Gollen) and their families broke out of the Presbyterian Church in the village of Farealapa on Nguna Island in the late 1980s. The brothers were influenced by the aforementioned Revival Pentecostal movement, which had been organizing crusades around the country in order to recruit new members. Aaron, Joshua and Moses themselves explain that they initially did not want to break out of the Presbyterian Church; they began receiving spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit and wanted to use these to help people within the Presbyterian Church. However, the Presbyterian leaders did not approve of these new practices, and banished them from the church. The three brothers and their families thus arranged family worships within their own households in the village, but were maltreated by their Presbyterian fellow villagers, who would throw stones at them and speak badly of them. Thus, after a period of conflicts and persecutions, the brothers moved to Port Vila with their families. After living in diverse locations in Port Vila, Pastor Aaron bought land in Freswota Five and built a community there.

After some years living in Port Vila, each of the three brothers started their own ministry; Pastor Aaron set up the Survival Ministry, Pastor Joshua established the Healing Ministry and Pastor Moses founded the Life Revelation Ministry. These three ministries have at times been united, and at times broken away from each other, as there have been some internal disputes between the three brothers. Further, the Survival Church has recruited

⁴ Kava refers to an intoxicant drink of grey-brown colour with mildly sedative and relaxing effects. It is produced from the roots of the kava-plant (*Piper Methysticum*), and is common in many Pacific countries.

members and incorporated other independent breakaway churches. One of these is the Pauvatu Survival Church in Unakap; my second field location.

Unakap village: The Pauvatu Survival Church

The Pauvatu Survival Church started out around the same time and in a similar manner as the ministries of Aaron, Joshua and Moses, but in a different village on Nguna Island. It all began with two families in Unakap village. Also inspired by the Revival movement, some of them started to receive gifts from the Holy Spirit and wanted to use these abilities within the church. But the Presbyterian Church leaders disapproved of this and expelled them from the church. Following this the two families started their own family worship; meeting up in each others' homes and praying together, calling their congregation first Unakap Church Fellowship, later changing it to Alive Ministry. This breakaway caused many problems and disputes within the village community; persecutions against the members of Alive Ministry began, including the same forms of harassment as for the brothers in Farealapa. Eventually the ministry leader, Pastor Caleb, travelled to Port Vila with his family. During his stay he met the three Gollenbrothers from Farealapa, forming a fellowship with their church, and changing its name from Alive Ministry to Pauvatu Survival Church.

Pastor Caleb eventually went back to Unakap, and today the Pauvatu Survival Church is accepted as a proper church of its own within the Unakap village community. Some years back the Presbyterian Church publicly apologized for its ill treatment of Survival Church members, performing a ceremony of reconciliation. Also, I was also told that the Presbyterian Church had at several points tried to convince the Pauvatu Survival Church to join back together with them. The Pauvatu Survival Church was not eager to do this, though, as they felt that the Presbyterians tried to take away their independence. They take much pride in the local church they have built, emphasizing the 'local-ness' of their church, as opposed to the Presbyterian Church which was established by white, foreign missionaries.

The Survival Church in Unakap is smaller than the Presbyterian Church in the village, but they pride themselves in an active congregation. In addition to the weekly Sunday service, people attend church most Tuesday and Thursday nights. The remaining nights of the week members arrange family worships within their households, where they pray, read the Bible and sing together. Also, church members arrange several activities beside church services. There are active Youth and Women's Groups, a Warfare Ministry (see chapter five), a Children's Ministry, in addition to outreaches, fundraisings, combined services, and healing

sessions. These are arranged in the village as well as elsewhere on the island, but also in the capital and sometimes on other islands as well.

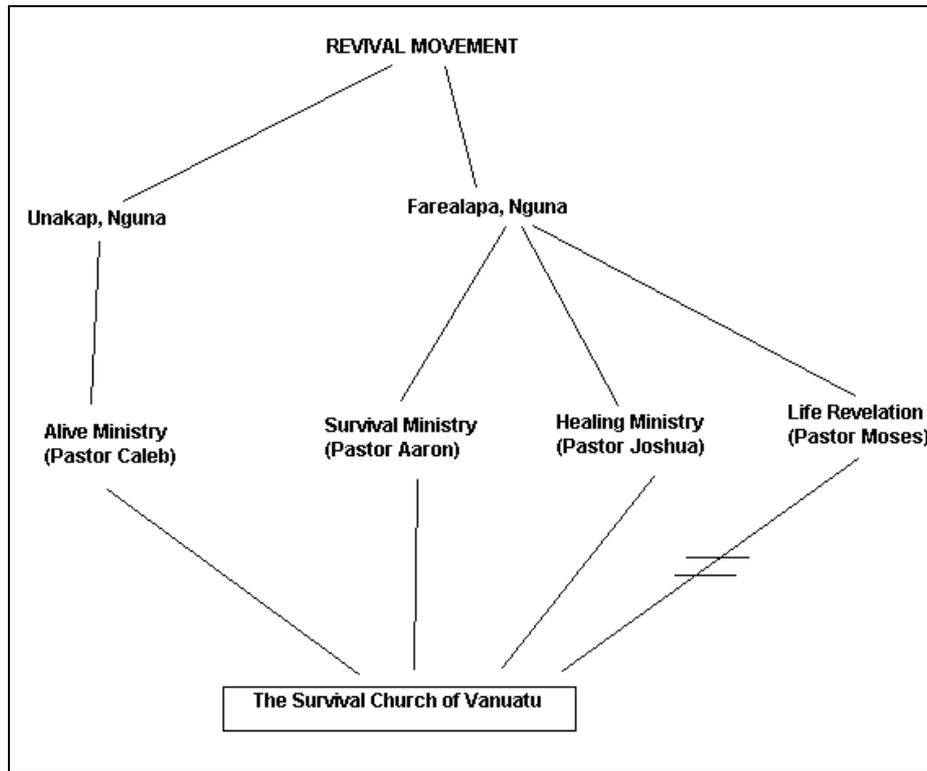


Figure 2: Genealogy of the Survival Church in Vanuatu

Present Survival Church structure

During my stay in Vanuatu the Survival Church consisted of Pastor Aaron’s Survival Ministry, Pastor Joshua’s Healing Ministry and Pastor Caleb’s Alive Ministry. In addition, the church had another branch in Port Vila, two more on Nguna, three on Santo, one on Tanna and one on Malekula; in total eleven branches. This number is quite unstable, however, as churches keep breaking away, joining in, and changing their names and leaders. Also, the different branches vary in their size and shapes. There is a strong emphasis on marking a difference between one’s own church and the Presbyterian Church, where it is said that things have gone “out of hand”. For instance, many people express that many Presbyterians are not close enough to God, as many of them are falling into temptations of sinful life; smoking, drinking, and not attending church regularly. Also, the liveliness of the Survival Church services is set up as more enjoyable and entertaining than the calmer Presbyterian services.

Before going more thoroughly into the ethnography of the Survival Church, I will use the remainder of this introductory chapter to discuss my theoretical framework as well as some methodological concerns in relation to my fieldwork.

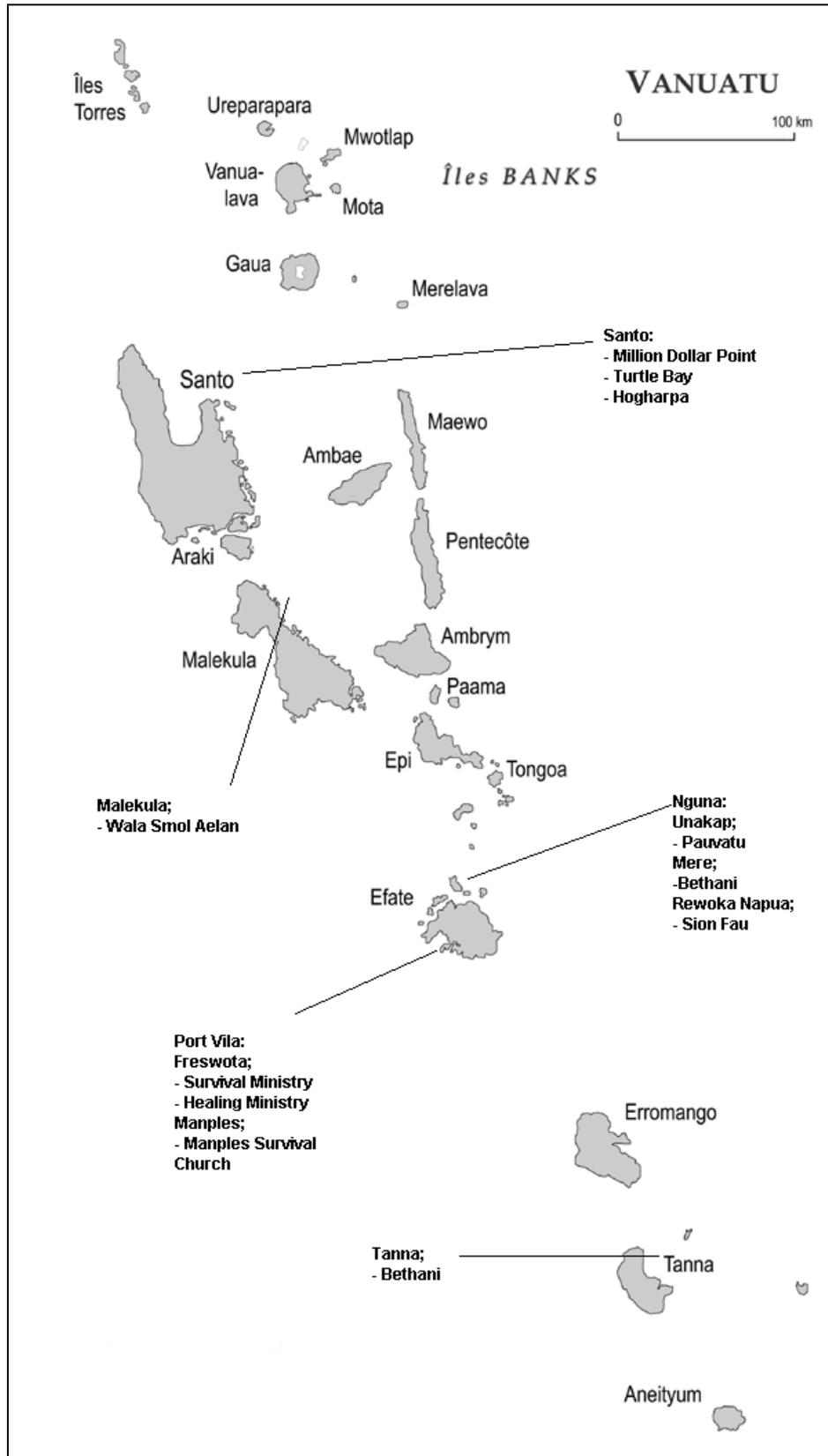


Figure 3: Locations of the Survival Church in Vanuatu

Terminology and theoretical framework

The specificity of global connections is an ever-present reminder that universal claims do not actually make everything everywhere the same. Global connections give grip to universal aspirations.

(Tsing, 2005:1)

The global and the local

Globalization has been depicted as a leading factor in increasing homogenization of societies. This view has included a fear of societies becoming too alike, and consequently losing their specific cultural expressions. An increasingly more valued approach to globalization is looking at how people react to new cultural forms in various manners and simultaneously use their existing world-views in this process, or the existence of “multiple modernities” (Hefner, 1998, Eisenstadt, 2000, 1999). Although globalization is nothing new, the present is often described as a “global era”, characterized by an increased sense of rapid movement and change, which for anthropologists, in turn, calls for new methods in the study of societies (Lien and Melhuus, 2007). Following this mode of thought, Hannerz (2003) has argued that in anthropological studies “the field” can no longer be seen as a given, bounded entity. Further, he argues that the construction of “locality” has become extremely complex, containing influences and connections from several places at once. Thus, studies of societies have become increasingly “*multi-local*” but also “*trans-local*”, in that one looks both at networks of localities in addition to the relations between them (Hannerz, 2003:21). However, as Lien and Melhuus (2007:xii) have noted, although one’s field sites are multiplied, it becomes the work of the analyst to confine the actual fields of study.

Anna Tsing (2005) has introduced the term “friction” to describe a way of approaching a study of the global. In opposition to earlier notions of the era of global motion, seeing it as mere flows, Tsing argues that it is at times when actual encounters and interaction, or frictions, take place that emergent cultural forms begin to take shape,. Further, it is the study of global connections which brings this friction into light; “Rubbing two sticks together produces heat and light; one stick alone is just a stick. As a metaphorical image, friction reminds us that heterogeneous and unequal encounters can lead to new arrangements of culture and power” (2005:5). In order to study change on the local level that are influenced by the global, then, one has to look at the actual encounters that take place at the local level.

Tsing problematizes the use of “local” and “global” as dichotomized analytical tools, as this suggests that the global is homogeneous, as opposed to the heterogeneity of the local. We thus miss a complete understanding of actual global and local processes, according to Tsing (2005:58, 2000). A solution Tsing brings forward is the making of scales; be they within the global, local or regional level (2000:348). This entails looking at the various social, material and cultural processes that form the different localities and globalities one intends to study (2000:348). In a similar vein, Robertson (1995) has argued for using the term “glocal” in order to overcome problematic local-global dichotomy, as the abstractly global, or uniquely local realities do not exist.

Keeping Tsing and Robertson’s problematizations of the local and the global in mind, I will use these terms throughout this thesis. I have chosen to define the Survival Church as a particular social field and locality, thus representing the local. The global will be defined, on the one hand, as the logics of neoliberal capitalism, but more importantly as the influence from the Pentecostal movement, and how this takes form at the local level. As Tsing (2000:349) has argued; one has to look at the particular form that the global takes on the local level before one can examine global influences. As I will show, the global influences of neoliberal capitalism in Vanuatu come into being through the development of the country as a tax haven, contact with foreign organizations, but also, more indirectly, through so-called Prosperity gospels of Pentecostal movements. The different manners in which the Survival Church interacts with these external fields, and the outcomes of this interaction, will be discussed throughout this thesis.

Pentecostalism as cultural globalization

Christianity in the Pacific can in itself be seen as an example of a globalizing process. The views on Pacific Christianity have been varied; some have seen it as dominating Westernization, but an increasingly favoured approach is to regard it as becoming part of local cultures across the region, and thus having become both a local and a global phenomenon (Barker, 1990:2).

Similarly, the spread of Pentecostal Christianity has been described as an example of successful globalization (Robbins, 2004b:117, Anderson, 2004), and many scholars have wondered why the spread of this particular branch of Christianity has been so effective. There are many viable views on this, which I will return to later in this thesis, but a central aspect of the spread of Pentecostalism can be seen to be its emphasis on discontinuity or a break with the past, while at the same time preserving elements of the local culture. Other important

aspects are its emphasis on egalitarianism, its decentralized social organization, and a strong focus on ecstatic rituals and spirituality (Robbins, 2004b:124-127). As Robbins (2009a) has argued, Pentecostal churches can thus be seen on the one hand as being helpful in preserving local cultures, in that they make room for the use of traditional religious elements, such as the belief in spirits. On the other hand, if one considers the internal similarities between Pentecostal churches on a global basis, Pentecostalism can be seen as an example of Western globalizing homogenization (Robbins, 2009a:67). Robbins, following Dumont, considers both of these perspectives as viable, but argues that in the co-existence of traditional and modern religious aspects, a hierarchical relationship usually develops between them, for example in that local spirits are categorized as evil and demonic (Robbins, 2009a:68, see also Tonkinson, 1981).

Concerning the Survival Church, in this thesis I will look more closely into how this particularly local church relates to aspects of the past, both when it comes to *kastom*⁵, storytelling, sorcery and healing practices.

(In)dividuality and Christianity

Marilyn Strathern (1988) has argued that in the study of social life in Melanesia, one has to consider the specific Melanesian notion of personhood. According to Strathern (1988:13);

Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them.

This means that persons in themselves contain all the social relations they form part of, and are thus imagined as a kind of microcosms of society. Strathern counsels a departure from the supposition that “at the heart of these cultures is an antimony between ‘society’ and the ‘individual’” (1988:12); one cannot bring Western or anthropological categories to Melanesia and expect to find equivalent expressions.

If Melanesians see themselves as dividuals as well as individuals, this may have several implications for the local implementation of Christianity. Christian cosmology focuses strongly on the personal relation between the individual and God, and a central factor is the

⁵ Throughout this thesis I have chosen to follow Akin’s (2004:300) definition of *kastom* as “a Melanesian Pijin word (from English ‘custom’) that at its most basic, refers to ideologies and activities formulated in terms of empowering indigenous traditions and practices, both within communities of varying levels of inclusivity, and as a stance toward outside entities”. The concept of *kastom* will be discussed more in-depth in chapter three.

focus on individual sin and salvation. One question thus becomes; what happens to local notions of personhood as dividual in the encounter with the Christian notions of individuality?

Sabine Hess (2006) has used Strathern's theory to show how ceremonial practices in Vanua Lava, Vanuatu, reflect the different views on personhood. For instance, wedding ceremonies are usually performed twice; first in a *kastom* wedding and then in a church wedding. The different views on personhood are revealed through local gift-giving practices; in the *kastom* wedding people give gifts as dividuals; from the kin-sides they belong to in each context. In contrast, people give individual gifts in the church wedding. This is partly because in the church ceremony "the couple is taken out of their dividual relationships with their kin and put into an individual relationship to God" (Hess, 2006:286). According to Hess, a competitive relationship between *kastom* and church is established, at the same time as the two are seen as complementary. I will return to the issue of individuality and Christianity in chapter four.

The Republic of Vanuatu

The Republic of Vanuatu, formerly known as the New Hebrides, is an island nation located in the South West Pacific, consisting of some eighty volcanically originated islands, around sixty of which are inhabited. The country has an extension of 12 200 km² and according to the 2009 national census has a population of 234,023 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2009).

Like most countries in the Pacific region, Vanuatu was as mentioned exposed to an intense missionization from the early 1800s (Bolton, 2003:8). In addition, Vanuatu has a quite interesting colonial history, having been under simultaneous colonial rule by Great Britain and France; a so-called condominium government that lasted from the early 1900s⁶ until the country's independence in 1980. Both the condominium government and the missionization have had several effects on Vanuatu's history and contemporary situation. On the one hand the dual colonial government led to a relatively weak colonial state in Vanuatu, but on the other hand it facilitated the development of a strong social community (see for instance Philibert, 1981). Also, according to Bolton (2003) it was actually the missionary work that led to the development of the *kastom*-category in Vanuatu; as a way to recognize the difference between Christian and local ways.

Miles (1998) has argued that as the processes of decolonization and nation building began, Christianity in many ways actually helped creating the feeling of nationhood that the

⁶ The condominium arrangement was conceived in 1906 and formalized in 1914 (Miles 1998:18).

ni-Vanuatu⁷ have today, Christianity being something everyone has in common. Also, analogies between personal freedom obtained through Christ and national independence were applied in the process of nation building in Vanuatu, combined with an emphasis on *kastom* and the Bislama language (the official language of Vanuatu, see “Language” below) as common ground (Miles, 1998:61).

Language

As a consequence of the Anglo-French condominium government, Vanuatu has today three official languages; English, French and Bislama (a Pidgin language). In addition there are about 113 local languages in Vanuatu, the majority of these Austronesian (Tryon 1996:171 in Bolton, 2003). The language spoken on Nguna Island is similar to those of nearby islands of Pele, Emao, Tongoa, as well as the western part of Emae and some villages on North Efate.

During my first few weeks in Vanuatu, I received lessons in Bislama and after about a month I began to be able to conduct most of my conversations in this language. Ngunese people both in Freswota and on Nguna mostly speak the Ngunese language amongst themselves, and outsiders (for instance in-marrying women of other language groups) are expected to learn the language as soon as possible. In both of my field locations, then, Ngunese was the language mostly spoken between people in daily life. Sometimes the people made an effort to speak Bislama between them when I was present, but especially when there were children present, who did often not speak Bislama very well, Ngunese would be spoken. I made a constant effort at learning the language, but it was too difficult for me to learn within such a short time-span. I thus had to base a lot of my information gathering on conversations in Bislama.

Methodological concerns

In 2006 my supervisor, Annelin Eriksen, conducted an interview with a pastor of the Healing Ministry in Freswota. She discovered that this church had a very interesting history and way of linking its history to the island of Nguna, in addition to it being renowned in Port Vila for its healing practices (Eriksen, personal communication, see also Eriksen, 2009b, 2009a). The pastor had also expressed a desire for someone conducting research within the church, so she suggested this church as a possible project for my master’s thesis. As I immediately found this to be an exciting project, I chose this as the point of departure for my fieldwork.

⁷ Ni-Vanuatu is the term used to describe the population of Vanuatu.

When I arrived in Vanuatu in early January 2010, Eriksen was already in Port Vila, conducting her own fieldwork. I was therefore so fortunate that she accompanied me to my first encounter with the Survival Church in Freswota only three days after my arrival. Ralph Regenvanu, director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre at the time, also accompanied us to this meeting. In Freswota we met with Pastor Aaron, president of the Survival Church, and explained my wish to do research within the church. He was at once very positive to the idea, and agreed to let me conduct my fieldwork there. We agreed that I would spend the next few weeks getting familiar with the Survival Church; attending church services in Freswota and getting to know its members. Then, in February, I was to travel to Nguna in order to visit a second branch of the church; the Pauvatu Survival Church in Unakap, and stay with a family there.

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) was founded in 1956, and is an umbrella organization consisting of a museum, various archives and a library (Bolton, 2003:xvi). This centre has a long history of organizing workshops for locally recruited fieldworkers, to study for example local customs, languages or handicraft around Vanuatu.

The Vanuatu Cultural Centre has a policy considering foreign researchers' opportunities for doing ethnographic fieldwork in Vanuatu. This policy includes the necessity of an agreement between the VCC and the researcher, and that the researcher will have to deliver a written contribution to the place of research after finishing his or her fieldwork. The researcher might also be asked to do some work for the VCC while in the field. In my first encounter with Pastor Aaron of the Survival Church it was decided that in return for me doing fieldwork within the church, I was to write a booklet containing the history of the church and its most central stories.

Through my research permit received from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre I was given a letter in Bislama describing my research (see appendix B) which I gave to the Survival Church leaders in Freswota and on Nguna, as well as to the chiefs of Unakap village. This letter explained that I was a researcher doing fieldwork on the Survival Church. Accordingly, the reason for me coming to Nguna Island was clear to most people from the very beginning, and I became known as the foreigner that had come "*long side blong jioj*" (for the sake of the church). However, this initially made it harder for me to get to know other sides of the community, such as kinship relations. Thus, when I tried asking questions about things not related to the church, or suggested that I collect genealogies or make a household survey of

the village, people would find this strange and inappropriate, as they had the impression that my only task in the village was to study the Survival Church. Not wanting to upset people or make anyone uncomfortable, then, I had to find other ways of gathering information. Explaining anthropology to non-anthropologists is always hard, of course, and I had to spend a lot of time explaining that in order to understand the church I had to understand the rest of the community as well. My field methods will be described more in-depth below.

Choosing the two fields

During the four first weeks of my stay I stayed at a guest house in Port Vila. I spent this time making arrangements with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, and looking into literature on Nguna in the VCC library. At the same time, I visited the Survival area in Freswota a couple of days a week, in addition to the weekly Sunday service. As the school was closed due to summer holiday, a teacher at the school agreed to be my Bislama teacher. She became one of my main interlocutors and good friends, and we spent several mornings together studying or walking around town. Wanting to get to know the Freswota area and church community more closely I asked if I could move to Freswota until I was to leave for Nguna. I had hoped to be able to live with a family, but as the housing arrangements were already crowded, it was decided that I should rather sleep inside one of the classrooms of the school. (As it was still summer holiday at the time, the school building was empty.) Living in Freswota made it much easier for me to get to know people, as I became more than a mere visitor spending a couple of hours in Freswota each time I came. Whereas before I had mostly conversed with the pastor, my Bislama teacher, and some church members, it now became more natural for me to get to know other people living in the area. My improvement in Bislama also made it easier to converse with people.

In early February, after about a week living in Freswota, word came from Nguna that the family I was going to live with was ready for my arrival, so I prepared to leave for Nguna. My Bislama teacher from Freswota accompanied me on the trip to Nguna, as she knew the family I was to live with well. On Nguna I moved in with an elderly couple, their daughter and her two young children. The first night of my stay I was welcomed me with a great feast of *laplap*⁸, and told that I was now their classificatory ‘daughter’, their daughter’s younger ‘sister’, and her children’s classificatory ‘mother’. While on the island I lived within this

⁸ *Laplap* is a local pudding (in Ngunese called *nakoao*), made out of a grated root crop (usually yam, taro or manioc) or bananas, sometimes mixed with coconut milk, and sometimes fish or meat, wrapped in large leaves and baked for several hours..

household, and to show my appreciation of their immense hospitality did my best to participate in daily chores, in addition to always bringing food from Port Vila when I travelled there. Initially I was treated mainly as a guest; I was told to sit at one of two chairs in the household during meals, while my ‘father’ sat on the other chair, and the rest of the family sat on mats on the floor. When I asked if I could help out in the kitchen or help clean the house, I was told to just sit down and “*spel smol*” (“take a break” or “rest” in Bislama). After a while, however, and after I repeatedly expressed my interest in learning local ways, I was allowed to help out more and more. Although I knew that I was not able to work at the same pace as my family, or with the same skills, I was happy when I noticed that my help was appreciated. For instance, the daughter in the family told me that she was glad to now have a ‘sister’, as she had grown up with only brothers, but no sister to help her with the house chores. Also, I noticed that when visitors came to the house, my family proudly told them how “*their mistaare*” (the Ngunese word for “white person”) knew how to make *laplap*, how to “*skras-skrasem kokonas*” (Bislama for “scooping coconuts”; i.e. make coconut milk), carry water from the well, and so on. Furthermore, the fact that I preferred *aelan kakai* (local food) to *kakai blong waetman* (“white people’s food” such as rice and tin fish) made people laugh with surprise.

My main field method while in the village became mainly that of participant observation; following the daily lives of my family; preparing the different meals, fetching water from the well, washing clothes, and sometimes walking on the reef to gather shells, crabs and octopuses. To a large degree, my family’s diet was based on food purchased from Port Vila, so garden trips were not too frequent, and I only got to go to the garden a couple of times. Some days I conducted formal interviews with Survival Church leaders, and I participated in all the different church activities; meetings, fundraisings and church services. Every Saturday I went with my ‘sister’ to clean the area around the church (as that was her formal chore within the church; most members had their own particular area of duty within the church). One Sunday I went with the family to visit another branch of the Survival Church on Nguna, in Mere village, located a couple of hours’ walk from Unakap, on top of the mountain.

Before travelling to Nguna I had pictured a quiet, rural village, with traditional thatch houses that I had been told about and seen pictures of before my journey to Vanuatu. However, Unakap village, and in fact most of the villages on Nguna, are characterized by modern houses made out of bricks and cement or corrugated iron, that is, quite similar to those in Port Vila (although usually the houses on Nguna are larger). There is no electricity

(although some people have generators or solar panels), however, and no running water; one has to fetch water for cooking and washing from a well, while rain water is used for drinking. I soon noticed, then, that my “rural” field location was not nearly as rural as I had imagined. Also, there is a high degree of mobility between Nguna and Port Vila; most people residing on Nguna have spent at least a couple of years in town, studying, working and the like. Moreover, some people travel to the Port Vila market several times a month, spending a couple of days there, until they have sold their products (mostly mats, fans and baskets made out of pandanas, or fruit).

In my project description I had written that I would spend most of my time on Nguna, studying the church there. My “plan B” was to compare the branch in Port Vila with the one on Nguna. I soon decided that the second option would be the best alternative for my fieldwork. There were several reasons for this decision. First of all, I noticed that the two churches in fact had two separate origins (as described earlier in this chapter) and although the two are joined together in one church, there are some differences between them. For instance, as will become clear in chapter three, the Freswota branch link their origins to Ngunese *kastom*-stories, whereas the Unakap branch relates their origins to modern narratives. Secondly, I figured that I would get a better comparative grasp and a better understanding of local Pentecostal churches in Vanuatu by looking more closely into two churches rather than one. Finally, as it became clear that my Ngunese interlocutors themselves spent quite some time travelling between Nguna and Port Vila; visiting relatives, going to the market or visiting the other Survival Church branches, I reasoned that I should do this as well, in order to get a better understanding of their daily lives.

My six months of fieldwork thus became divided between Nguna and Port Vila. I travelled back and forth between the two locations, although my main place of residence remained with the family on Nguna. Since housing arrangements in Freswota were crowded and school vacation had come to an end, I usually slept at a guest house during my stays in Port Vila. Sometimes I travelled with my Ngunese family, if someone was going to the market for instance, or to visit a relative in town, sometimes by myself, and sometimes I travelled with the whole Ngunese congregation. In March, for instance, the whole congregation travelled to Port Vila to perform a combined service with a Survival Church in Manples (a Port Vila neighbourhood). Also, in May, a week-long Bible Teaching Conference was arranged in Freswota during a school break, where I again slept inside the school, along with the Ngunese congregation.

Religious concerns

Understandably, I received many questions regarding my own church affiliation. I explained that in my home countries (Iceland and Norway) we have a state church, which means that all inhabitants automatically become members of the Protestant Church by birth, although, at least within my family, people do not necessarily go to church every Sunday, but rather on special holidays or important ceremonies such as baptisms and weddings.

Some people found it strange that I as a member of a Protestant Church (a church more similar to the Presbyterian Church of Vanuatu than the Pentecostal Church I had come to study) had chosen to do my research on the Survival Church. However, I explained that, being a student of social anthropology, my interest in the Survival Church was based on the social aspect of the church, in addition to the particular history of their church, their practices of healing, and the fact that theirs was a quite recently established, local church. People seemed to appreciate the fact that someone from the outside had taken an interest in what they themselves described a “small, independent church that many outsiders disliked”. My role during church services and activities, both on Nguna and in Freswota, then, became that of an observer and an apprentice, although as I for instance learned most of the songs, and could participate to an increasing degree.

Names

The name of the church and its main leaders are stated in this thesis, in addition to place names and names of organizations. This is partly due to the fact that my fieldwork was based on the proposal by one of the Survival Church leaders that someone conduct research within the church. In addition, given that the church has a particular relation to Nguna Island through both its own origins, as well as its relation to *kastom*-stories of the island, it is relevant to name the island. However, all of the remaining church members as well as my other interlocutors referred to by name in this thesis (mostly in chapter five) have been given pseudonyms or not directly named at all, in order to protect their privacy.

Chapter outline

In chapter two I will give an introduction to my two main field locations; Unakap village on Nguna Island and the Port Vila neighbourhood of Freswota. I will provide a description of daily life in these locations, and give some socio-economic context for the rest of the thesis. Further, I will present some historical background for developments such as urbanization in Vanuatu, thus demonstrating some effects of global neoliberalism on the local level. Further, I

will depict some existing discourses on urban versus rural life, looking into identity-making in the presence.

In chapter three I will describe some particularly local aspects of the Survival Church; its origin stories. The Survival Church in Freswota has a specific way of relating its origins to Ngunese *kastom*-stories, thus underlining a sense of continuity with the past. The Survival Church in Unakap, on the other hand, has created its own Christianized myths. Both churches, then, have a way of localizing their particular forms of Christianity. Relating this to theories on ethno-theologies, black Jesus-figures and everyday folklore, I will argue that the Survival Church can be seen as an example of indigenized Christianity. Furthermore, we will see that the Survival Church has a particular way of breaking with the past, in a double sense.

In chapter four I turn to the view on economy within the Survival Church. I will demonstrate how this church's special form of economic thinking is influenced by the global Pentecostal movement and ideologies such as Prosperity or Health and Wealth gospels. At the same time, however, people still relate to traditional ways of reciprocity and sharing. Thus, an ambiguity between local and global ways of viewing wealth may arise at the local level. Finally, I will discuss what these changed economic practices can lead to on the local level; in relation to non-Survival Church members.

In chapter five I take a look at one of the most central activities of the Survival Church; its healing practices. On the one hand, these can be seen as a global aspect of the church, in that such practices, as well as discourses related to it (for instance the Health and Wealth gospel), are similar within Pentecostal churches on a global scale. On the other hand, however, the church's healing practices also represent something very local, both in that they have many similarities to traditional ways of healing, but also in that healing is used to cure the effects of another local phenomenon; sorcery, or *nakaimas* in Bislama. Having described this church's healing practices in-depth I thus turn to describe how some members of this church experience an intense fear of sorcery, especially in the rural environment. I relate this to this particular church's ability of successfully incorporate the effects and discourses on neoliberal capitalism. For instance, Survival Church members are often more successful than their Presbyterian fellow villagers when it comes to finances. Drawing on theories on sorcery from Vanuatu as well as outside, I will look into how sorcery and fear of sorcery can be interpreted. Building on this, I will consider what healing and sorcery can be seen to represent within the church, and in the general social context.

2

Ethnographic Context:

- Between the urban and the rural; Nguna Island and Freswota five

Introduction

This chapter is intended as an ethnographic introduction to my two main field sites and Survival Church locations; Unakap village on Nguna Island, and a part of the Freswota neighbourhood in Port Vila. After providing physical descriptions of the two locations, I will give some historical background of urbanization processes in Vanuatu, as these have influenced the church also. When it comes to my two field sites, the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (2009) defines Nguna Island as rural and Port Vila as urban. In addition, people tend to oppose the rural and the urban, or island versus town, in their daily discourses. A central argument of this chapter, however, is that the division between urban and rural may be seen as more blurred and in flux than these two categories indicate, at least for Nguna and Port Vila. Further, I will consider why people still tend to make such dichotomizations, and what such categorization may indicate about processes of identity-making.

Nguna Island

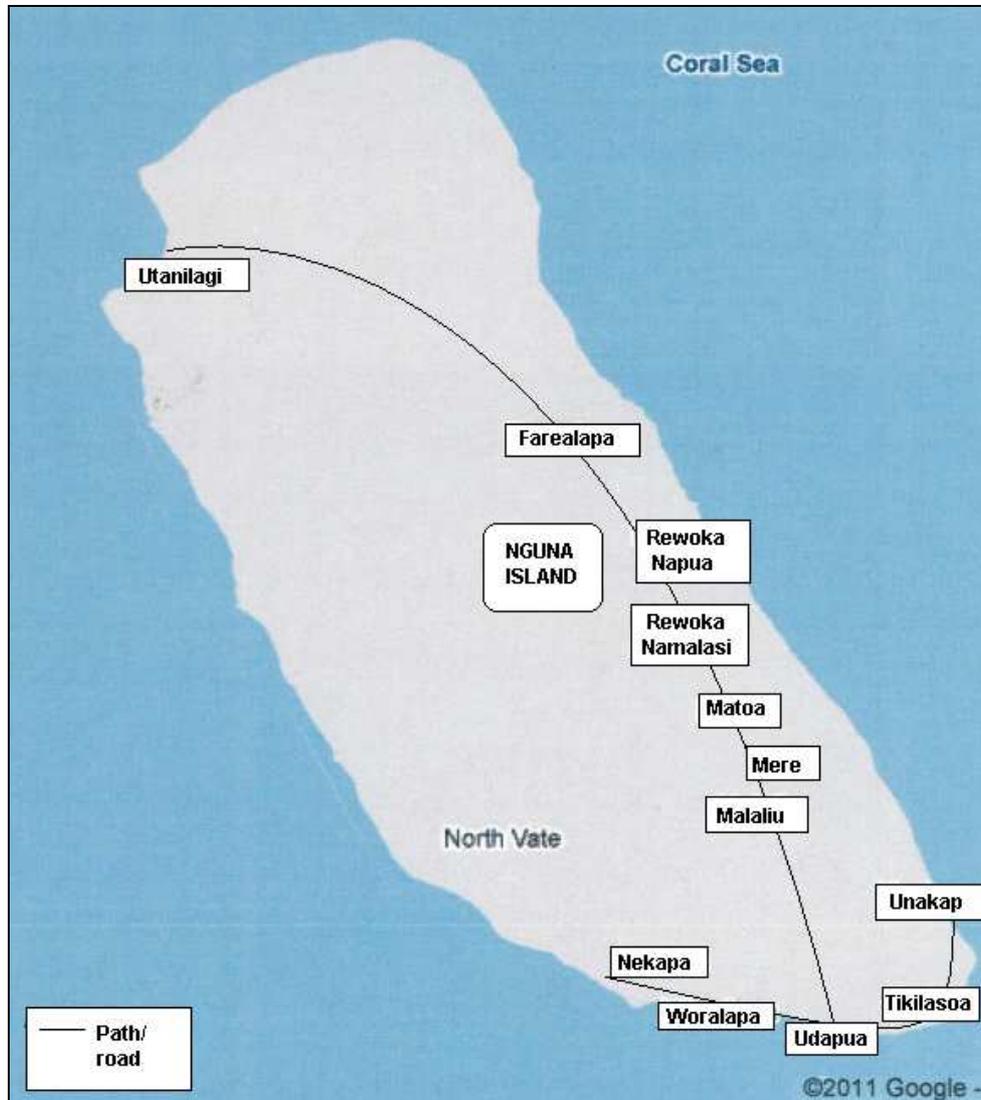


Figure 4: Nguna and its villages

Nguna is a beautiful island just north of Efate, measuring some 5 by 10 km. Home to twelve villages it had a population of about 1250 in 2009 according to the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (2009:4). Half of Nguna’s villages are located on the seashore (Unakap, Tikilasoa, Udapua, Woralapa, Nekapua and Utanilagi), while the other half are situated “*antap*” (on top of) the mountains (Malaliu, Mere, Matoa, Rewoka Namalasi, Rewoka Napua/Fareafau and Farealapa).

In order to reach Nguna from Port Vila one can catch one of the trucks that run from the town centre around noon every day of the week except Sunday. Ngunesese men usually drive these trucks, charging 500 vatu⁹ per person each way. These men usually sleep on Nguna and drive back to Port Vila the following morning at around 7 a.m. The one or two passenger seats next to the driver will usually be occupied by a friend of the driver, but if there is a sick person or a woman with an infant among the passengers, they usually get the priority. The remaining passengers, normally some ten to fifteen persons, sit squeezed together on the flatbed at the back of the truck, with their luggage and other items in the middle. All kinds of things are transported on these daily trips; on the way to the island people bring for instance foodstuffs (salt, sugar, noodles, etc) or utensils not obtainable on the island. On the way from the island people bring mats, fresh fish, garden crops, and from time to time a pig or two for selling at the market, or for giving away to relatives living in town.

The drive from Port Vila up to North Efate ideally takes about an hour, but with the truck it can take much longer, depending on which arrangements the driver has (usually he has arranged to pick up people or things elsewhere in town, and almost every time he stops at a supermarket in the neighbourhood of Manples, as many people like to buy frozen chicken and other food to bring with them to the island). The new road up to North Efate was officially opened in 2010, just before my first trip to Nguna, and is said to make the journey along the coast much quicker and more comfortable than before. The road used to be very bumpy and muddy, I was told, but today it is all smooth asphalt. However, the road is pretty steep and winding, and there have been several accidents since the new road opened, as drivers are speeding more than before. In addition, the trucks are often overcrowded with passengers and luggage, making them unstable on the road.

Arriving safely at North Efate, at Emua Wharf, one gets off the back of the truck and everyone helps loading off the luggage. Speedboat drivers are usually waiting at the wharf; at least three or four boats going to the different coastal villages on Nguna, and sometimes to Pele Island, which is close by. If there is another truck behind one usually has to sit down and wait patiently for others to arrive. When the boats are loaded and ready to leave everybody climbs in. Younger men usually sit on the roof of the boat, while women, children and elders sit on the benches inside. The boat ride over to Nguna takes about half an hour. The sea is usually quite still, and sometimes the boat driver puts out a line to catch fish on the way over.

⁹ Vatu is the name of the currency of Vanuatu. 100 VUV corresponds to about 6 NOK or 1,09 USD (<http://coinmill.com>, 19.05.2011)



Figure 5: People unloading trucks and boarding speedboats at Emua wharf, North Efate. Nguna Island in the back.

Figure 6: Southern Nguna seen from neighbouring Pele Island

Nguna is a mountainous island marked by two extinct volcanoes. It is a lush and green island, and arriving by boat the dense vegetation is all you can see at first, but as the boat approaches the island one begins to distinguish some houses down by the white sandy beach. There is a coral reef surrounding Nguna, and the boat driver has to be careful not to bump into it when approaching. Landing on Nagisu Taare (“White Point” in the Ngunese language), on the south-east side of the island, one gets off the boat and pays the driver. Usually a group of people is sitting under a large tree, waiting for family members or deliveries sent from relatives in town, or just to see who is arriving. Some people bring wheelbarrows to help transport the luggage back to the village.

Unakap village

Unakap village formally begins by the landing point, where the main school is situated, bordering to the island’s largest village, Tikilasoa. From the point it takes about fifteen minutes to reach the “centre” of the village, where the housing becomes denser, and both the Presbyterian Church and the Community Hall are located. Following the path from Nagisu Taare one sees only a few houses on the left side of the path and along the right side of the path is the beach and seafront. Halfway between Nagisu Taare and the village centre there is a small path leading uphill, to the Pauvatu Survival Church. As mentioned, most houses on Nguna are built in modern style; constructed with brick-stones and cement, with glass windows and corrugated iron roofs. There are a couple of traditional houses as well, made out of wild cane (*natangura* in Ngunese) and thatch, but the villagers do normally not sleep in these houses themselves; these are either used as kitchen houses or for lodging tourists. A few

households have generators or solar panels for electricity, but most rely on kerosene lamps for light when the sun sets in the afternoon.

Between the houses there are small paths covered in light grey corals and sand, whereas the main path is wider and made of sand and soil. Poultry belonging to different households walk freely around the village at all times, eating what they can find. Each owner has his way of marking the fowl belonging to him, for instance by removing a toe or by tying a piece of calico of a specific colour to its feet or wings. There are also cats and dogs alking around the village, belonging to different households. At the outskirts of the village one finds pig sties, where pigs are fenced in, and a few people own goats which are tied to trees around the village.

The village is shut in between the beach and the ocean to the east, and the mountain to the west. Uphill are the villagers' gardens, and on top on the mountain there is a path leading to other villages. From the beach one can see the sunrise every morning, but one cannot see the sunset, as the sun disappears behind the mountain in the evening. From the beach one can also see the islands of Emao, Pele and Efate in the east and south, and to the north one sees Mataso Island. Some days, if the weather is particularly good one can see as far as the islands of the Shepherd group in the back.

Unakap is a small village with a population of about 100 persons living in some 30 different households. It is hard to get a straight number of the people living in the village, however, since there as mentioned is a lot of movement between the island and Port Vila. Except for school vacations and public holidays, then, life in the village is for the most part calm and quiet. The village wakes up around sunrise, after the roosters' cuckoo, which usually begins even earlier in the morning. Women start the day by going to their kitchen houses to light up a fire and put water to boil for the morning tea. Breakfast, consisting of white bread (which is baked and sold in the village daily, and sometimes sent from town) or biscuits with peanut butter and tea is usually eaten before the children go to school at 7:15 a.m. After breakfast it is time for the daily chores. Going to the gardens, fetching water from the well, washing clothes and starting to prepare lunch are typical morning activities in the village. From time to time, if the reef is dry, some women and children take plastic buckets and thin iron sticks and go searching for shells, sea snails and small octopuses on the reef, while the men might go looking for fish and crabs with nets or spears outside the reef. If someone is going to Port Vila the next day, the nicest shells and fish might be saved in order to sell there, as one can get good money for such products at the market in town.

The village is very much characterized by neatness, especially on weekends. Every Saturday people clean up the village; sweeping the paths and public areas, as these are quickly covered with dry leaves, fallen-down breadfruit and waste. The beach area is also cleaned, and in particular the church areas, so that all is set for church service the following day.

On Sundays most villagers wake up earlier than usual; the women prepare *lap-lap* and put it in the fireplace so that it is ready for lunch after church. After breakfast people go wash in the sea or in the shower house, and put on their finest clothes; the women wear colourful island dresses¹⁰, and the men wear long trousers and shirts. When it comes to church affiliation, the village is divided between two churches; the mainstream Presbyterian Church, established by missionaries, and the independent Pentecostal Survival Church. As mentioned, the Survival Church also has a base in Port Vila, created by people that migrated to town from Nguna Island in the late 1980s. I will now turn to a description of this urban location.



Figure 7: Entering the Survival-area; the school is behind the sign to the right, the pastor's house and office to the left, behind the large tree.

The Survival-area in Freswota Five

Freswota Five, as the most recent addition to the quite large neighbourhood of Freswota, is situated at the edge of the neighbourhood, between Freswota Four, the neighbourhood of Ohlen, and a road going in the direction of the airport. When arriving in Freswota Five the first thing one notices is a quite large fenced-in area, and a sign declaring that this is the Survival School (see figure 7). Within the wire fences are the school's two buildings, a

¹⁰ In Bislama; *aelan dres*, sometimes also called Mother Hubbard dress. These dresses were introduced by the missionaries in the late 1800s, as they wanted women to dress more 'decently'. See figure 12, page 38.

smaller building for kindergarten, a second-hand clothes store, as well as several small houses, mostly made of corrugated iron. In the middle of the Survival area is a huge tree, under which there are a couple of benches and a table; this is the meeting point of the area. Behind the tree is a relatively large house, with a container built in the middle, and doors on each side. This is Pastor Aaron's house and office.

Usually a couple of containers are situated around this point, containing goods sent from an Australian non-profit organization (see chapter four). The school building consists of six classrooms, an office, and a couple of toilets and a shower, which are shared by the people living within the area. Most of the people living here are Pastor Aaron's closest family; his wife and their seven children as well as their spouses and children. The remaining people living within the area also come from Nguna or surrounding islands (for example Pele, Emao, Tongoa and Mataso), and are usually somehow related to the pastor. Some of the houses are for leasing and are rented out to people from different areas of Vanuatu.

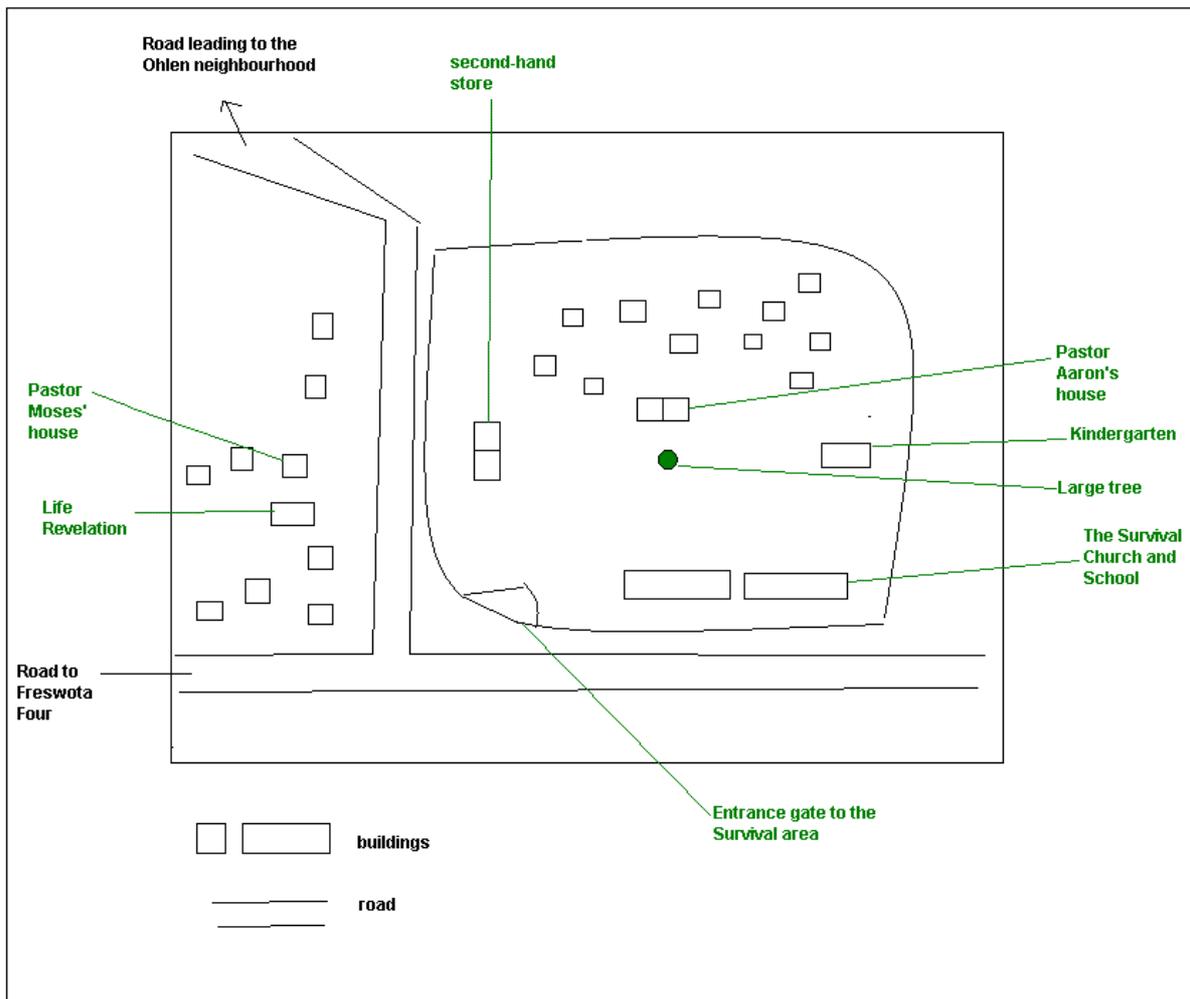


Figure 8: The Survival area and its surroundings in Freswota Five.

The Survival area is a lively place most days of the week. Except on weekends the schoolyard is filled with children in red school uniforms, and at lunchtime people from the neighbourhood sit on the benches selling juice and snacks for the children to purchase. In the afternoons one of the classrooms is rented out and used as nursing school for young women. Whenever the second-hand store receives a shipping of clothes from Australia, the owner arranges a market in the same classroom the following Saturday. Every Sunday a different classroom is cleared out and decorated for Survival Church service. The services are attended mostly by people from Freswota, but people come from all around Port Vila to receive healing within this church, as will be described in chapters four and five.

The whole fenced-in Survival area is owned by Pastor Aaron. The people who live in the houses outside of the fences are also the pastor's kin; including his parents, his two brothers and five sisters, and their descendants of two generations. As mentioned, Pastor Aaron's older brother, Pastor Joshua, runs the Healing Ministry, which is part of the Survival Church, while their younger brother, Pastor Moses, broke out of Survival some years ago to establish his own church; Life Revelation. As can be seen in figure 8, Pastor Moses' Life Revelation church is located very close by the Survival Church, and during Sunday service one can actually hear the singing from the other church.

Since the people living in Freswota Five are mostly migrants, or children of migrants, from Nguna or surrounding areas, and in order to provide a better context for my fields of study, I will now give a brief background for rural to urban migration processes in Vanuatu.

Historical background: the road towards urbanization

Urbanization is a very recent phenomenon in Vanuatu, in fact Melanesia is said to be among the most recently urbanized regions in the world (Connell and Lea, 1994). The two main urban centres of Vanuatu today are defined as the capital Port Vila on Efate, and the much smaller town of Luganville on Santo¹¹, together measuring some 24.4 percent of the total population (Government of Vanuatu, 2009:3). The rest of the country is defined as rural.

Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila, was developed as a commercial centre in the 1880s, and with the formation of the Anglo-French condominium government in 1906, it became established as the main administrative centre (Mitchell, 2004:360). However, for several years Port Vila was mainly inhabited by European settlers and Asian labourers, and the local population remained in rural areas (Rawlings, 1999:83). This was partly due to severe

¹¹ According to Vanuatu National Statistics Office (2009:3), in 2009 the population of Port Vila was 44 040, and that of Luganville 13 167.

regulations that were put in place by the colonial administration to avoid local people moving into town. Throughout the colonial period similar restrictions were in operation not only in Vanuatu, but also in other Melanesian countries such as Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (Koczberski, Curry and Connell 2001:2019). For instance, the only way for a ni-Vanuatu to reside in town for more than 15 days at a time was to have a work permit (Bedford 1973:55 in Mitchell, 2004:360). Urban life was thus from early on connected to the idea of labour, as Mitchell (2004) has argued, and the view of the urban as a place for work and earning money has survived up until the present.

Bonnemaison (1976) has demonstrated how migration in Vanuatu triggered a rapid process of change from the early 1970s. Previously, the dominant pattern had been that of circular migration. This meant that people would travel from rural areas to work in town for relatively short periods of time (from a month up to a year), and then return to their rural home villages as soon as they had acquired the desired amount of money (Bonnemaison, 1976:9). The circular migration pattern is for the most part controlled and organized. People maintain familial bonds, relations and obligations, hence preserving their island identity and rights to land on the island (Mitchell, 2004). Circular migrants living in town tend to settle close by those from the same rural community, following the norms of conduct in their place of origin. A result of circular migration thus becomes the establishment of communities in town that become similar to those of the home villages, reflecting the traditional structures of rural villages (Bonnemaison, 1976). However, from the early 1970s the relatively well-organized circular migration pattern began to decrease and give way to a new form; what Bonnemaison (1976:10) has termed uncontrolled or one-way migration. As opposed to the circular, temporary migration, the one-way migration is more permanent, and develops in a much less organized way. One-way migrants come to town for very disparate reasons, and often by themselves. Thus, the attachment to one's place of origin or to fellow islanders residing in town might disappear. This migration pattern is thus described as much more individualistic, and people leave their islands without knowing whether or not they will return. There were several reasons for the development of uncontrolled migration in Vanuatu. Among other factors it happened as a result of falling copra-prices on a world-wide basis (copra being the main source of income for many islands), the first effects of increased levels of education (educated youth familiarized with more technologically developed societies wanting to work in town) combined with increased demand of labour in Port Vila (Bonnemaison, 1976:10-11). In 1971, nine years before the nation's independence, Vanuatu

was established as a tax haven¹², which contributed to the explosive growth of Port Vila as an urban centre. Foreign banks were established, hotels were built, airlines were expanded and cruise ships began to arrive regularly, at the same time as the expatriate population grew (Mitchell, 2004:362). However, the enormous amounts of capital flowing through Vanuatu did not end up benefiting the ni-Vanuatu population. As Mitchell (2004:362) has explained;

The British administration claimed that the tax haven would provide employment and capital and thus spur the country's economic growth (Sope, n.d.:48). However, Sope has argued that the establishment of the tax haven meant that commercial development has been concentrated in Vila and has only benefited the Europeans who live there.

The urban environment of Port Vila is to this day very much marked by its position as a tourist location and tax haven. For example, the town centre is defined by two main streets. The first street is characterized by foreign banks, duty free shops, pharmacies, expensive cafés, a large international grocery store and shops selling expensive clothing, all intended for tourists, expatriates, and in part the small ni-Vanuatu elite. The second (and smaller) street is referred to as "China Town", and contains Chinese stores selling cheaper products and some inexpensive Chinese restaurants, aimed at the overall ni-Vanuatu consumer market. Even though many ni-Vanuatu are employed at the different stores in town, most establishments are owned by foreigners. The only exception is the food and handicraft market, where local people come to sell their products. Large parts of the city centre, then, are not economically attainable by most ni-Vanuatu citizens. However, this does not stop people being drawn towards the "bright lights of town". Several commentators have argued that the rise of neoliberal capitalism on a worldwide scale has, especially for urban dwellers, contributed to a growing sense of marginalization, combined with a longing for inclusion. As Weiss (2009:10) has remarked;

In terms of the particular dilemmas of neoliberalism (...) it makes sense that those with some means to imagine themselves as active participants in global cultural processes should appreciate their imaginative possibilities and should most acutely feel the sting of the inaccessibility of full participation

¹² "A tax haven is a jurisdiction that levies no (or very low) direct corporate or personal income taxes and is used by foreign individuals or corporations to avoid or alleviate the tax burden in their own country" (Mitchell, 2004:361).

As people in town see the possibilities of global capitalism right in front of them – in the shops of the city centre and in foreign films and music videos – it may become all the more difficult to accept these differences. At the same time, people have particular ways of relating to their local origins, which I will turn to now.

Island identity and sense of belonging

Primary to the definition of Melanesian identity is not mobility or journeys, but rootedness at the heart of a living space full of meaning and powers

(Bonnemaïson, 1984:119).

In the course of my first few weeks in Port Vila I noticed that one of the most common questions asked when meeting new people was “what island are you from?” (*yu blong wanem aelan?*). The answer to this question would usually be on what specific island one was born, or which island(s) one’s parents were from. The ensuing conversation would typically include a discussion of the specific characteristics or customs of that particular island. Before long I had taken up the practice of asking which island people were from, as this was a good conversation-starter when meeting new people. Interestingly, however, even though it often turned out that people had spent all their lives in town, I never met anyone who presented themselves as being *from* Port Vila. The relationship between the urban and the rural is quite complex in Vanuatu, as elsewhere in Melanesia. Having both an urban field location (Freswota in Port Vila) as well as a ‘rural’ location (Unakap village on Nguna Island), I got a chance to explore the relations between the two discursive fields. Conversely, however, I soon noticed a discrepancy between discourse and practice regarding rural life; although rural life is talked about as much easier than urban life, there are not that many differences between the two in the case of my two fields.

The discourse on rural life being much better than life in town is common throughout island Melanesia, and has been commented upon by various researchers (see for instance Jolly, 1996, Eriksen, 2005, Battaglia, 1995). During my stay both in Freswota and on Nguna this discourse became very noticeable. The expression “*laef long taon i sas tumas, laef long aelan hemi isi nomo*” (life in town is too expensive, life on the island is easy) was to be heard all over. In town “everything” costs money and one has to work hard to get it, while on the island life is said to be easier. As one Ngunese woman living in town told me; “On the island, if you want to eat a mango or drink fresh coconut juice you just go pick the fruit yourself in the

garden. But in Port Vila you have to first pay the bus fare to get to the market downtown, and there you have to pay several vatu for the fruit!”

Island life is further said to be much healthier than life in town; the fresh breeze from the ocean combined with walks to the gardens uphill on the island is contrasted with polluted air in town, people taking the bus instead of walking and working too hard to gain money. “*Aelan taem*” (island time) is a common term used to describe the tranquil and easy way people deal with things on the islands. There is no hurry or hassle to get things done; “On the island we don’t need watches; we just sleep as long as we want and do things in our own pace” one of my neighbours explained to me my first night on the island. Most people, however, especially the women, were busy with work most of the day; taking care of children, fetching water from the well, going to the gardens, preparing meals and washing clothes. Some also spent considerable amount of time on economic activities, which will be described in chapter four. In addition, as mentioned, most Unakap villagers over the age of 30 have at some time or another lived and worked in Port Vila for extended periods. The links to town are thus close, and most villagers also have family members residing in Port Vila. These are expected to visit regularly and contribute economically to their family, especially their parents. When coming from Port Vila people bring with them boxes full of things like rice, bread, peanut butter, as well as candy and crisps for the children. Some people that have rights to land on the island are in the process of constructing houses to live in when they have accumulated enough money in town to settle down in the village. Constructing cement houses is expensive, however, so this process can take several years. Also, people develop new needs and desires, and after a while in the village, people often need more money (for example to buy a television, a generator, a solar panel, and so on). Further, a growing tendency on the island is to base much of the diet on imported food; especially rice and tinned meat or fish. Thus, there are different degrees of “rural-ness” in Vanuatu. The fact that Nguna Island is geographically not that far from Port Vila has contributed to it not being as “rural” as many other, more isolated and remote, islands in the archipelago. Interestingly, however, the idealization of island life, and the dichotomization of urban and rural, remains; also on Nguna.

An important contrast between urban and rural life, is the accessibility to gardens and food crops. On Nguna every single person has their own garden plot, and ideally a lot of a family’s diet is based on what is to be harvested from the gardens. In Freswota’s urban environment, however, people normally do not have access to gardens, and must therefore base their food-consumption on the money they earn. The easiest option often becomes eating rice and tin food bought in local stores, local food bought at the market, or food sent from

family members in rural areas. There is a discursive distinction made between local food (so-called island food or *aelan kakae*; yams, taro, manioc, cooking bananas, etc) which is grown in the gardens, and imported foreign, “whiteman food” (*kakae blong waetman* – rice, noodles, sugar and tinned meat/fish) which has to be purchased with money. Island food is said to be the healthiest food there is, building strong bodies and making the children grow *fat-fat*¹³. In addition it is said to make your stomach full and give more energy to work in the gardens. Eating whiteman food, on the other hand, is said to make children grow fast, but not strong. It is also said that after eating a meal of rice one soon becomes hungry again, and thus does not have as much energy to work. Ira Bashkow (1999, 2006) comments on a similar discourse existing among the Orokaiwa of Papua New Guinea, who describe local food as “strong” and whiteman food as “weak”. Bashkow explains this by the symbolism embedded in the different types of food. Local food symbolizes “heaviness” of the rootedness to the ancestral land, while whiteman food, on the other hand, symbolizes foreign lands, the “lightness” of travel and of the money it is bought with (Bashkow, 1999:133). Bashkow argues that the Orokaiwa use this symbolism to reaffirm their own rootedness to their land. They have the possibility to look to the foreign and unknown precisely because they have this specific rootedness and security in what is their own; “people always have the cultivation of taro on their ancestral lands as a viable alternative to retreat to when they experience disappointment and problems in business, town life, schooling, or other arenas of the whitemen’s world” (Bashkow, 1999:183).

Using symbolisms of rootedness to one’s land is common throughout Melanesia. As we saw by the quote at the beginning of this section, Bonnemaïson (1984) has given the example of how the tree and the canoe are important symbols for identity and belonging; the tree symbolizing rootedness to the ancestral land, and the canoe symbolizing travel. On Nguna there are similarly several metaphors for rootedness to the land. For instance, in the Ngunese language, the word for stump of a tree is “*lake*”, while “*lakesikaiana*” means to be of the same origin. Also, there is a type of a local pandanas-tree called *Navataparop* on Nguna. The pandanas tree typically consists of several roots coming from the ground to make up the tree-trunk (see figure 10). This is said to symbolize the coming together of all the people from the village to one unity, what is said to be Unakap’s family line. In Port Vila *Navataparop* is used as a name for a popular gospel band consisting of youth from Nguna. Using this name,

¹³ Bislama for “fat”. In Vanuatu, being fat is mostly considered positive, indicating that one eats well. There is a difference, however, between being fat from island food and being fat from whiteman food; the first is considered healthy and the second unhealthy.

and all the symbolism it inhabits, may well be a way for urban youth to maintain a sense of rootedness to their island of origin, as well as a demonstration to outsiders where they come from.



Figure 9: Unakap: Volcanic stones.



Figure 10: The roots of a pandanas tree.

Further, being a volcanically originated island, much of Nguna's landscape is characterized by large, volcanic stones (see figure 9). Some of these stones are included in local narratives, and interlinked with local beliefs. One narrative concerns a large, flat stone at the outskirts of Unakap village. This stone is believed to have the power to make all the local people kind and welcoming towards outsiders. Also, when someone moves to the village, he or she is supposed to touch the stone, for it is said to contain magic that makes everyone who touches it want to stay. Even if the person leaves the village, he or she will always have a desire to come back, it is said. When women come to live in the village through marriage-arrangements, they are taken to the stone to touch it; this makes them feel at home in the village¹⁴. (I was advised not to touch the stone since I was only a temporary guest from a place so far away; if I touched it, it would make it too hard for me to go back to my family in Norway and finish my work.)

Urban dilemmas of identity and (be)-longing

The deficient sense of urban identity in Port Vila as described above has been commented upon by several researchers of the region. Gregory Rawlings (1999:76) has for instance

¹⁴ Similarly, several stones in the sea surrounding Nguna are said to be the first people inhabiting the island. Such stories are related to Matasolo tribe, the narrative used by the Survival Church as described in chapter three.

remarked that in Vanuatu the term *man Vila*¹⁵ is normally used as a form of insult; indicating that the person has no place. Connell and Lea (1994) have similarly explained for Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, that even though many people are of third or fourth generation living in town, urbanity still has a sense of impermanency about it. This can be noted both in that people do not consider themselves as being from town, but also in the way houses are constructed with material such as corrugated iron that is easy to move to a different location (Connell and Lea, 1994).

Mitchell (2004) has commented that an increasing amount of young people that have been born in Port Vila struggle to define their identity. Many have trouble deciding whether they should relate to their mother's or their father's island of origin, as they have perhaps never even been to these places themselves, nor do they master the vernacular languages. Mitchell further argues that daily life for young people in town is often experienced as disillusioning. Not having paid employment leaves many young people spending their days wandering the streets of Port Vila. Having no personal experience of their parent's island of origin, they have nothing to "go back" to, but at the same time there are few opportunities for them in town (Mitchell, 2004). One's island of origin is, as mentioned, a common topic of conversation in town, and rural life is often idealized. I found this idealization of island life in some ways paradoxical, as people in town did not necessarily want to live back on the islands themselves. This is perhaps especially so for young people who consider rural life too quiet and boring compared to the possibilities of urban life. A paradoxical situation may thus arise in that people want to live in town, but are left without work and money. I will now turn to an in-depth description of daily life in Freswota in order to give an ethnographic insight, as well as insight into how daily life is influenced by current global neoliberal influences.

Freswota Five

Freswota is one of the larger neighbourhoods of Port Vila. For some years it has also been among the most rapidly growing neighbourhoods in Port Vila (Chung and Hill, 2002:286) and has now developed into five sections; the oldest part called Freswota One and the most recent Freswota Five. The whole neighbourhood is characterized by one-floor buildings of varied standard; some houses constructed out of bricks and cement, while others are made out of corrugated iron and wood. The neighbourhood is further defined by a small market, a large football-field, some grocery stores, a bilingual (i.e. French and English) public school, a

¹⁵ A person from Port Vila. In Bislama, putting the suffix "man" or "woman" in front of a place name is used to indicate one's place of origin, such as *man Tanna*, *woman Nguna*, and so on.

sizeable Presbyterian Church, as well as several smaller independent churches, such as the Survival Church, and plenty of kava-bars¹⁶. The inhabitants of Freswota are mostly migrants from the different islands of the archipelago, along with a growing second and third generation urban dwellers.



Figure 11: People going “wokbaot” (“walkabout”) in Freswota Five; Survival area fences on the left.

A common meeting-place for people in town is the kava-bar, also called *nakamal*. Mostly men, but increasingly women as well, gather at the kava-bars at dusk to sit together drinking and talking in the dark for hours. As alcohol is very expensive in Vanuatu, kava, which is a lot cheaper, is the most common intoxicant. However, in recent years marijuana and home-brewed alcohol are becoming common as well, especially among the younger generation. Walking the streets of Freswota after dark is not advised to anyone, especially women. Most young women I got to know expressed a fear of walking places alone (and actually of being alone in general). While I lived in Freswota someone I knew with always insisted on coming with me if I was to leave the immediate residential area, even during day-time, whether I wanted to catch a bus from around the corner, go to a store a few blocks away or just take a walk. This may of course have been because I was a foreigner and the family I lived with felt responsible for my safety, but in general girls did not walk the streets by themselves¹⁷. Those who did were often referred to as “problem girls” or even “*woman blong*”

¹⁶ The kava-bar usually consists of a small house and some benches for customers, placed under a tin-roof. The kava-bar sells kava, beer and sometimes food. By its entrance there is always a lamp, usually with a coloured light bulb. If the light is on this indicates that the bar is open and has freshly-made kava.

¹⁷ The fear of walking alone was not unfounded, however. During the six months I spent in Vanuatu I was told of numerous incidents of rape and violence towards women in Freswota, and there was even a case of a woman and her infant daughter who were found murdered in a kava-bar.

rod” (“women of the road”, i.e. prostitutes). Sometimes, when I went “*wokbaot*” (“walkabout”) with some young girls in Freswota, they would point to groups of boys hanging on street corners, telling me they were afraid of them as they were “boys of trouble” who smoked marijuana and drank alcohol or kava at night.

Young men are highly visible in the public spaces of Freswota, as elsewhere in town. Many do not have jobs, and spend their time wandering the streets of town. Mitchell (2004:363) has explained this trend with high unemployment rates in Port Vila, combined with crowded housing arrangements. The large number of men in public spaces compared to women can be explained by the fact that women tend to be engaged in domestic work and taking care of children, and thus have less freedom than men. Mitchell also notes that unemployment rates are generally higher for men than for women (2004:365). As the service sector is growing, women tend to get work as house girls, in the Chinese shops in town, or at hotels or casinos. Conversely, common jobs for men are much more limited; they most often work as security guards, or as taxi or bus drivers. Owning a bus or a taxi requires an investment, however, and thus available savings or funds. The global phenomenon of higher unemployment rates for men than for women has been described as a “crisis of masculinity” by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000:307); resulting from a feminization of the workforce and a disruption of gender relations, leading to frustration among young men on a worldwide scale. The Comaroffs comment on the similarity of the situation of young people on a global scale, and relate this to the development of neoliberal capitalism. These similarities are founded on processes of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, according to the Comaroffs. The exclusion takes place at the local level; young people finding themselves excluded from local economies, having trouble encountering paid employment, and finding themselves less successful than their parents. Conversely, young people find a sense of inclusion in “assertive, global youth cultures of desire, self-expression, and representation”, standing “at the frontiers of the transnational (...) as a consumer category with its own distinctive, internationally marketable culture” (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:307). In a similar vein, Weiss (2009:131) argues for the case of Tanzania that in the neoliberal presence popular culture becomes an expression of the pain and frustration experienced by urban youth, as “once unimaginable wealth and well-being are now all too easily imagined and instantaneously mediated, and therefore all the more painfully unattainable”. In what follows, I will give an example of how new longings and desires resulting from global influences are developed and dealt with by young people in Vanuatu today, using the example of clothing practices.

Changing styles of clothing

Since colonial times, most ni-Vanuatu women have worn the *aelan dres* on a day-to-day basis; a colourful dress with a v-shaped neck and puffy sleeves, covering shoulders and knees, sometimes decorated with ruffles and laces (see note 10, page 26; for a more in-depth



Figure 12: Island dresses

description see for instance Bolton, 2005). Nowadays, however, the *aelan dres* is mostly worn by older or at least married women, while younger women only wear the *aelan dres* for church or festive occasions. At least this was the case both in Freswota and in Unakap during my stay, although there were some variations between the two locations.

On Nguna, all women wore an *aelan dres* to church service, while in Freswota many young women would wear a skirt and a blouse instead of an *aelan dres* when attending church. Young women in general are increasingly wearing more “Western-style” clothing, such as jeans, t-shirts or board shorts, both in the urban and the rural¹⁸.

Many young men have similarly taken up international “rastafari”- or hip hop-clothing styles; baggy pants, singlets, sunglasses, shiny diamond earrings and scarves around their heads. This change of clothing patterns indicates that young people, both in the urban and the rural environments, look to more global or Western trends in their choices in clothing. Further, as both Weiss (2009) and the Comaroffs (2000) have argued, this may be seen as a way for young people to be included in global youth cultures, thus perhaps rebelling against the current situation and gaining a sense of being included in something larger than the local.

Second-hand clothes have become quite popular in Vanuatu, especially among the younger generation. Within the Survival area in Freswota Five there is a second-hand clothes store, run by a Ngunesse woman. She set up this shop a couple of years ago, with the help from her father, and with money from a microfinance loan from the church (which cooperates with Evidence, an Australian non-profit organization, which I will get back to in chapter four) she rented a small house, and bought some bags of second-hand clothes from Australia. The store

¹⁸ However, the trend of women wearing trousers is frowned upon by many people. For instance, an older man once told me that ni-Vanuatu women should wear dresses, or at least skirts covering the knees, and that he would never allow his daughters to wear trousers.

soon became popular in the neighbourhood, and before long the woman had to order new supplies of clothes. She made such high profits on her business that before a year had passed she had repaid the whole loan, including a twenty percent interest. The second-hand shop has customers most of the day. Young women meet up here to chat, look at and try on clothes and shoes. About once a month a container filled with second-hand clothing and other items from Australia is delivered outside the store, and people from Freswota, especially young girls and women, gather to look at the newly arrived clothes, trying to pick out the nicest items. However, even though the prices are relatively low in the second-hand stores, many people do not have enough money to buy these, but only come to “look at the clothes”.

Similarly, when going to the town centre, young girls enjoy walking around the markets and shops, looking at clothes, sandals and accessories, discussing which ones they would buy if they had enough money. Mitchell (2004:373) has commented upon the similar practice of “eye-shopping” in Port Vila; young people going to town to look at shop windows, longing for things, but being unable to buy them, as they have no money. Mitchell further describes eye-shopping as one of many ways of “killing time” (*kilem taem*) for unemployed youth in town, together with for example watching DVDs, playing cards and hanging out in public spaces.



Figure 13: A young couple in Port Vila.

Many stores in the centre, then, are too expensive for the average ni-Vanautu, as the prices are aimed at the foreign tourist market. There are Australian stores selling original brand clothing like Billabong or Quiksilver¹⁹ at Australian-standard prices²⁰, while the fake version is sold in a Chinese store around the corner at a much lower price. There is a considerable amount of Chinese shops in town, selling everything from mass-produced kitchen utensils to counterfeit versions of brand name clothing, DVDs and MP3-players. Foreign cruise ships arrive regularly in Port Vila, and with them a mass of wealthy tourists, mostly Australian, taking over the centre’s streets, cafés, restaurants and shops for the day. Watching the tourists becomes a source of entertainment for young people, as I noticed one day I was in town with some young women from Nguna on a ‘cruise ship day’. The girls

¹⁹ Australian clothing brands of surf and summer wear.

²⁰ However, because of Vanuatu’s position as a tax haven, these prices are cheaper than in Australia. In addition, there are separate duty-free shops selling clothing, liquor, cigarettes and perfume where only tourists holding a departure ticket can shop at discount.

found great entertainment in watching the tourists, often commenting on their strange clothing. “Look at her – she wears such a short skirt that if you were sitting on the ground you would see her panties...” one girl would exclaim, and the others would break out in laughter. When discussing second-hand clothing in Zambia, Hansen has argued that even though fashion spreads across countries, it does not necessarily contribute to “cultural homogeneity” or “passive imitation of the West” (1999:345). Rather, it “promotes awareness of difference between local livelihoods and opportunities elsewhere while allowing the expression of variety, individuality, and uniqueness in clothing practice” (Hansen 1999:345). Similarly, in Vanuatu, even though Western clothing is admired and longed for by the younger generation, there are certain rules of conduct concerning sense of decency and which clothes are appropriate and which ones are not. Wearing “Western-style” clothing may thus come to take place within local terms.

“The urban and the rural” - discourse versus practice

As we have seen, there is a marked contrast between discourse and practice, or between what people say and what they do, when it comes to urban versus rural life. As both urban and rural areas have gone through economic change, money has become ever more important in parts of the society at large. I have argued that a marked division between the urban and the rural seems somewhat out of place when it comes to my two main fields, Nguna and Freswota, especially because of Nguna’s proximity to Port Vila, and Ngunese islanders’ increased involvement in urban economic life. These two areas are thus in fact not as unlike as local discourses or official statistics indicate (i.e. defining Nguna as “rural”), rather, the two are closely interconnected. One question thus becomes: what makes people keep up these discourses concerning “the urban and the rural”, presenting island life as better than life in town? Are these discourses a form of nostalgia towards past times? Or are they perhaps a means to preserve one’s sense of identity? Battaglia (1995:93) has looked on discourse and practice by Trobrianders living in Port Moresby, and argues that nostalgia is “not merely a yearning for some real or authentic thing. Rather, it generates a sense of productive engagement which is at once more personal and larger than any product it might find as its object.” Battaglia further describes nostalgia as “cultural practice” that replicates “the social conditions of and for feeling, such that one’s experience of social life is supplemented and qualitatively altered” (1995:93). I would argue that the urban-rural discourses among my interlocutors may be interpreted as a way for people to define their identity. As the practice of always linking one’s identity to one’s island of origin indicates, people have a need for a

feeling of rootedness and belonging. However, the decreasing sense of island rootedness combined with aspirations towards the global in the neoliberal presence, as for instance seeing the availability of expensive brand clothing right in front of you without having the possibility to buy it yourself, creates some dilemmas for people's identity-formation. As I have shown above, changing one's clothing practices may be way for ni-Vanuatu youth to feel included in global youth cultures. At the same time, accumulating the correct types of clothing requires money, which is not always attainable in the contemporary situation of high unemployment rates. An ambivalent situation thus arises for many people; a theme I will return to later in this thesis.

Concluding remarks

In this introductory chapter I have presented my two main field locations; Unakap village on Nguna and Freswota five in Port Vila. In order to provide some ethnographic context to the subsequent chapters I have retraced the background for urbanization processes in Vanuatu. Since the 1970s migration patterns have gone from circular migration towards a larger degree of one-way migration. With the augmented global influence of neoliberal capitalism, exemplified by the establishment of Vanuatu as a tax haven, and thus an increased growth of the tourist- and service industries, a considerable amount of socioeconomic change has taken place, and the "global" is ever more present in people's daily lives. These processes, in turn, have influenced the ni-Vanuatu on several levels, both financially and when it comes to processes of identity-making. I will come back to how the Survival Church relates to these global processes and the economy in chapter four. First, however, I will turn to more local aspects of the church. In the following chapter I will thus show how Survival Church members link their origins to a local, rooted island-identity, consequently creating a form of localized or indigenized Christianity.

3

A Double Break with the Past

- Indigenizing Christianity through local narratives

Modernity creates its own folklore and legends; it requires its own narratives of heroic quests, of spectacular failures, betrayals and near misses, through which villagers can create their own subversive history of modernity's possibilities

(Lattas, 2010b:296)

Introduction

In spite of global influences from the spread of neoliberal capitalism described in the previous chapter, which may contribute to people experiencing similar processes around the world, as for instance encountering common ground through global religion or youth cultures, there are at the same time often strong cultural processes at work on the local level. Also, Pentecostal Christianity has been described as one of the most globalizing religions (Robbins, 2004b) and thus a possible homogenizing force on a global scale, as described in chapter one. However, as I will show in this chapter, although Pentecostal churches may look similar on the outside, there may simultaneously be some very local processes going on within.

In this chapter I will present some origin stories of the Survival Church, thus tracing a few distinctions between the two branches of the church I studied; one on Nguna and one in Freswota. Although both are branches of the same local independent church, and both

originated on the same island, they relate differently to local *kastom* and to their own origins. The Freswota Survival Church links its origins to traditional Ngunese *kastom*-stories, while the Survival Church in Unakap focuses on more recent and Christianized myths. However, the point in this context is that both churches present their origins using different narratives, and both connect these narratives or origin stories to the Bible. In addition, the way these narratives are constructed entails a sense of both continuity and a break with the past.

By presenting missionary accounts on Ngunese society from the 1800s, existing research on the island, as well as anthropological theories on colonial encounters and relations between Christianity and *kastom*, I intend to trace some explanations for the development of the different relations between these. Finally, in discussing some recent anthropological debates on Christianization, cargo cults, everyday folklore and ethno-theologies I will argue that the Nguna and Freswota churches can be seen to represent forms of local and indigenized Christianity.

Freswota Survival Church: an Ngunese *kastom*-story

Freswota 5, January 27, 2010

It is early afternoon and we are sitting in the shade under a large tree in the middle of the Survival area. I have been conversing with Pastor Aaron; founder and president of the Survival Church, for a couple of hours. Some of his family members are sitting on the benches beside us, listening to our conversation, at times interrupting to give additional information or to ask questions. The pastor has been explaining how he came to establish the church, a story which goes back to when he was a young man, in the 1970s, and he first felt that he had a special connection to God, through the 1980s, when he broke out of the Presbyterian Church on Nguna, up until today, when the church has expanded to include several branches in Vanuatu. After finishing this account, the pastor becomes quiet for a bit, and then he says that I should know that the church's history really goes even further back than what he has now told me. The following account, he informs me, is a *kastom*-story from Nguna, and a true story about one of his ancestor who lived in the 1800s:

“My great-great grandfather lived in the village of Farealapa on Nguna Island and he really wanted to become a *kleva*²¹. One day he was out fishing when he spotted a really huge fish. Suddenly he noticed that it wasn't a fish, but a woman with white skin! He wanted to marry her, and took her to his village, but he couldn't take her to his house, because he was already married and had several wives. So he let her live in a different house. She lived there, and told him that she could eat anything except red yam *laplap*, so then he only brought her

²¹ *Kleva* is Bislama for “clever”, in this context meaning “healer” or “diviner”.

white yam *laplap*. But his wives found out about her and became very jealous. They told the man that the woman could live in the house with them. One day when the man was away the wives gave the woman red yam *laplap*. The woman became very angry, and told the man that she would go back to the sea. He became very sad, but walked with her to the shore. Before she left she asked him if there was something he wanted more than anything in life. “Yes, I want to become a *kleva*”, he said. Then she told him that in five days he should go see the old *kleva* in the village; “The old *kleva* will try to test you, but no matter what happens, don’t become afraid”. After saying this, the woman went into the sea and disappeared. After five days the man went to the *nasara*²² and found the old *kleva*. The old *kleva* told the man to pick up a stone, but when he did the stone turned into a big snake! But the man remembered what the woman had said and did not become afraid, and the snake turned into a stone again. The old *kleva* then asked him twice to pick up the stone; the stone first turned into a lizard, and the second time it turned into a big rat. But the man did not become afraid and he never dropped the stone. After this the old *kleva* and the man fasted for five days, and after the five days had passed, the man had finally become a *kleva*.

One of the *kleva*’s abilities was to make food magically appear out of nothing. One day he was in the garden with some people, and the people were hungry, but they had not brought any food. The *kleva* told them to sit down and close their eyes, and not open them until he said they could; not even if they heard strange sounds. The people heard the sound of things falling to the ground, and when he said they could open their eyes they saw several small *laplaps* lying all around them!

The *kleva* could also have visions about the future. One day he had a vision about the arrival of something good on the island; something that would change the lives of all the people. The thing that would arrive would have thin layers similar to *laplap*-leaves and have black and white stripes, like the *blakenwaet* (black-and-white) sea-snake. Then, when the first missionary came to Nguna, he brought with him the Bible, which looked exactly like the black-and-white *laplap*-leaves that the *kleva* had seen in his vision! (The pages of the Bible resembled the stripes of the sea-snake). But the *kleva* disagreed with the missionary on many things, and the missionary would not agree with the *kleva*’s thinking. The *kleva* knew that if he would shake hands with the missionary, he would die, so he did not want to shake hands with him. But the missionary kept asking him, and in the end forced him to shake hands. After they shook hands, the *kleva*’s hands started to bleed and he died. Three days after the *kleva* was buried the people of the village went back to visit the grave, but then the grave was open, and the *kleva* was gone!”

²² Ceremonial ground.



Figure 14: A “*blakenwaet*” (in English black and white or banded) sea snake like the one described in the *kastom*-story.

Story-telling on Nguna: historical background

As the pastor himself points out, the account above is a *kastom*-story from Nguna, probably going back about a hundred years, when the first missionaries arrived on the island. The innovation of the pastor’s account is that he defines the story as part of the church’s history, and it can thus be seen as an origin story of his church. He further defines the story as a “true story”, linking it to his own family line.

Before arriving in Vanuatu I was already familiar with the story about the *kleva*²³ through Annelin Eriksen’s work (2009b:185-189), as she had as mentioned interviewed a Survival Church pastor in Port Vila and heard a slightly different version of this story during a fieldwork in 2006. Only two researchers have previously done extensive fieldwork on Nguna Island itself; linguist Albert Schütz and anthropologist Ellen Facey. Looking into their work I discovered that both of them make references to this story, referring to it as *Munuai Vaau*, which is Ngunese for the “new diviner”; *munai* meaning “healer” or “diviner”, and *vaau* meaning “new” (Schütz 1969b, Facey 1982, 1988). Schütz conducted fieldwork on Nguna in the late 1960s, and has published work on texts and grammar from the island (1969b, 1969a). A version of this story, as well as several references to the same diviner appear in *Nguna Texts* (Schütz, 1969b). Facey carried out her fieldwork on Nguna from 1978-80, and also heard versions of this story, which she refers to both in her PhD.-thesis (1982) and in her texts collection *Nguna Voices* (1988). Schütz’ version of the story concludes by stating that *Munuai Vaau* was the last diviner to live on Nguna (1969b:223).

²³ *Klevas* are referred to in various ways in the literature I have found. Don (1927: 24-25), refers to these figures as sacred men, witch-doctors, wizards, medicine-men or *na-atamoli tapu* [Ngunese for “sacred person”], Schütz (1969b) and Facey (1982, 1988) calls them *munuai* or diviner, while my interlocutors on Nguna and in Freswota used the words healer or *kleva*.

In the introduction to *Nguna Texts* Schütz explains that he had wanted to collect “old stories” from Nguna that could be of use to folklorists as well as linguists. He therefore expresses some disappointment when the first “old story” recounted to him turned out to be an account about Peter Milne, the first missionary to arrive on Nguna, less than a hundred years earlier. Schütz (1969b:ix) also comments;

Whatever tradition of storytelling there might have been a hundred years ago has been submerged by the present culture, which appears to focus on going to church, preparing copra, and earning enough money to buy tinned fish. Along with the benefits brought by the first missionaries was the inevitable weakening of other parts of the culture as the traditional religion gave way to the new one.

In collecting Ngunese texts some ten years after Schütz, Ellen Facey (1988:48) noted how “somewhat ironically, Milne is (...) seen as the first recorder of *kastom* for posterity” and that the Ngunese during her stay used Milne’s missionary biography as documentation of their ancestors’ customs concerning traditions such as funerary rites. Facey describes this as “reinventing tradition in the process of trying to recapture and encode it” (1988:48).

The oldest written account on Ngunese society that I have managed to get hold of is the missionary biography referred to by Facey, *Peter Milne of Nguna*, written by Alexander Don (1927). This biography is based on letters and diary entries by Milne and his wife, Mrs Milne, written during their first years on Nguna after their arrival in 1870. According to Don (1927:29) spirits of the dead, called *natématé*, were considered the greatest danger in Ngunese society and were described as “potential enemies of the living, whom they will harm unless often propitiated”. Don (1927:24) further explains;

The native traces to evil sources anything out of the ordinary course of nature. When the ordinary wind becomes a hurricane; when the ordinary dry season becomes a drought; the ordinary waves of the sea a tidal wave; when the earth shakes and gapes; when the ordinary course of human life is arrested by the death of a child, or the gradual advances of old age disturbed by sickness and disease – the cause is an evil spirit or some man in touch with an evil spirit. Hence the sacred man, the medicine-man, the witch-doctor.

These sacred men with special abilities appear frequently in Milne’s biography, and were obviously very important figures in Ngunese society, being the only ones able to protect people from evil spirits. In a description of local healing practices written by the missionary’s

wife Mrs Milne, the following is stated about local diviners: “The sacred man will not even shake hands with the missionary, which would make him *moli*, or common. The common people dare not touch a sacred man, fearing sickness or death” (Don, 1927:25). This comment indicates the strong spiritual power of diviners; their “mana” (Kolshus, 2007, Mauss, 1954).

If the sacred man brings sickness and death to regular people by a handshake, what is the significance of the death of the sacred man himself after shaking hands with the missionary? What does this say about local views on the missionary and on the diviner?

Missionization and its malcontents

Judging by the *kastom*-story the *kleva* may be seen to have been positive to the coming of Christianity, describing the predicted arrival of the Bible as a “good thing”. It may therefore seem somewhat contradictory that he is said to have “disagreed with the missionary on many things” and that the consequences of the handshake were fatal for him. Also, the *kleva* received assistance in gaining his powers from a white woman, and later died after shaking hands with a white man. I would argue that his death may be seen to symbolize the end of the old beliefs, and the breakthrough of Christianity. Facey has suggested that the diviner’s death succeeding the handshake with the missionary may be seen as “a demonstration of Milne’s, and God’s, greater power”, and that Milne “thereby overcame the power of the *munuai*” (1988:48). Eriksen (2009b:188) has argued that it is possible to interpret the *kleva*’s bleeding hands as stigmata, and consequently see the diviner as a local, suffering Jesus-figure within the local church. This interpretation can be further supported by the *kleva* rising from the dead after three days, as Jesus himself is said to have done (Matthew 28:1-20). The diviner’s ability to make food appear out of thin air is also linked to the narrative of Jesus’ miraculous feeding of thousands of people (John 6:1-15), but also to the story where God makes bread “rain from heaven” for Moses and the people of Israel in their wanderings out of Egypt (Exodus 16:4). In an account of the story collected by Schütz, the diviner is even said to have given the credit of the miraculously appearing *laplaps* to God, saying; “It was Jehovah who gave it to you. Uncover it and eat.” (Schütz, 1969b:210). Also, the diviner’s healing abilities are similar to Jesus’ abilities to heal the sick (Mark 6:53-56). I see the paralleling of the *kleva* with Jesus as an indication of the church considering the *kleva* as having had a close connection not only to the local spirits, but to the Christian God as well. Similar ways of creating local, black Jesus-figures and of rewriting local stories to fit the Bible are common several places in Melanesia, which will be discussed later in this chapter.

At this point I would like to draw attention to some variations between the Unakap and the Freswota Survival Churches with regard to the story of *Munuai vaau*. After being told this story in Freswota early in my fieldwork, I assumed the Unakap church members would link the story to their church in a similar manner, being after all of the same church community, and also having originated on Nguna. During my subsequent stay on Nguna this story was recounted to me a couple of times, mostly by elderly people who knew and liked telling the *kastom* stories. The story was told in a similar manner, with one exception; in no way did people relate this story to the Survival Church. Rather, the story was told in a way of demonstrating how Christianity had changed the ways of life on the island, perhaps by replacing *kastom* with Christianity. As is common throughout Melanesia, people on Nguna make a strong distinction between the pre-Christian and the Christian times, referring to the former as “the darkness” and the later as “the light” (a discourse introduced by the missionaries). When I asked people on Nguna what belief systems their ancestors had before the arrival of Christianity, people would usually answer that the ancestors did not believe in “anything special”, and they did not have much to say about the pre-Christian period, perhaps even avoiding the subject altogether.

When looking at how Ngunese beliefs are presented in Milne’s biography, and taking into account Facey’s comment on how the Ngunese would use the missionary biography as a reference point to their own past, it does not come as a surprise that people may have become negative to this very past. “The natives” are described by Milne as “poor ignorant savages” (Don, 1927:43), and their religion is portrayed as containing “no angels of light; the demons of darkness are legion” (1927:29), being a religion “of terror, of despair, of gloom” with “no final good in it.” (1927:30). It also becomes quite apparent that the missionary did not give much credit to the natives’ beliefs, as this anecdote by Don (1927:24-25) suggests;

Mr Milne saw a man sitting alone on the ground, and asked him what was the matter. The reply was: ‘A *natématé* [i.e. evil spirit] is making me sick.’ Next day some medicine was given him, but he did ‘as they usually do when they get it into their heads that a *natématé* is troubling them.’ He died.

Milne further asserts that “the *natématé* worship and the feasts and kava drinking in connection with it are the greatest hindrance to the progress of the Gospel of Christ” (Don, 1927:30). The general missionary view can perhaps best be summed up in a comment by Reverend Frater, quoted in the biography (Don, 1927:33);

Only those who have first-hand acquaintance with it can realise all the degradation that is involved in heathenism. There is no nobility of thought, no faith in a higher power, no striving after higher and better things, but only a dread of evil spirits.

Both Schütz' and Facey's interlocutors describe Reverend Milne as having been a man with a strict and strong personality. Schütz even mentions rumours that Milne "put his Scottish determination to work to change the matrilineal kinship system to a patrilineal one" (Schütz, 1969b:ix). Facey refers to accounts by some elderly people she met who remembered Milne, describing "his forcefulness of personality and strict approach, in classroom and pulpit alike" (Facey, 1988:48).

Colonial and missionary practices of undermining existing cultures and belief systems in attempts to "civilize" or missionize local people are widely documented and commented upon within anthropology. An example is what Sahlins (1993) has termed "humiliating encounters"; encounters where local people get the feeling that their culture is inferior and insufficient compared to the foreign one. This, in turn, may lead people to "give up" their own culture and "convert" to a foreign one, according to Sahlins. Robbins (Robbins, 2004a) has used the theory of humiliating encounters and cultural change in describing the Urapmin's self-acquired conversion to Christianity in Papua New Guinea. According to Robbins, the Urapmin incorporated Christianity by "becoming sinners" and being constantly regretful of their own pre-Christian lives (Robbins, 2004a). Another possible outcome of colonial encounters is what Jean and John Comaroff (1992) call "the colonization of consciousness". According to the authors this is a struggle over power and meaning, between foreign missionaries and local people, which simultaneously becomes a process of trying to convince the locals rhetorically to convert to Christianity, reforming their practices and ways of thinking, so that they will become governed subjects.

Milne's biography similarly gives a description of how the first missionaries struggled to gain the trust of the Ngunese, trying to get them to convert to Christianity. For instance, church attendance is described as having been relatively high in the beginning of their stay, but gradually decreasing after only a few weeks. Looking at the missionaries' attitude towards local beliefs and ways of life, I would argue that it is perhaps no wonder that the Ngunese gradually lost interest in the missionary project. Perhaps the story of the *kleva* can be seen as symbolizing the disappointment that the Ngunese experienced towards the missionaries; originally seeing their arrival as a new, exciting phenomenon, but eventually growing tired of

the missionaries' negativity towards local practices. If one defines the missionaries as representing "the global", as representatives of global missionization, and the Ngunese as representing "the local", this can also be seen as an example of a friction between two different world-views, the encounter between these generating a sense of disillusion for those involved; the missionaries looking down on the Ngunese belief system, and becoming frustrated with their lack of interest, and the Ngunese people becoming disappointed by the missionaries' lack of respect. The power-perspective is very present here, however, and the Ngunese version of the story about this encounter may perhaps be seen as expressing their frustration with the situation; although they eventually became Christian, this did not happen without some resistance on their part.

Facey notes that at the time of her stay on Nguna there had, since conversion to Christianity, been "no competing denominations to threaten [the] Presbyterian stronghold" (1982:270). The only example she gives is a newly arrived Seventh Day Adventist denomination which the Presbyterian Church denied permission to construct an their church building. The Presbyterians are described by Facey as defining themselves having a superior relation to Christianity; "Since the island was 'brought into the Light' by a Presbyterian missionary only this church has historical validation" (1982:271). However, Facey does comment upon some existing discontent, disinterest and even contempt for the Presbyterian Church, in part explained as youthful rebellion and in part as increasing secularism resulting from the changing socioeconomic situation in the country in the late seventies.

Unakap Survival Church: modern myths²⁴

It is interesting to note that the Freswota Survival Church attributes so much significance to the "new diviner" *kastom*-story compared to the Survival Church in Unakap. But how can this be interpreted? One interpretation could be that people living in town feel a need to stay closer to their roots, to the *kastom* of the island they came from, but have left behind. As pointed out in the previous chapter, island identity is considered very important among people in Vanuatu; people living in town usually relate to the island where they or their parents were born as their place of origin. On the other hand, the fact that the Unakap branch does not relate to this story in the same way, does not mean that they are not close to their island identity. It could simply be because the members of the church belong to a different family

²⁴ There are various definitions of the word myth. Here I have chosen to use Dundes' (1984:1) definition of a myth as "a sacred narrative explaining how the world and man came to be in their present form", and avoiding pejorative definitions of myths as less true than other narratives.

line, and therefore are not themselves related to the *klevas*. Another explanation could be that since they have not had to leave the island and move to town, they do not feel the same need to relate themselves to their *kastom* as people living in town may do. However, considering the fact that the two churches have separate origins, this may of course also be a coincidence.

Even though the Unakap church does not share the Freswota church's connection to this specific *kastom*-story, the church does have plenty of its own narratives and myths. The following tale is an example of how the Unakap church localizes Christianity through a narrative; an account related to me by Unakap Survival Church's main pastor, Pastor Caleb, about one of the congregation's first healing sessions.

Unakap village, Nguna Island, March 18, 2010

“One day, while the church was still young, we [the congregation] arranged a meeting where all of us received our spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. Some received the gift of healing; some received the gift of spiritual prophet, and so on. One of the prophets had a revelation from the Holy Spirit about Kalsao, a man in the village. This man had been ill for several years, and now the Holy Spirit said that he needed our help. All of us went to Kalsao's house at the time indicated by the Holy Spirit. We walked very quietly, and when we arrived we sat down around the house and started to pray. When Kalsao noticed this he became very angry and shouted from inside his house that we should leave. But the Holy Spirit had told us that if Kalsao wouldn't let us help him, he would die. We gave him ten minutes to give us an answer, and after ten minutes he finally opened the door and let us in. Kalsao's house was very small, and very dark. He lived there all alone; for eight years he had been inside the dark house, and he wasn't able to go out in the sun. He was very sick, he couldn't walk and he couldn't eat local food; he could only drink very hot tea and only eat boiled rice. This had spoiled his teeth, and his stomach had become very big, but the rest of his body was very thin and he had a long beard. When we saw that his house was filled with evil spirits, we took all his belongings out of the house. Then we performed a Spiritual Battle inside and around his house; we prayed for a long time to get the evil spirits out, we performed a healing ceremony, and in the end we had finally healed Kalsao. After a while the people in the village heard the news of this miracle, and everyone came to see.”

This story describes the congregation's first use of their spiritual gifts, and can thus be interpreted as an origin story of the Unakap Survival Church. It also shows how the independent church began receiving some recognition from the rest of the community, in that the latter came to witness the results of their healing. After being healed by the congregation,

Kalsao became member of the church, and eventually received a central position within it, today going by the name of Minister Paul. In his sermons Minister Paul often refers to this event, and his eight years of sickness. He likens his sickness to his previous blindness towards Christianity, and his healing to being born again as a true Christian. In 2008 he had his first child; a son born the 8th of August; the eight day of the eight month in the eight year of the new millennium. These numbers are also important to him, as they relate to his eight years of illness. In addition, within Christian numerology the number eight generally represents Jesus, newness and a new beginning as well as his resurrection on the eight day of the week (John 20:26). There is an evident symbolism here; Kalsao's eight year long illness, and his "rebirth" after being healed. His son's birth is also an obvious new beginning; in addition to his special date of birth, he was also his first child. As mentioned, it is common to liken the time before the arrival of Christianity to a time of darkness, and vice versa; the time after Christianity's arrival to a time of light. The story of Kalsao shows how, while he was sick and possessed by evil spirits, he could only stay inside his dark house. After he had been healed and had accepted God in his life, he was again able go outside and into the sunlight. The focus on a new beginning and Kalsao's turn from illness to recovery thus symbolizes the journey from pre-Christian to Christian ways; from darkness into light.

Another important detail of the story is that while Kalsao was sick, he could only drink hot tea (which in Vanuatu usually contains a lot of sugar) and eat boiled rice, that is, foreign, so-called whiteman-food; *kakai blong waetman*. The food had destroyed his teeth and made his body unhealthy and undernourished. This can furthermore be linked to the general discourse mentioned in chapter two concerning local food building strong, healthy bodies, while foreign food is seen to do the opposite.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the story expresses an innovative subversion of categories. Within one category we find sickness and the darkness of pre-Christian ways; whilst within the other is healing, the light of Christianity and a new beginning. The new and subversive aspect within this categorization is that the first category also encompasses foreign food, while the second includes local food. The local is thereby connected to 'the light' of Christianity, while the foreign is connected to 'the darkness'. The time *before* Christianity seems to be forgotten or at least excluded. This subversion of categories can be seen to entail people of the Survival Church viewing their version of Christianity as something local and belonging to them, in opposition to the Presbyterian mission churches on Nguna. This can further be linked to the church defining itself as locally originated and in opposition to the mission churches established by foreign missionaries. As is common among Pentecostal

churches, a radical break with the past and a focus on a new beginning is emphasized. In this case, however, there is not only one, but a *double* break with the past; first with the pre-Christian times and secondly with the mission church.

Miraculous materializations

Another central origin story of the Unakap Survival Church concerns the erection of a new church building for the Presbyterian Church in the village. This took place just before the independent church was established, in the late 1980s/early 1990s. Two men, later to become central figures within the Survival church, Pastor Caleb and Brother David, had decided to erect a new church building. They are both known for good skills in constructing houses, and the pastor is a trained carpenter. According to the story, none of the other church members would help the two men; only God stood by them while they were working. The two men worked hard day and night, almost without sleep and without eating any food. They did not have a lot of money to buy material for the church construction, but instead of trying to contribute, the other church members would tell the two men that they would never be able to build a church without money and material. But the two men had trust in God and the Holy Spirit, and they kept praying for assistance. Subsequently, wood and cement would miraculously appear on the shore; for instance a stranger would arrive by ship bringing material, without requesting any signature for handing it over to them, and the men could thus continue the erection of the church. However, shortly after the men had completed the construction of the church, the rest of the Presbyterian congregation decided to throw the two men and their families out. This was when Alive Ministry (later to become the Unakap Survival Church) began to take form. The men's two families started their own family worships within their households, and the persecutions and throwing of stones described in chapter one began.

I find this story interesting in several respects. First of all, the fact that the men could pray to the Holy Spirit and subsequently receive material from God, without spending any money themselves, can be related to so-called Health and Wealth or Prosperity gospels (e.g. Sullivan, 2007); something I explore more in-depth in chapter four. Secondly, while recounting this story today, people underline the two men's skills as carpenters and likening them to Jesus who was also a carpenter. Finally, the focus on receiving unjust treatment while being kind towards others, and simultaneously maintaining one's trust in God is connected to Christian ideas of suffering, which I will discuss in what follows.

Suffering Samaritans

Members of both Survival Churches, in Unakap as well as in Freswota, strongly emphasize the difficult times they experienced after being banished from the Presbyterian Church in their respective villages. Discourses on how badly they were treated by the Presbyterians, and how, continuing up until today, theirs is a small, independent church that many outsiders dislike and look down upon, are central to their own narratives and origin stories as well as in daily life. While emphasizing their own suffering, the members also underline how they did not fight back, but did their best to endure and stay true Christians. This is further underlined by them strongly emphasizing their duty to help people in need, and some of them comparing themselves to the Good Samaritan of the Bible (Luke 10:25-37). In addition, there is a connection between the Good Samaritan and the story of the last diviner, who did good deeds, but who also was badly treated and ended up dead after shaking hands with the missionaries.

These stories also can be paralleled to the sufferings of Jesus Christ, who was killed unjustly, but never condemned the people responsible for his suffering. There is an obvious connection made between the local churches' own origins and the origins of Christianity itself as described in the Bible; through unfairness and suffering. Like Jesus was banished by the Jews, persecuted and crucified, people of the Survival Church were banished from the Presbyterian Church and persecuted for their changed practices. This linking can be interpreted as a need to identify oneself with the biblical texts. It is also another example of localizing Christianity, suffering being a central aspect of Christianity in general. For example, it is stated in the New Testament (1 Peter 2:19-20);

For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God.

Similarly, in the Book of Job of the Old Testament, there is a long passage concerning unjust suffering and lessons to be learned from it. There is a reference to the Bible hanging above the altar of the Freswota Survival Church, which I take to be quite descriptive of the church's view on rejection and suffering; "Come to him, to that living stone, rejected by men but in God's sight chosen and precious" (1 Peter 2:4). I interpret this passage to entail for the local church that even though they, like Jesus, have been rejected by the larger community, the most vital thing to them remains the fact that God has chosen them and regards them as precious.

Christianity and *kastom*

In Vanuatu, the relation between *kastom* and Christianity has been complicated since early colonial times. (And as we saw from the missionary accounts above, the missionary view on local *kastom* was usually quite negative.) Tonkinson (1981) has noted that in the process of nation-building related to Vanuatu's independence in 1980 this relation moved from opposition to complementarity. Both Christianity and *kastom* have in fact been used in order to create a sense of unity among the ni-Vanuatu, as these are the two cultural aspects most inhabitants have in common (Winch-Dummett, 2010). In defining what she takes to be "the essence of Ngunese culture", Facey (1982:282) refers to Tonkinson (1982) and his term "*kastom* within Christianity". Although Christianity has become an essential part of ni-Vanuatu culture, Tonkinson explains, *kastom* will remain the most important factor for people's sense of national identity, since "unlike Christianity, it can evoke ni-Vanuatu distinctiveness without excluding some of the country's inhabitants." (1982:314).

The concept of *kastom* is widespread throughout island Melanesia, and has been in use locally for several decades. Within anthropology the meaning of the *kastom*-concept has been extensively debated since the early 1980s (see for instance Jolly, 1992, Keesing, 1982), and there are several definitions in use. As mentioned in chapter one, in this thesis I have chosen to follow Akin's (2004:300) definition of the concept;

Kastom is a Melanesian Pijin word (from English 'custom') that at its most basic, refers to ideologies and activities formulated in terms of empowering indigenous traditions and practices, both within communities of varying levels of inclusivity, and as a stance toward outside entities.

Contemporary definitions of *kastom* may vary from place to place, especially on the local level, but I find this definition to be quite similar to the way my Ngunese interlocutors use the concept. Ngunese daily use of the *kastom*-concept is in many ways quite vague and all-inclusive, as the concept is used to describe everything from the ancestors' ways of life to local ceremonies, traditions and stories. On Nguna, Pastor Caleb expressed how he appreciated the closeness Pastor Aaron had to the *kastom* of Nguna, knowing the *kastom*-stories well and connecting them to the church. (This, he explained, compensated for the Freswota branch not always being as religiously active as the church on the island.) Pastor Caleb further told me that he considered it very important to get rid of the "bad" *kastom* of

Nguna, but just as importantly stay in touch with the “good” *kastom*. When I asked what he implied by these different forms of *kastom*, he explained bad *kastom* as evil spirits and *nakaimas* (sorcery), and good *kastom* as the *kastom* stories of the island (see further chapter five on ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ *kastom*). *Kastom* can also be used in order to distinguish one’s own ways from those of surrounding groups, for example the *kastom* of Nguna versus the *kastom* of Emao Island. The concept may thus be seen as a way to establish a form of identity among different groups of people, but also in order to establish a unity among many; even though different groups of people have different *kastom*, the fact that they all *have kastom* provides them with a feeling of commonality.

Localizing the Bible

In addition to linking their origins to the “new diviner” *kastom* story, the founders of the Freswota Survival Church also make a connection between their family line and a mythical ancient tribe called Matasolo tribe, which is also related to several *kastom* stories. In the Constitution of the Survival Church, written by Pastor Aaron, it is stated that the Survival Church’s name; “originated in moral inspiration of oral tradition (...) of the Bible with Matasolo’s oral scriptures” (Gollen, n.d.:2). For the church, their name thus stands for *the survival* of their ancient oral traditions, including those of old *kastom* stories. The Constitution also states that they; “believe in the manner of righteous custom that reflects the same inspiration; 1 - custom and church, 2 - Hebrew and Matasolos, 3 - any traditional cultures in the whole world” (Gollen, n.d.:5). As we can see, the Survival Church juxtaposes *kastom* (custom) with the church, as well as Matasolo oral tradition with the Hebrew Biblical tradition, considering both as being “traditional cultures”, based on the “same inspiration”; both are thus considered divine. An interesting detail is also the focus on *righteous kastom*, and again we see the focus on different forms of *kastom*; not all *kastom* is good *kastom* and compatible with Christianity.

The Bible is a central part of Christianity the world over, and this is also the case for the Survival Church. Each branch of the church arranges Bible teaching conferences at least once a year. These may last from a couple of days and up to a week, and include a strict timetable of teaching and preaching from early morning until late night. As we have seen, there is a direct parallel made between the Survival Church’s narratives and texts of the Bible. Another interesting detail is a comment in Milne’s biography about the Ngunese having their own version of the Bible’s legend of the Fall of Man (i.e. Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden; Genesis 3). The author does not comment much upon this, except stating that this is

something the people told Milne, and giving a reproduction of the story. The following is how the legend is presented by Don (1927:33):

The natives of Nguna profess to have a tradition of the Fall. God, they say, forbade the first man and woman to eat the rose-apple (*nakavika*) under the penalty of death. But the devil (Saratau) assumed the form of a serpent and tempted them to eat it. The serpent in those days “had hands and feet and walked erect like a man”. It spoke to them beside the rose-apple tree, asking “Why do you not eat *nakavika*?” They replied that God had forbidden it, for it was a bad tree. The serpent said: “He is deceiving you; it is a good tree, I will climb it for you.” So he climbed the tree and pulled some of the apples and pretended to be throwing them into his mouth and relishing them very much, smacking his lips as if to say, “Oh, how delicious!” (But he was only throwing the apples over his shoulder.) At length the man and woman both ate some. When God came again, He asked, “Who told you to eat of the *nakavika* tree?” When they said “The Serpent”, God took hold of it, cast it upon the ground, upside down, and trod on it, tramping off its hands and feet.

This story indicates that the Ngunese linked their traditional narratives to the Bible already at the time of the arrival of missionaries. The legend is presented in the first chapter of the biography, which is about Mr and Mrs Milne’s first years on Nguna. The Ngunese had not converted to Christianity at this point, and consequently seem to have made this connection to the Bible without necessarily wanting to be part of the missionaries’ project. This may thus have been a way for them to juxtapose their own belief system with the foreign one, stating their equality, a need felt then as well as in modern times when creating Christianized narratives. It may thus be what Lattas describes as a “struggle of ideas” between local people and Europeans; “By rewriting Christian stories people use the authority of white culture to escape full subordination to the terms of white culture” (Lattas, 1998:80). I will explore this further in what follows.

Ethno-theologies and localized Jesus-figures

As we have seen, both Survival churches have created narratives of local Jesus-figures which they relate to their own origins. In Freswota this is done through paralleling the *kastom*-story about the *kleva* to the Bible. Similarly, in Unakap some of the founders and members of the church are attributed divine abilities and experiences. Finally, the members’ spiritual gifts received by the Holy Spirit can also be interpreted as links to Jesus’ abilities and the divine,

and most church members share the experience of unjust sufferings after being expelled from the Presbyterian Church

These Ngunese narrative creations might be termed ethno-theologies, following Michael W. Scott (2005, 2007), who defines them as “the indigenous theological speculations and projects, not only of trained clergy and intellectuals, but also of laypersons and even whole congregations” (2007:301). Scott has accounted for ways that Arosi people in the Solomon Islands relate their customary beliefs to Christianity. Although the Arosi have been Christian for a long time, and like the Ngunese tend to term the pre-Christian period as a “time of darkness”, many Arosi place great emphasis on preserving knowledge about ancestral customs and cosmologies. Some Arosi see continuity between ancestral traditions and Christianity, “sometimes to the point of virtually denying the exogenous character of biblical religion”, according to Scott (2007:302). The Arosi thus consider Christianity’s values as something that has always been a part of their society, but that people did not know this explicitly until the missionaries arrived. One example of this is how the Arosi have created a narrative in which God mediated the Ten Commandments to the ancestral chiefs through custom law, long before the arrival of missionaries (2005:109).

Like the Survival Church, some Arosi have their own version of a localized Jesus figure (Scott, 2007:307). This Jesus figure takes the form of a mythical spirit-snake called Hatoibwari and is part of traditional Arosi mythology. Many narratives about Hatoibwari and things he said and did are almost identical to those of Jesus Christ as described in the Bible. Scott explains these narratives as a consequence of an initial linking of Hatoibwari to Christianity made by missionaries in their attempts at facilitating people’s conversion to Christianity. Today some people say that Hatoibwari was placed among the Arosi by God, but that people did not know this until Christianity’s arrival. Others see the snake as the originator of all Arosi people, and thus “a pre-Christian intimation of the biblical creator God” (Scott, 2007:313). Scott gives the example of a missionary pastor who places a strong emphasis on the importance of teaching people about their ancestors’ customs and beliefs. Subsequently teaching them about Christianity, this pastor underlines the similarities between local and biblical narratives. The missionary sees this form of teaching as giving more credibility to both traditional and Christian beliefs (2007:312). The tradition of linking Christian and customary beliefs in ethno-theologies can thus be seen to have led to a mutual interdependence between the two; understanding and learning customary beliefs has become a way of understanding Christian beliefs, and vice versa.

Similar manners of interpreting and localizing the Bible's texts and a black Jesus through narratives are common several places throughout the Pacific. Andrew Lattas (1998, 2010b) has described such processes among cargo cults in the Kaliai area of Papua New Guinea. Some of these cults incorporate elements that contain new interpretations of Christianity, such as localized Christian myths, everyday folklore, and stories of black Jesus-figures; suffering, killed and resurrected. Within some cults in the Kaliai area the story of Jesus' birth has been altered to include Virgin Mary giving birth not only to Jesus, but to an additional son. This brother of Jesus usually goes by the name Titikolo; a lost ancestor god of the Kaliai. Titikolo is also a trickster figure which traditionally appears in many old folklore stories of the Kaliai. Some villagers also call Titikolo Jesus or Moses; being a trickster figure he goes by many names and personalities. In some cargo cult stories Titikolo is killed by the Kaliai and rises from the dead after three days, an event explicitly equated with Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. In other stories the Kaliai do something to upset Titikolo and he becomes angry with them. Both versions of the story end with Titikolo leaving the Kaliai and running away to white people (Lattas, 1998:80-82).

Lattas interprets these kinds of stories as ways for the Kaliai to understand the differences between their own cultures and the materially more advanced cultures of white people that are so craved by cargo cult members. After noticing white people's social, political and financial advantages, local people get a sense of having ended up with a "false culture made up of pigheadedness, ignorance, masks, sorcery and warfare" (Lattas, 1998:76). The people further blame this unjust division of benefits on their own past where they killed or upset Titikolo. The longing for cargo thus becomes an objectification of people's sense of moral inferiority (a sense of inferiority which ironically in itself is partly a product of the civilizing projects of colonizing whites, Lattas notes). The Christian discourse of original sin gets translated into a localized version of the Fall of Man; material differences between black and white are interpreted as the result of a racial sin carried out by the Kaliai. But why do people choose to take the blame for their own misfortunes when it leaves them feeling racially inferior? An explanation Lattas provides is that taking responsibility for one's own misfortunes becomes a way of self-empowerment; a feeling of being in control of one's own life and destiny. Further, by incorporating the Christian sense of original sin, cargo cults appropriate the church's discourse on redemption and salvation, which simultaneously creates alternative ways of keeping and creating a sense of the self (Lattas, 1998:76-79).

The process of rewriting Christian narratives can as mentioned be seen as a struggle of ideas; a way for local people to gain intellectual autonomy. Lattas (1998:xxxviii) has noted

that since the Bible can be seen to symbolize white power and knowledge, new readings of its texts may occur because people seek to adjust its content to their own lives, incorporating in it the meanings and rationalities that suit their own ways of thinking. Thus, processes of creating new narratives become a way of resisting white authority by actually incorporating it in one's own culture, or as Lattas explains: "We are dealing here with those artful forms of double reading that allow people to simulate compliance while reusing the dominant culture for other ends" (1998:314).

As I have outlined in this chapter *klevas* were obviously central figures of Ngunese society long before the arrival of missionaries. Being in contact with ancestral spirits and able to perform miracles they were perhaps among the most important religious figures of the community. At the time of Christianity's arrival the *klevas* did not want to shake hands with the missionary, and there was obviously a conflict going on between *klevas* and missionaries. The act of shaking hands was most likely not a local tradition at the time, and may thus be seen to symbolize European ways. (Today shaking hands is very important, especially in connection to church services, when everyone attending are expected to shake hands with everyone else after each service.) The diviners' refusal to succumb to these new ways may thus be seen as resistance against the foreign in a double sense; both literal and symbolic. This can be interpreted as a struggle of ideas as described by Lattas, between the Ngunese population and the missionaries²⁵. Encountering similarities between local diviners and Jesus may have helped to establish a connection to the new religion; gaining control over it by incorporating it. Further, linking the *Munuai Vaau kastom*-story to the Survival Church in the present can be seen as a way for the people involved to regain intellectual autonomy, and win back control of their current lives. The power-perspective thus becomes central here, as the establishment of local churches can be seen as a form of resistance against foreign authorities. Christianity in the Pacific originated in the colonial period as something brought in by white foreigners; the missionaries. Following Lattas, I would suggest that the mission churches can be seen as symbolizing the subordination brought by white colonizers. The establishment of local independent churches succeeding the independence of Vanuatu may consequently be seen as representing people's need to gain autonomy; not only from the colonizing whites, but from the missionizing whites as well. Combining *kastom* with Christianity becomes a way of taking two central aspects of the culture and create something new. Although the mission

²⁵ It should be mentioned, however, that it were often the high-ranking men who embodied the strongest opposition to Christianity, in fear of losing their power. Lower-ranking men and women were often more positive to Christianity since the church contained a more egalitarian structure (see further Eriksen, 2008).

churches can be seen to stand for foreign power, Christianity in itself has for a long time been seen as a part of ni-Vanuatu society. Facey (1982:282) has for example asserted that on Nguna, “Christianity is (...) regarded as traditional to contemporary generations even though it originated with Europeans”. The local churches embody a means for people’s need for independence from mission churches, and to establish their own form of localized Christianity. As both Lattas and Scott have noted, this may be a means for people to find their place in the world, of defining who they are. The Survival Church’s use of narratives is an example of such a process of localizing Christianity and creating ethno-theologies. Both churches use their respective narratives as ways to establish their own place within the cultural context, thus creating their own, localized forms of Christianity. Church members define their churches as “independent” and “local” churches; *independent* from the originally white mission churches and with uniquely *local* histories and origins, whether these are linked to old *kastom*-stories or to more recently created narratives or myths. As Lattas has noted “When traditional myths are no longer adequate allegories for talking at a distance about present experiences, people have to invent new myths about the past that can reobjectify the present” (1998:xxxiv).

A central explanation for the development of ethno-theologies, according to Scott (2005:102), is that these “address the problems of who one’s people were in relation to God before they became Christians and where they belong in God’s plan for humanity”. This includes evaluating the relation between indigenous ideas and practices and those of Christianity, as well as situating ancestral identities and histories within biblical history (2005:102). Also, it is important for the people involved not to feel like they have been forgotten by God or that theirs is the “the last place” on earth to be Christianized (see for instance Jacka, 2005). For instance, Kolshus (2007:134) has shown for the case of Mota Island in the northernmost part of Vanuatu, despite its geographical remoteness, this island’s important position in the missionary history of Vanuatu has provided people with a sense of pride.

As Scott (2005) points out, however, the development of ethno-theologies is not unique to the recently Christianized societies of the Pacific, nor to processes of globalization. Similar processes have for example been documented as taking place in Europe since late antiquity. Scott describes ethno-theologies as possible responses to what he terms a “particular Christian problematic”; Christians everywhere wanting to be part of biblical history and thus constructing their ethnic identities based on the integration of local traditions with biblical narratives (2005:119). This concerns “questions of how God has always been

God, not only of Israel but of the gentiles also, and what God's relationship to the gentiles was before they learned to acknowledge him" (2005:119).

Considering the seemingly widespread need among Christians to relate their local or pre-Christian histories to their religion, one might question whether the creation of ethno-theologies can be seen as a "necessity" for people converting to Christianity. Christianity everywhere can be seen as being a localized or personalized interpretation of the Bible's contents. This becomes an ongoing process within each society, since Christianity comes to be interpreted in diverse manners and each place has its specific interpretation, based on people's views of their own history.

Concluding remarks

In this chapter I have explored some of the ways in which the two branches of the Survival Church link their history and origins to both Christianity and to local *kastom*. Even though the two branches have done this in different ways, both have established their own narratives, myths and origin stories related to the Bible through the creation of localized Jesus-figures. The Freswota church uses a *kastom*-story with a local Jesus-figure to trace its origins, while the Unakap church has created modern narratives where the founders of the church are seen as local Jesus-figures. Thus, both churches have found ways of localizing their new forms of Christianity, and of creating what Scott (2005, 2007) has termed ethno-theologies.

Following Scott, I have argued that the Ngunese ethno-theologies can be interpreted as ways for church members to situate themselves in the wider context, and to confirm their own value in the eyes of God. Adding to Scott's argument the power-perspective, and following Lattas (1998, 2010a), I further argued that the local church can be seen as a modern reaction against processes of colonization and missionization, both of which can be seen to represent external, European power; "the global". Localized forms of Christianity can be interpreted as ways of creating one's own "subversive history of modernity's possibilities" (Lattas, 2010b:296), and they can thus be seen as commenting upon external transformative powers and as reactions to processes of change within a society, for instance caused by frictions between "local" and "global".

4

“God Hemi Mekem Yu Nambawan”

- Ideology, practice and altered economic activities

“Jesus made water into wine; that is, something cheap into something expensive. So if you are an uneducated person, feeling worthless, God can make you number one. (‘God Hemi mekem yu nambawan’)”

(Pastor Caleb, Survival Church service, 16.05.2010)

Introduction

As the citation above indicates, Survival Church leaders advocate that they can help people with their problems; whether these are financial, spiritual or health-related. Such ideas can be related to so-called Health and Wealth or Prosperity gospels, which have had a broad appeal within Pentecostal churches on a global scale. This line of thinking entails believing that the correct faith in God can lead to a good life; receiving economical and spiritual advantages, and obtaining healing of body and spirit through the church (see for instance Sullivan, 2007, Meyer, 2004, Coleman, 2000). The healing part of such Health and Wealth gospels will be explored more in the following chapter; the important aspect for the context of the present chapter is that the Pentecostal focus on earning money is a global phenomenon, taken up by churches on the local level, such as the Survival Church. Another example of this is the story recounted in the previous chapter; about Pastor Caleb and Brother David who miraculously received expensive building material for free, sent directly from God in order for them to build a church, and as a reward for their strong faith.

In chapter two I demonstrated how especially Port Vila on Efate as well as surrounding islands (including Nguna) have gone through great changes since colonization, from being largely rural to becoming gradually more urban. Moreover, I showed how the contemporary situation in Vanuatu has become increasingly influenced by the global spread of neoliberal capitalism, for instance through Vanuatu's position as a tax haven. In this chapter I take up the issue of socioeconomic change. I first describe the increased economic involvement of people on Nguna Island in general, before looking at how the Survival Church relates to such processes of change. Then I will present the influence of the global Pentecostal movement, focusing on the Prosperity or Health and Wealth gospels. Relating these to economic activities within the Survival Church, both on Nguna and in Port Vila, I will discuss whether the church may be seen to influence traditional Melanesian ways of accumulating wealth and sharing. Finally, I will ask the question whether this new form of Pentecostal Christianity, focused on the value of accumulation, also entails the process of individualization. This has been much debated within Melanesian anthropology in recent years (see for instance Hess, 2006, McDougall, 2009, Strathern, 1988).

Ngunese involvement in monetary transactions

Unakap villagers are highly active in urban monetary transactions, as they need money to pay for school fees, clothes, kerosene, travels to town, and so on. As pointed out elsewhere, many people travel regularly to the market in Port Vila to sell fruit, garden crops or seafood to supplement their income. Some women make items such as baskets and mats out of pandanas to sell at the market; a few do this in large quantities for intermediaries at the tourist market. Others (mainly men) work periodically at hotels, in construction work or as seasonal workers abroad, for instance as fruit-pickers in New Zealand²⁶. Yet others buy boats or trucks, transporting people between Nguna and Port Vila. Selling homemade bread or “gateau”²⁷, sewing clothes, or renting out bungalows to the occasional tourists that arrive in the village are also common economic activities in the village. Establishing small trade stores within the households is quite widespread as well. The trade stores sell many of the same items that are sold in the local cooperative store; rice, tin food, diapers, candy, flour, sugar etc. The cooperatives, as the name indicates, are owned jointly by the villagers and its income used for communal expenses. The trade stores, however, are owned individually by each household (or

²⁶ In 2007 The Recognized Seasonal Employer (RSE) program was established as an agreement which allows unskilled Vanuatu laborers, such as fruit-pickers and farm workers, to work in New Zealand (<http://www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/hortandvit/rse/>).

²⁷ “Gateau” refers a kind of bun or doughnut, made out of dough deep-fried in oil.

even by one member of the household) and its income thus goes to that specific family. Still, the trade stores do contribute to the village in that they each have to pay a “tax” of one thousand vatu²⁸ a month to the village community. This money is used for communal work in the village, such as maintaining the community hall, the wells, and so on. In Unakap there were at the time of my fieldwork in total five trade stores, but only one cooperative. The growth of trade stores can in many ways be seen as one effect of neoliberal capitalism, resulting in a larger degree of privatization and individual accumulation. As I will show later in this chapter, many of the trade stores were financed by micro-credit loans provided by the Survival Church, and so this development may be connected to this church in some ways.

Outside influences and change of practices in rural areas may possibly lead to increased need for money in the future. Cooking food on the island, for instance, is traditionally done in a separate kitchen house over an open fire. This is a time-consuming process, as it takes time to light the fire (especially when it is raining), and one has to stay near the fire at all times to make sure it does not burn out. On Nguna, some women have in recent years acquired small gas stoves purchased in Port Vila which are used for cooking food inside the sleeping house, which is much more convenient. A good stove costs about 15.000 vatu, and a can of gas costs about 8.000 vatu²⁹. Acquiring a stove, then, is an investment that costs a considerable amount of money, and may in turn increase the need for a constant future supply of money to buy gas.

Furthermore, although local food as mentioned is considered much healthier than foreign food, I noticed that many people in the village prefer to eat rice and tin fish. Where I lived on Nguna rice was prepared several times a week, as long as money allowed. The children were especially fond of rice, and would almost exclusively choose rice over for example taro when given the opportunity. Most people generally consider rice and tin food very tasty, but importantly for many; it is much easier to cook than traditional local food. A typical rice-meal is a plate full of rice with some tin fish on top, while a typical local meal may consist of cooked pieces of taro with coconut milk on top. To prepare the traditional meal one first has to peel and slice the taro, then boil or roast it for some time, and finally scratch the inside of a coconut to prepare coconut milk. All this together can take several hours. Going to the gardens to get the root crops and coconuts of course also takes a considerable amount of time as well. To prepare the rice-meal, on the other hand, one only needs to boil rice and then open a can of tin food. However, one needs money to buy this food.

²⁸ About 60 NOK (<http://coinmill.com>).

²⁹ In NOK about 935,- and 499,- respectively(<http://coinmill.com>) .

Finally, the need for money in itself can influence eating habits. Even though Unakap is located by the seashore and there is direct access to the ocean, people eat surprisingly little fish or seafood. Traditional fishing skills and *kastom*-related fishing-magic were said to have disappeared in the course of the last decades, as people were frequently moving back and forth between town and village. I was given elaborate accounts of complex *kastom* ceremonies³⁰ that previously had made plenty of fish appear, but these traditions were all said to have died out in course of the past decades. Perhaps for this reason, perhaps because of overfishing, people say that there is not much fish left outside Nguna. Whatever the reason, the price one can get for fresh fish at the market in Port Vila is very high. As a result, many people often choose to sell the fish they catch instead of eating it themselves. Thus, many would rather spend their money on imported tin fish which was actually cheaper than fresh fish, but of course a lot less healthy.

As we can see, then, several aspects of Ngunes island life have become gradually more like life in town. People's travels and involvement in town life generates new needs and longings, and money becomes increasingly important, as opposed to more rural or remote islands in Vanuatu, where money is less present for most people in daily life, and people base their diet almost exclusively on what can be retrieved from the gardens. I will now turn to look at how the Survival Church can be seen as a mediator in this respect, providing a means of income for its members, simultaneously influencing their economic thinking.

Economic activities and discourses within the Survival Church

As explained in chapter two, unemployment rates are quite high in Vanuatu, especially among the male population. Conversely, though, within the Survival Church I found it quite striking how most church members, both male and female, on Nguna as well as in Freswota, had some form of paid employment. For instance, some worked as seasonal workers abroad, others were teachers at the school, while yet others had started a business with a microfinance loan.

As described in chapter one, among the reasons people give for breaking out of the Presbyterian Church and founding the Survival Church in the first place was a need they felt for a change and a break with elements of their past. This included, among other things, a focus on attending church regularly, no more drinking, stealing, smoking, or being lazy. From the beginning, then, members of the Survival Church have had a strong focus on the importance of what they consider morally correct behaviour and the correct faith in God. This

³⁰ Similar to those portrayed in the film *Chea's Great Kuarao* from the Solomon Islands (Hviding et al. 2000)

line of thinking is typical within Pentecostal churches worldwide, and is as mentioned related to so-called Prosperity gospels. Before going more in-depth into economic influence from Pentecostalism within the Survival Church, I will present some examples of economic engagement within the church proper.

When telling me about the Survival Church, Pastor Aaron underlined the fact that since the church is small and independent it does not have much money of its own. Therefore, he explained, it is crucial that church members have paid employment, and may consequently be able to contribute economically to the church in the form of tithing and offerings³¹. In order to facilitate the congregation's economic contribution to the church, Pastor Aaron, as the church's president, saw it as his personal responsibility to assist church members make a living. He also described his church as an alternative institution to the state; "many politicians have a sort of a disease; they say that they want to change Vanuatu and help people, but they don't do what they promise. This is why we in the Survival Church take the task of helping individuals in the community," he explained. Pastor Aaron considered this especially important in the urban environment where life is expensive and work can be hard to find. As a solution, he had introduced some means to help the church members earn more money, such as establishing a private school and organizing a microfinance loan system, both of which will be described below.

Although there is considerable emphasis put on earning money, Survival Church leaders describe spiritual growth as being more valuable than economic growth. Thus, the view on earning money within the church can be seen as somewhat ambiguous. On the one hand, earning money is encouraged, while on the other hand, the *way* one earns it is significant. Morally, it is not considered the same, for instance, if a woman earns her money by working in a store or if she works at a casino, as gambling and Christianity are not seen to go well together. Also, for a church leader to be too involved with money may be regarded negative by the congregation or by outsiders. Combining this line of thinking with the strong reciprocal and egalitarian logic of Melanesian societies (Mauss, 1954, Sahlins, 1972), it does not seem easy to build up capital; if one has money, one is obliged to share. Pastor Aaron focused on doing exactly this. Being a relatively wealthy man he has his own land in Freswota where he rents out houses, runs a school and provides housing for many of his family members. As mentioned, he also made an effort to help church members find work. In

³¹ Tithing and offerings are economic contributions from congregation members to the church, common within churches worldwide. Tithing refers to requirements presented in the Old Testament about giving ten percent of one's income to the church (i.e. Numbers 18:26). The New Testament is less specific about the amount to be presented, but it is specified that one should give joyfully and freely to the church (i.e. 2 Corinthians 9-7).

some ways the pastor could be seen as an urban, Christian version of the traditional Melanesian big-man, defined by Sahlins as a leader-type “reminiscent of the free-enterprising rugged individual of our own heritage. He combines with an ostensible interest in the general welfare a more profound measure of self-interested cunning and economic calculation” (1963:289). However, as I will show in chapter five, a fear of jealousy (*jelas*) from outsiders when one appropriates too much money is quite common (see also Wardlow, 2006).

In what follows I will present some examples of the manners in which the Survival Church is involved in economic activities, and how the church engages its members in this process. The first two examples take place in Freswota, and concern the church’s school as well as its healing sessions. The third example is that of fundraisings on Nguna. Finally, I discuss the case of microfinance in-depth, as this may be seen a prime example of how global neoliberalism works on the local level, in both island and town.

The Survival School

The Survival Church in Freswota has for some years cooperated with an Australian non-profit organization called Evidence. The cooperation began in 2004, and has a rather particular background story. Pastor Aaron had for some time had visions³² of a great happening that would take place in the local community; a grand development that would facilitate the expansion of the church. Also, the pastor’s niece had visions of large containers and new houses that would arrive in the area. Then one day an Australian couple, Greg and Sue, came to visit the Survival Church in Freswota. The couple had come to Vanuatu on vacation, and the two were staying at a resort in a neighbourhood called Seaside in Port Vila. One night Sue had a vision in a dream about a young girl that needed help. The next day Sue and her husband Greg walked through the streets of Seaside Tongoa, which is one of the most economically disadvantaged parts of the Seaside neighbourhood. The couple brought with them a large bag of candy to make the children in the neighbourhood come over, and Sue recognized the young girl from her dream. The girl’s name was Susan and she was about eight years old. Susan’s family did not have a lot of money, and the couple wanted to help her family and pay Susan’s school fees. Through Susan’s family, which already was affiliated with the Survival Church, Greg and Sue came into contact with the church in Freswota. Some years prior to this event Pastor Aaron had set up the Survival School in Freswota Five,

³² The visions described here are implicitly visions of the future given by God, in accordance with the Pentecostal belief in people receiving spiritual gifts and abilities from the Holy Spirit. See chapter five for a more thorough discussion of spiritual gift.

employing his relatives and other church members as teachers and administrators. The school started out in a small shed that also housed the church at the time, but the Australian couple helped finance the construction of two larger school buildings containing six classrooms, an office and a lavatory. Through the help of the Christian Outreach Centre (a large Pentecostal missionary organization in Australia) which they were members of, Greg and Sue established a non-profit charitable organization named Evidence. They also started a child sponsorship program, where Australians sponsor the school fees for ni-Vanuatu children from economically disadvantaged families³³. Today the Survival School has at least two hundred students attending grade one to twelve, from Freswota as well as other neighbourhoods in Port Vila. Both the arrival of new students and the employment of teachers has in turn enlarged the church; students and teachers, as well as their families, sometimes become recruited to the church. Some decide to join the Survival Church after their children have started attending the school, but church membership is not a prerequisite for children to be admitted to the Survival School.

Healing

A more indirect way for the Survival Church in town to make an income is through its healing sessions (described more in-depth in chapter five), and people from around Port Vila come to the church every Sunday to attend these. Survival Church healing is free of charge for anyone who might experience a need, no matter which church affiliation people have. However, the healing may partly be seen as a source of income for the church, because people who are to be healed attend the whole service, and consequently pay tithing or offerings when arriving at the church, possibly even more than the usual amount of 20-100 vatu. Also, at times people who have been healed in the Survival Church start attending the church regularly. For instance, Susan's mother from Seaside told me that her family had started to attend the church many years ago, after having brought Susan there to be healed from asthma when she was a baby.

Fundraisings

An important economic activity on Nguna is that of fundraisings. These are arranged either on behalf of groups or individuals, usually in order to finance different activities related to the church, but sometimes also to finance schooling, travel or a specific purchase.

³³ See www.evidence.org.au/need-action and www.evidence.org.au/child-sponsorship for more information.

The most common form of fundraising is that of so-called “bring-and-buy” gatherings, where people sell food that they have prepared. One example is related to the Youth Group of the Unakap Survival Church. This group has about fifteen members, and many of these did not have a steady income. For this reason they have set up a rotating fundraising-system for each of them, so that every second week one of the members organizes a fundraising for him- or herself. There does not have to be a specific purpose for the fundraising except that the person involved does not have a steady income and needs money. For these fundraisings the whole village does not necessarily attend, but Survival Church Youth Group members have a specifically reciprocal obligation to come. The Youth Group also arranges fundraisings collectively, for example in order to raise money to buy equipment, like a keyboard or a guitar for the church. In addition, the whole Survival Church congregation arranges fundraisings jointly, for instance to finance travel expenses for outreaches to visit other churches, or to perform Spiritual Warfare ceremonies in places suspected of *nakaimas* or sorcery (as will be discussed in the following chapter).

Annelin Eriksen (2005) has described similar practices of fundraisings in the village of Ranon on Ambrym Island, further north in Vanuatu, and argues that these do not have a prime economic function in this community. One argument she gives is that the food is sold at a very low price compared to the time and money that actually goes into preparing it. The prime function of these events, Eriksen explains, is rather to bring people together; breaking up the routine of daily life, and sharing food. People will bring their food, sell it to each other, and then sit together for hours and eat the food. Further, fundraisings on Ambrym can be seen as a replacement for a disappearing practice of ceremonial exchange, according to Eriksen.

As mentioned, there is a quite strong reciprocal and social obligation to participate in the fundraisings on Nguna. However, I did not see the fundraisings I observed as having the same degree of sociality as described by Eriksen for Ranon. On Nguna, people would go to the fundraisings out of obligation, buy the food, and go home separately to eat it. Thus, I found that the objective of raising money was quite explicitly the core function of these events. For example, if one fundraising did not raise enough money for the purpose intended, another fundraising would be arranged a few days later. Furthermore, at times when fundraisings were especially frequent people would complain about how expensive island life was becoming. Some people even went to Port Vila to stay with relatives, save money and escape the social obligation of fundraisings. Of course, Ranon, being located quite far from Port Vila, is a much more rural place, and has a lot less money going around than what is the case for Nguna Island. One could thus ask whether the increased need for money on Nguna as

located so close to town may have led to a decrease of important practices of sociality and sharing.

The Survival/Evidence micro-loan schemes

Teach a man to fish and you will feed him for a day, teach a man to run a fish and chip shop and you will feed him for a lifetime.

(<http://www.evidence.org.au/micro-business-loans>)

In addition to the construction of the school, Survival's cooperation with Evidence had led to the establishment of a micro-loan scheme. This system entailed the provision of small loans to people who were interested in setting up their own business. The quote above is from Evidence's internet homepage, where the organization encourages people to donate money to microfinance loans in Vanuatu. This quote is a good example of how the idea of micro-business loans reflects the essence of neoliberal capitalist thinking; work is no longer the focus, and it is no longer enough to have skills to provide food for your own consumption – to get by in the modern world people need to earn money, spend money and think ahead.

As described in chapter one, Pentecostal Prosperity gospels take up several discourses from neoliberal thinking, particularly in relation to economic and material profits earned not necessarily through hard work, but rather through a correct morality and faith in God; with assistance from an “invisible hand” as described by Comaroff and Comaroff (2000:294). The clue of neoliberal capitalist thinking as opposed to traditional capitalism is that business and investments become more important than work in itself; as the free market regulates the economy, and takes an almost religion-like character. As the Comaroffs (2000:316) have argued about the workings of neo-liberalism;

(...) in these times – the late modernist age when, according to Weber and Marx, enchantment would wither away – more and more ordinary people see arcane forces intervening in the production of value, diverting its flow towards a new elect: those masters of the market who comprehend and control the production of wealth under contemporary conditions.

Thus, as times change and disruptions are experienced at an increased rate, the Comaroffs argue, ethics and moral receive an increasingly important role, which in turn often becomes expressed in “religious movements that pursue instant material returns and yet condemn those who enrich themselves in non-traditional ways” (2000:316). This is, as we have seen, similar

to the case of the Survival Church; an increased focus on morals on the one hand, and business and money on the other.

Pentecostal churches often advocate their ability to control the developments of economic change; for instance through their skills of healing or providing wealth; through the aforementioned Health and Wealth or Prosperity gospels. On the one hand, the churches heal both illnesses and financial trouble, and on the other hand the churches are often themselves highly involved in financial activities, as we have seen for the Survival Church.

When it comes to the micro-loan schemes, Pastor Aaron was the one in charge of finding suitable candidates to receive loans, and provided loans to both church members and non-members in Freswota as well as on Nguna. The loans had an interest rate of twenty percent and were to be paid back within twelve months. In order to receive a loan the applicant needed to have a business idea and plan, and give a reason for why he or she needed the money. The reasons given were usually related to supporting one's family or parents, or contributing to the church. There are some slight differences between the businesses set up in town and the ones on the island. First of all, economic possibilities are smaller on the island, as there are fewer people there, so logically the businesses there are smaller as well. The most common business set up by micro-credit loans on Nguna Island were the trade stores mentioned earlier, where people sell foodstuffs and commodities they bring from the city. The trade stores are typically based within a household, in a locked room, and consist of a cupboard loaded with different items, such as tin fish or noodles. Other loan-takers have for instance set up businesses selling fuel or kerosene on the island. In town the businesses are more varied. In chapter two I presented the example of the woman in Freswota Five who set up a second-hand clothes store that soon became successful in the neighbourhood. Another example includes a Women's Group that needed sewing-machines for their business of sewing up clothes for selling. In such cases as the latter there was often set up a loan agreement, where the church would buy the sewing-machines, and the loan-takers would gradually pay back the value of the machines. If the loan-takers did not manage to pay back this money within the agreed terms, they would have to return the sewing-machines to the church. Other cases include people taking up loans in order to establish small businesses selling fish or poultry around Port Vila.

The surplus of the microfinance scheme should ideally go to the church, and to cover the loans of people not able to repay. However, the Survival micro-loan scheme had only been partially successful. Several people had received loans and managed to pay them back within the agreed terms, but many of them had not. This had resulted in the Evidence

organization backing out of the project temporarily, and during my stay the micro-loan schemes were not in process. Although Survival Church leaders expressed some disappointment in this lack of success, it was emphasized that they intended to start up a similar project with their own money if they got the opportunity. In what follows I will turn to the case of microfinance in general, in order to look at possible factors that may have contributed to the breakdown of the Survival/Evidence micro-loan schemes.

Microfinance in the Pacific

Following the apparent success of the Grameen Bank in Bangladesh the model of microfinance spread rapidly as a means to assist people out of poverty the world over³⁴. In the Pacific context it has been debated whether microfinance schemes may be applied successfully in the region. Gregory (1999) has for instance argued that since the Grameen Bank model was developed in an Asian society with an economy mainly based on rice crops, the system may not be suitable for other kinds of economies. McGuire (2000:168) has explained how Pacific countries are mainly based on root-crop economies for mere self-consumption, while the rice economies of Asia are surplus economies that can be more market-oriented and may therefore seem more suitable for microfinance-schemes. Furthermore, McGuire comments, contrary to many Asian countries, Pacific cultures have political rather than economic exchange systems. Conversely, however, Sullivan (2007) argues that microfinance can be viable in the Pacific, exactly *because* of the traditional exchange system. Sullivan reasons that “traditional exchange-systems are especially well-suited to the concept of savings and loans – think of pigs and brideprice (...) and it is the very sociality of these indigenous systems that make them work”, pointing to “traditional networks of obligation and reciprocity” that help keeping the microfinance schemes stable (Sullivan, 2007:81). According to McGuire (2000), microfinance schemes may be successful in countries outside the Asian rice economies, but only when properly adapted to the local community. It is important, however, to carefully consider several factors within the society in question, McGuire argues. Small populations and low population densities, combined with the extreme remoteness of many Pacific societies might for example have several implications for the success of microfinance programs. For instance, administrative costs may become high

³⁴ The Grameen bank is a microfinance model based on the idea of giving small business loans to the poor, preferably women. The bank was established in 1976 and in 2006 its founder Muhammad Yunus won the Nobel Peace Prize for the initiative. I describe this as “apparent” success, however, since there in recent years there has been an increasing amount of criticism against Yunus and his model, and it has for instance been demonstrated that many people have ended up in poverty traps (see for instance Bateman, 2010).

and the size of the market (of the loan taker's businesses) may be quite limited (McGuire, 2000:170). Both these factors may have contributed to the failure of the Evidence/Survival Church micro-loan scheme, at least on Nguna Island; Unakap being a small village with a limited market, and several people establishing small trade stores at the same time. The kinship system also becomes central in this regard, as there is a strong obligation to lend and share money with one's kin, and people would often ask trade-store owners if they could buy their products on credit, particularly if they were related. Trade-store owners I spoke to explained this as a problem, as they found it hard to say no, but that this also made it hard to earn enough money to make their businesses go round. Further, Pastor Aaron himself pointed to the fact that him being both a church leader and responsible for the micro-loan scheme had become a problem. As a man of the church, he noted that he at times had felt uncomfortable having to inhabit the role of a debt-collector, since his post ideally was to help people and share. As I will explain below, such paradoxical situations may be likely to occur in the encounter between different views on value and sharing.

Pentecostal views on value

As we have seen, the Survival Church fulfils several functions in the local community beyond that of a church. In fact, this church may be seen as an independent institution offering alternative services to those of the state; providing healing, education and micro-business loans to both church and non-church members. The church also has overseas connections to Pentecostal organizations such as Evidence, which opens new economic and social possibilities. Jean Comaroff has commented on similar practices of religious organizations willingly taking over state tasks “[a]t a time when, under the sway of neoliberal policies, many states have relinquished significant responsibility for schooling, health and welfare” (2009:20). Comaroff further argues that such organized religious institutions are gaining an increasingly political and business-like character, describing this as Pentecostal holism which has “a major impact on ordinary understandings of self, identity, politics, and history” (2009:21). As we have seen, the Survival Church greatly influences its members' way of life, and their economic rationality, encouraging them for instance to start their own businesses and make their own money, which they, in turn, can share with the church. Such thinking is quite particular to Pentecostal churches on a global scale, and quite dissimilar to previous economic rationality within Christianity.

Nancy Sullivan (2007) has worked on Evangelical Christianity in Papua New Guinea and comments on the long and complicated relationship between money and Christianity.

According to Sullivan, the traditional biblical view on money as *mammon* (i.e. wealth as personified evil and greed) is changing within contemporary Papua New Guinea, as a consequence of Evangelical influences such as Prosperity gospels. In modern Evangelical Christianity, Sullivan explains, a growing viewpoint is that wealth combined with greed and selfishness is still a negative trait, but that sharing your wealth with the church is a good thing. Sullivan also recalls Max Weber's famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1930) where he describes the Calvinist way of thinking and the effects of capitalism in the 16th century. This resulted in a strong focus on hard work, accumulation and saving, combined with an ascetic and spiritual way of life, which would eventually lead to God's salvation. One of the conclusions Sullivan draws is that contemporary Evangelical Christianity has an increasing focus on accumulating money, but contrary to the Calvinist way of thinking as described by Weber, one should not save it but rather spend it, as "external abundance can reflect spiritual abundance" (Sullivan, 2007:63).

Birgit Meyer has explained similar tendencies within Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches throughout Africa, presenting themselves as "ultimate embodiments of modernity" (2004:459). For these churches, this entails constructing huge church buildings, the use of elaborate technology, and presenting prosperity as a blessing provided by God. Like the Survival Church, the Pentecostal churches Meyer describes sometimes provide loans to members, and focus on tithing as a source of income for the church. However, a focus on prosperity and money through God does not have to be the ultimate sign of a "modern" Pentecostal church. For instance, Engelke (2010) describes the independent Pentecostal Masowe Church in Zimbabwe, which explicitly rejects the Prosperity gospel (2010:181). Rather, the Masowe Church focuses on immaterial faith, which Engelke describes as "an extreme form of Protestantism that seeks a 'live and direct' relationship with God, as expressed in large part through the workings of the Holy Spirit" (2010:181). Although the Masowe Church rejects the materiality of religion, Engelke notes, they prize most other aspects of modernity, such as education, professional success, science, biomedicine and mass media. There are thus various ways of relating to prosperity within Pentecostal churches, and being part of the "modern" does not have to entail an exclusive focus on accumulating material wealth; there may be various levels of this. These different reactions may be seen as effects of a friction on the local level; in this case the conflicting encounters between logics of global neoliberal capitalism on the one hand, and local morality discourses on the other. The friction between these different logics leads Survival Church members to a particularly ambiguous position, as they keep a strong focus on earning money while simultaneously

underlining the importance of spiritual growth. However, there may be other effects of such encounters, for instance when it comes to those between traditional views on value, reciprocity and sharing on the one hand, and Christian logics of individuality on the other, which I will turn to in what follows.

Christianity, individuality and traditional forms of sharing

Joel Robbins (2004a) has described Pentecostal Christian conversion among the Urapmin in Papua New Guinea. In contrast to the majority of Melanesian societies Urapmin conversion did not happen as a result of missionization. Rather, the Urapmin themselves decided to become Christians in order to obtain the economic prerogatives they saw neighbouring groups receiving, but also in order to regain their ritual status regionally (2004a:15). According to Robbins, the result of Urapmin's conversion was that they became trapped between their own logic of relationality and the Christian logic of individualism. Robbins argues that as some of the traditional values and structures remain in Urapmin society, these tend to come into conflict with the new Christian values in daily life, leaving them in a constant state of sinfulness. Daily life for the Urapmin is thus largely marked by a "struggle between Christian and traditional values and structures of understanding to dominate its unfolding" (2004a:35-36).

Debra McDougall (2009) has done work on Christian conversion in the Solomon Islands, and does not entirely share Robbins' view on the importance of Christianity and individualism in cultural change. McDougall criticizes Robbins for defining Christianity as having a coherent cultural logic where the central aspect is individualism, and argues that although Christian ideology may lead converts too see themselves as individuals, one has to consider additional factors in this process, such as local institutional and economic conditions (2009:3). Furthermore, she argues that even though Christianity has a strong focus on individuality, it can also create a strong sense of community for its followers, as for instance within global networks of Christianity. On the other hand, McDougall shows that even though relationality is central within traditional Melanesian society, individuality is also a valued factor here. The author gives her own empirical examples of how two different groups of converts (Seven Day Adventists and United Church members) on the island of Ranongga in the Western Solomon Islands developed very different relations to local places, complemented with varied success in the trans-local economy. According to McDougall this happened as a result not only of the new, Christian ideology, but to a large extent because of existing institutional structures and geographic circumstances among the two denominations

(2009:13). For instance, on the ideological level, the Adventists value education as well as millenarianism. On the institutional level, however, geographical and historical factors have contributed to them not participating as much in traditional agriculture as their United Church fellow villagers, but rather working in town. In addition, their church affiliation has led them to receive financial support from the global network of the Seven Day Adventist Church.

Following McDougall, one might thus question whether the ideology of the Prosperity gospel is the only reason for Survival Church members' financial success. Survival Church members in Unakap emphasised that their new, independent life after establishing their own church, combined with the national independence of Vanuatu as a whole in 1980 included independence for them on several levels. For instance, when I asked them about their marriage traditions, they explained that as the country had been independent for several years, people had also become independent from traditional marriage regulations, and could thus marry "whomever they wanted". Although I never got a chance to establish how concise such statements were with actual practices, this discourse can nevertheless be seen to enlighten some views on independence and ancestral tradition. Further, this exemplifies what I described as a "double break with the past" in chapter three; that Survival Church members consider to have broken not only with the past of colonialism and white missionaries, but also with pre-Christian or ancestral times. Relating this to McDougall's argument, one could thus wonder whether Unakap Survival Church members, like the Seven Day Adventists on Ranongga, have had greater economic success as a result of them partially breaking with customary kinship ties, thus facilitating involvement in trans-local economies through an engagement with Survival Church networks in town rather than kin ties on the island. Furthermore, like Ranongga Adventists, Survival Church members have global connections through their church affiliation, the church receiving financial support from the Australian Pentecostal organization Evidence described in the previous chapter. However, as McDougall (2009:13) notes, disengagement from land and kin ties may lead to problems in the long run. In theory, if economic engagements in town fail, one can always rely on one's gardens back in one's village. However, as many Ranonggan Adventists have engaged in wage labour in town and have not maintained kin and land ties back in the village, they eventually lose their rights to land and thus do not have anything to go back to if they should be left in a situation of unemployment in town. The situation is similar in Vanuatu, as we saw in chapter two; maintaining both social and practical ties to the land is important in order to retain one's land rights. What we can see, then, is that the Survival Church's practice and discourse have led to an altered financial success, as neoliberal influences have reached church members, both on

Nguna and in Freswota, through Pentecostal discourses such as the Prosperity gospel. People have become more focused on accumulating wealth, education and paid employment than many of their fellow villagers. But, does trans-local financial involvement have to entail people leaving behind traditional forms of sharing and reciprocity with their kin?

Christian cosmology promotes a personal relationship to God; focusing on individual sin and salvation. Pentecostalism pursues the same logic, but adds a material aspect; that God's salvation can only be reached through morally correct behaviour and through earning money. Further, in my conversations with Survival Church members, they presented God as "a rich God", and one who blesses those who share their money with the church. "The more you sacrifice, the more God will give back to you" one woman told me, as she was explaining why she always gave one tenth of her already meagre income to the church collect. It should be noted, however, that this same woman gave half of this same income to her parents; having earned twenty thousand vatu, for instance, she gave ten thousand to her parents, two thousand to the church and was left with eight thousand for herself. As Sullivan (2007) has noted, the line of thinking of the Prosperity gospel encourages not only the accumulation of money, but also sharing. However, this sharing is directed particularly at the church, rather than only one's kin. Whereas earlier one would share one's wealth with the local community (with one's kin, or even through one church in the village, which for the case of Nguna used to be the Presbyterian Church), what happens today is that this wealth goes back into the Survival Church. As described in chapter one, though, both of the Survival Churches were established by people already related through kin ties; three brothers in Farealapa (and then Freswota), and two families in Unakap. Further, as the example of the woman above indicates, sharing with one's closest kin is still considered important. Also, kin metaphors are used within the church, for instance by referring to congregation members as "brothers" or "sisters". Thus, sharing within the church does not necessarily exclude traditional practice of sharing with one's kin. It may rather be a way of limiting the amount of people one shares with, of creating a new community.

Taking up McDougall's argument, then, I would agree that Christianity may lead to increased individualization, in that people have become more focused on accumulating material wealth through a personal relationship to God. However, this has also led to new forms of collectivity. For the case of the Survival Church this collectivity comes to take place both on the trans-local level (between the Survival Churches on Nguna and Port Vila), on the trans-regional level, (as the Survival Church expands to outer islands of the country), and finally on the trans-global level (through the Pentecostal movement which generates

cooperation with foreign organizations such as Evidence). Although Survival Church members have in a sense become more involved in financial activities and Christian logics of relating to God, and more individualized they still maintain a strong connection to logics of sharing with their kin as well as to their church.

Concluding remarks

I started out this chapter by describing how Nguna Island has become more and more involved in monetary life in course of the last decades, thus taking up the argument from chapter two that the global spread of neoliberal capitalism has influenced the society in different ways. Then I moved on to show the Survival Church engages with this change, creating new means of earning money for its members. In addition, they take up global Pentecostal influences from lines of thinking such as the Prosperity gospel. This, in turn, has led to the Survival Church and its members to become more oriented towards neoliberal capitalist thinking and more successful when it comes to earning money. This, in turn, can be seen to have led to increased individualization among this church's members, but also, to a new sense of collectivity. However, ideology alone can not account for extensive change within a community, as McDougall argues. Links to foreign Pentecostal organizations such as Evidence have helped the church become more financially successful, which in turn has helped its member earning money.

As we have seen, then, the “mysterious” workings of neoliberal economies generate the outgrowth of developments such as the Prosperity gospel, and as the Comaroffs have noted; “As the connections between means and ends become more opaque (...) the occult becomes an ever more appropriate, semantically saturated metaphor for our times” (2000:317) although “the occult” should be seen as more than a metaphor;

Magic is, everywhere, the science of the concrete, aimed at making sense of and acting upon the world – especially, but not only, among those who feel themselves disempowered, emasculated, disadvantaged (Comaroff and Comaroff, 2000:318).

In the following chapter I will turn to people's views on sorcery and healing within the Survival Church, also looking at how this church relates to the global and the local simultaneously. Further, I will look at the effects that Unakap Survival Church members' financial success has within the local village community, and how this may disrupt social relations.

5

Causing and Mending Social Disruption

- Global and Local practices of Healing and Sorcery

We believe that healing is God's covenant to our nation, Vanuatu. 1) To heal evil or ceremonial customs into righteous or moral customs. 2) To bring righteous moral traditions and cultures into restoration.

The Survival Church's Constitution (Gollen, n.d.:5)

Introduction

In this chapter I will demonstrate how the Survival Church's healing practices can be seen as an example of the resemblance of this particular local church to Pentecostal churches elsewhere. As we saw in the previous chapter, so-called Prosperity- or Health and Wealth gospels are important traits of Pentecostal churches on a global scale, and may take similar forms. Pentecostal churches world-wide have been shown to have much of the same structure, and a person from a Pentecostal church almost anywhere in the world can in theory step into a sermon within any other Pentecostal church and feel "at home" (Robbins, 2009b). However, there are many locally specific aspects to the churches as well. For instance, healing practices within the Survival Church are marked by several features of traditional healing practices. Furthermore, the view on healing within the Survival Church can be seen to differ from many

other Pentecostal churches, as it is accepted within this church to make use of traditional healing in conjuncture with Christian healing.

Traditional healing within the Survival Church can thus be seen as belonging to the “good” side of *kastom*. Conversely, this healing is often performed because of influences from what is considered the “bad” *kastom* of Vanuatu; namely *nakaimas* (Bislama for sorcery), as indicated in the quote above. In the second part of the chapter I will look at the relationship between the Survival Church and sorcery, and discuss possible interpretations of this phenomenon in the context of the church in particular, and more generally within the society at large.

The global success of Pentecostalism

Pentecostal churches have been shown to be successful on a global scale, in many different societies, and among many different groups of people. Although Pentecostal Christianity originated in the US more than a century ago, about two thirds of its over 500 million adherents today live in Africa, Asia, Latin America and Oceania (Robbins, 2004b:117).

According to Robbins the most central reason for Pentecostalism’s success on a global scale is not primarily its doctrinal features, such as moral strictness and individualist models of salvation, described in the previous chapter, but the churches’ “mastery of the technology of ritual production” (2009b:62). In arguing this, Robbins goes beyond mere functional arguments that assert that the churches help people adjust to and cope with the increasingly global orders they live in (2009b:56), for instance when it comes to the spread of neoliberalism. Without negating such arguments, Robbins argues for taking a further step back and consider precisely *how* Pentecostal churches come to inhabit their positions as being able to fulfil such functions.

First of all, Robbins argues that Pentecostals give a large amount of space to rituals in their daily lives. The Pentecostal doctrine, Robbins argues, allows all members to initiate and take part in ritual performances, and a ritual can thus take place as long as there are two or more Pentecostals present (2009b:60).

Secondly, the *way* Pentecostals perform their rituals is crucial, according to Robbins. Pentecostal rituals are based on shared knowledge and are at once open enough to allow improvisation, yet fixed enough to endure and be shared with Pentecostals of other churches (2009b:61). For instance, practices of lifting one’s hands in praise, speaking in tongues, and healing are common among Pentecostals worldwide. This is part of the reason for the fact that a Pentecostal church member as mentioned can recognize and take part in a Pentecostal

service almost anywhere in the world. As Robbins notes; “Pentecostal bodies of all backgrounds are well trained to work together in ritual and well practiced in producing the physical synchronization that turns mutual attention into successful interaction ritual” (2009b:61).

There is thus no doubt that Pentecostal churches have a lot in common on a global scale, and the Survival Church is no exception. As explained in chapter four, the church has a close connection to Evidence and the Christian Outreach Church of Australia, its members visiting regularly, contributing with money to the Survival School and sometimes organizing joint services in Port Vila. Also, during my stay there were a couple of incidences when Australian tourists of Pentecostal denominations would show up at Sunday Survival Church service in Freswota. Though they had merely asked a taxi driver to take them to “a Pentecostal Church in Port Vila”, it seemed as if these people felt at home throughout the service, knowing some of the songs and so on. The fact that these Pentecostals from Australia, who did not even understand Bislama, could step right into a Survival Church service and worship, emphasises Robbins’ point and highlights the way in which the Survival Church is not only a local church from Nguna but a Pentecostal church recognizable in its ritual form for visitors from outside of Nguna, Freswota and even Vanuatu.

Nonetheless, although the Survival Church has a lot in common with Pentecostal churches on a global scale, I would argue that there is also something very locally specific about this church. As shown in chapter three, the church uses local narratives and *kastom*-stories to describe its own origins, thus indigenizing its own form of Christianity. In what follows I will focus on the practice of healing within the Survival Church as a particularly local phenomenon. This is so both because healing often takes a local form, but also because it relates to another particularly local phenomenon; namely sorcery or *nakaimas*, which I will describe in the second part of this chapter. Before providing an in-depth description of the church’s healing practices, I will give a brief description of the discourse on “spiritual gifts” within the church. These gifts feature as essential components for the healers.

Spiritual Gifts

As mentioned elsewhere, receiving spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit is common within Pentecostal churches, and in fact one of their main characteristics (Meyer, 2004:452, Robbins, 2004b:121, Coleman, 2000:19); this is also the case of the Survival Church. Many of the gifts listed below are similar to gifts described in the Bible, and are practiced by Pentecostal churches elsewhere. The Survival Church pastors underlined that they acknowledged the

typical 9 Spiritual Gifts³⁵ and the 5 Fold Ministry Gifts³⁶ of the Bible. Based on these biblical gifts, within the Survival Church, each person has his or her own spiritual gift, or set of gifts, which makes them unique within the church, although many of the gifts overlap. Below is a list of some of the most central gifts that were explained to me by diverse church members. Although most of the names used below are English, these are the names that are used within the church.

- **Healing:** Pastor Joshua of the Healing Ministry and Minister Paul of the Pauvatu Survival Church both have the gift of healing. Their healing is performed through laying of hands and praying. Pastor Joshua and his wife also provide a special kind of oil that is put on the patient's forehead during healing. As shown in chapter three, Minister Paul (Kalsao) was healed by church members before becoming a member himself. Such examples of the healer having suffered from an affliction previous to receiving his or her gifts of healing are not uncommon within Pentecostal churches (see for instance Fernandez, 1978:209).
- **Deliverance:** In order to be able to achieve healing, deliverance has to be performed first. This includes breaking a curse or taking away the demons that are disturbing the person that is to be healed.
- **Discernment:** This gift provides the ability to discern different spirits from each other; for example if you are walking in the dark alone, you can feel if there is someone or something in the dark, although you cannot see it.
- **Spiritual Gift of X-Ray:** When a person is suffering from sorcery attack a person with the gift of x-ray can, with the help of the Holy Spirit, see what is causing the pain. If a man, for instance, has a pain in his stomach, a person with the gift of x-ray can "see" inside the man's body, and what is causing the pain. There might be an object, like a small stone or piece of wood, located inside the person's stomach, placed there through sorcery.

³⁵ Gifts of Wisdom, Knowledge, Discernment, Speaking in tongues, Interpretation of tongues, Prophecy, Faith, Working of miracles and Healing. (1 Corinthians 12:1-14).

³⁶ Described as Apostolic, Prophetic, Teaching, Evangelical and Pastoral gifts (Ephesians 4:11).

- **Word of knowledge, word of wisdom, word of teaching:** People with these gifts have the ability to interpret the Bible's texts in innovative ways, or explain the texts' meaning to others.
- **Prophet/Dreams and Visions:** Those with gift of dreams and visions have the ability to predict the future. They usually have a dream provided by the Holy Spirit of what will happen in the future. Some can have visions while awake as well; this is explained as seeing incidences in the future in the same manner as one watches television. It is quite common that people tell about their visions during church service; sharing them with the congregation. Sometimes, if the vision is hard to interpret, the pastor will provide an interpretation of the vision.
- ***Cherubim/seraphim:*** In the Bible a *cherub* is a kind of divine being or an angel (Revelation 4 and 5, Ezekiel 1 and 11). Within the Survival church, however, a *cherubim* is a person who can be possessed by the Holy Spirit and heal. Although it is said that both men and women can have this gift, it is most common for women, and during my stay I only heard of women with this gift. A *cherubim's* most central task is healing the sick and perform deliverance. Although their actions may seem similar, all *cherubims* act out roles of different angels while possessed; waving their arms in different ways, some speak in tongues, and yet others sing.
- **Weather forecast:** Gift of being able to predict the weather.
- **Spiritual Warfare/Binding:** When for instance a whole family or a place is cursed or afflicted with evil spirits, a Spiritual Warfare is performed; this is a battle of prayer against evil forces; keeping them in place and removing them.
- **Prayer Warrior:** During healing sessions the Prayer Warriors have a central position, they pray incessantly to protect the healers while they perform healing. They also form part of the healing session in that they pray for the people to be healed. During church services the Prayer Warriors stand outside in order to prevent evil spirits from entering the church building.

- ***Prij mesej blong God:*** (Preach the message of God) This gift is usually undertaken by a pastor or a minister, as these are persons seen to have special preaching abilities, working as direct mediators to transmit God's message to the congregation.

Healing practices within the Survival Church

An expressed goal of the Survival Church is to help people with all kinds of problems and afflictions; whether these are spiritual, financial or health-related. Underlining the social importance of the church is thus central. As outlined in chapter four, the Survival Church can in many ways be seen as an alternative to the state as a regulating institution. The state is rarely relevant in people's daily lives in Vanuatu, and social institutions providing schooling and health care are created to a larger extent by church institutions than by the state. The healing provided by the Survival Church can likewise be seen as an essential part of the kind of health care the church offers in the community.

Healing is about more than just health, though, and the actual healing can take several different forms. The Survival Church considers its healing sessions to be among its most important activities, and people come to church with various needs besides physical illnesses. Some of these needs may be related to developing one's own business, finding employment, but also difficulties in relationships, broken marriages, troubles related to conceiving children, or problems related to politics, robbery and so on. As will become apparent, reasons for all these different problems or afflictions are often caused by sorcery. In what follows I will describe three types of healing practices within the Survival Church; healing (and deliverance) during church service, healing outside church service and Spiritual Warfare.

Healing and deliverance during church service

In Freswota, a part of the church service every Sunday is dedicated to healing and deliverance. As mentioned, before the actual healing takes place, deliverance is performed; the patient has to be "delivered" from, for instance, demons, before he or she can be healed. Pastor Joshua and his Healing Ministry are in charge of these sessions, but the whole congregation participates. The healing sessions are vibrant events, and include a great deal of movement, as well as loud singing and praying. During my stay I attended several Survival Church services that included healing sessions such as the one described in the vignette in chapter one of this thesis. The whole congregation stands up and starts to sing together, the people that are to be healed step to the front of the room, and the pastor prays for them. After a while the

cherubims get possessed by the Holy Spirit, shaking and sometimes speaking in tongues, walking to the front of the room in order to help with the deliverance from evil spirits and healing of the persons standing there. The healing sessions I observed all took similar form; except that the amount of people to be healed varied, and sometimes there were more than one *cherubim*. In total a healing session would take about thirty minutes out of the whole service, which usually lasted up to two hours. These kinds of healing sessions are widespread among Pentecostals worldwide (for Africa, see for instance Englund and Leach, 2000:234). However, *cherubims* are probably a phenomenon specific to the Survival Church, although similar roles are often attributed to women in other Pentecostal churches; for instance the Prophetesses of the Bible Church in Port Vila, as explained by Eriksen (forthcoming).

The healing in the Survival Church is free of charge for anyone in need, and one does not have to be a church member to receive healing. In fact, people from various denominations around Port Vila attend these services, as the Survival Church and its Healing Ministry are widely renowned for their skills of healing.

There is a great deal of singing in the church in general, and church services are usually quite lively events. There is always a build-up to the actual healing; the whole congregation has to stand up and sing together, creating a very special atmosphere within the church. It was emphasized how important it was that everyone sang and participated, as this was a prerequisite for the arrival of the Holy Spirit to the church. This was also noticeable in that the Holy Spirit never possessed the *cherubims* until the singing and the pastor's praying had been going on for at least a few minutes. It may of course also be seen as important that people feel that they actively participate in the healing, not just sitting by as mere observers. Bruce Kapferer (1991) has argued for the importance of observers within Sinhalese rituals of exorcisms and healing on Sri Lanka. The presence of observers becomes significant, he argues, both for the persons to be healed but importantly also for the observers themselves. Kapferer distinguishes between small and large exorcisms, arguing that "Major exorcisms are as directed to an audience of kin, friends and neighbours as they are focused on the patient" (1991:82), and that the curative power of such rituals consists in the fact that they are held in public, attracting large audiences. Similarly, the emphasis on participation of everyone present in rituals of healing and deliverance within the Survival Church underlines the importance already made on fellowship within this church. The sense of fellowship created in the healing rituals may be seen to affect not only the persons to be healed, but the congregation as a whole.

Healing sessions outside church service

Every now and then, if people are too sick to attend healing service in church, or require extra attention, the healers may come to where they are. (I was even told that some people could heal by speaking to the patient on the phone.) For instance, it is not uncommon that healers from the church go visit sick people at the hospital or in their homes, either after Sunday service, or during the week.

One such healing session I witnessed took place on Nguna, and involved an old woman named Carol. Carol had been feeling an intense pain in her elbow for a long time, but did not know the reason for this. She had gone to see a doctor in town, but the doctor had not been able to make things better. She had also gone to see a man in the village known for his traditional skills of massaging away pain, but this only helped temporarily. One day the church healer came to her house. He sat down with her on a mat, and the whole household gathered around them. First, everyone prayed together and sang some hymns, performing what is generally called a family worship. Following this the healer focused especially on healing the old woman's painful elbow. Holding his hands around it he prayed intensely to the Holy Spirit to make the pain disappear. In the end he asked all the people present "do you believe in Jesus Christ and his ability to heal Carol?" After each one had answered affirmatively, the healer prayed some more and finally rounded up his healing with an "Amen".

In the cases of healing outside of the church that I witnessed the healers would pray and lay hands on the sick persons, and the Holy Spirit was said to work through the healers. Also, I was told that people who had the Gift of X-ray would have to be possessed by the Holy Spirit in order to have visions and be able to find a stone or another object inside the painful body-part, which would have been placed there by sorcery. One woman explained to me that she had suffered from severe headaches for a long period of time. When she went to a Survival Church healer he had prayed and "taken out" a large ball of animal hair from "within" her head, which, she explained, had been causing the pain. After this, the woman explained, her headaches disappeared completely. Similarly, one man told me that he had been suffering from a bad knee and sought help from a Survival Church healer. During the healing session the healer found a stone inside the man's knee, which had been causing the pain. The stone, the healer had said, had been placed there by magical means, i.e. sorcery. In both these cases a woman with the Gift of X-ray had been present, and had used her gift to discover the objects.

Spiritual Warfare/Binding

A third way of healing is through what is called Spiritual Warfare or Binding. This includes a form of healing of a whole family or a household that has been cursed by evil spirits through sorcery, sometimes caused by what is called “curse of blood line”. The following event took place during a Bible Teaching conference I attended in Freswota³⁷. One night a family from Ohlen Mataso, a neighbourhood close to Freswota, came to the church. The family was worried about evil spirits, which they believed had possessed their home. Some members of the congregation decided to go to their house and perform Spiritual Warfare to help the family, and I went with them.

Spiritual Warfare, Ohlen Mataso, May 19, 2010

It is Wednesday night, past 10.30 p.m. and some members of the Unakap congregation have decided to walk up to the neighbourhood of Ohlen Mataso to perform Spiritual Warfare in a family’s house. This family came to the Survival Church in Freswota earlier tonight asking for help; they are afraid there might be some sort of *nakaimas* in their house. There has been a lot of suspicion of black magic going on in Ohlen Mataso lately, and four persons are said to have died in dubious manners, so people are afraid. It is completely dark around us as we walk towards Ohlen, although some people carry flashlights and walk together in small groups. We are about fifteen persons; Pastor Caleb, his wife, some of the older founders of the church, some of whom are Prayer Warriors and one is a Prophetess, in addition to some choir girls and boys from the Youth Group. The walk takes some twenty minutes, and when we arrive the family is sitting quietly on a mat inside their corrugated iron house, waiting. The congregation stops outside, and Pastor Caleb starts giving instruction for the ceremony. Most are to stand in the back singing, some are to pray out loud. If anyone sees something pass by us; a rat, a gecko or an insect, it may be a devil, so one is to give notice or try to kill it immediately. “*Be yufala i no fraet – God Hemi stap witem yumi*”, (“*But don’t be afraid – God is with us*”) the pastor concludes reassuringly. The Prophetess, Pastor Caleb and the Prayer Warriors go inside the house and start praying, while the rest of us stand outside and begin to sing. As we stand there, singing, we hear that the praying inside gradually becomes louder, and the volume of the singing follows accordingly. Suddenly the Prophetess comes running out of the house, her eyes are closed and her arms are shaking; a usual sign of her being possessed by the Holy

³⁷ In May the three Nguna-based Survival Churches arranged a Bible Teaching conference in Freswota. Members from the three churches travelled to Port Vila and gathered at the Survival School in Freswota for one week to encourage the church community and study the Bible. This took place during a school holiday, so all the visitors from Nguna slept inside two classrooms, women and children in one and men in the other. Activities were arranged in a third classroom, from early morning until late night. People from other church community attended the conference too, and the event thus had the additional function of recruiting new members.

Spirit. The Prayer Warriors and the pastor follow right behind her, still praying loudly, as the prophetess runs away from the house and down a path. After them follows the family, and finally the rest of us, still singing. (At this point a girl from the Youth Group whispered to me that the Prophetess has now felt the presence of evil spirits, and that she has begun chasing them.) The chase continues up and down narrow paths around the neighbouring houses at such an increasing pace that in the end we are all running, and finally uphill towards some banana trees. The Prophetess and the Prayer Warriors start hitting the trees, chopping them down to the ground with their bare hands. Some Prayer Warriors are still praying, and one of them is angrily shouting “*Out, devil! Out!*” Simultaneously they hit the trees forcefully with their hands. They all appear like they are in some sort of trance. When the trees have all been chopped down on the ground the shouting stops, and it is clear that the evil spirits have been eradicated. We then all walk back down to the house, and everybody is pleased that the Spiritual Warfare has been successful. The whole group gathers in the backyard of the family’s house. More people have arrived; neighbours that have noticed that there is something going on. A woman has arrived with her husband and children. She tells the church leader that her husband has been ill for some time now, and asks if they can help him. A healing session is performed for the man there and then; the congregation begins to sing again, and the Prayer Warriors start their praying.

Continuity or change in contemporary healing practices?

The healers of the Survival Church underline the fact that it is not they themselves that actually heal, but that they are merely mediators for Jesus’ power and healing. Similarly, if we recall the *kastom*-story about the *kleva*, described in chapter three, the pastors portray the *kleva* as one of their ancestors, and attribute their own healing abilities to this inheritance. The pastors explain that the difference today is that instead of healing through nature spirits as the *kleva* did, they now heal with the power of the Holy Spirit. In both cases the healers are mediators of spiritual powers. Furthermore, traditional healing practices on Nguna as described by the first missionary’s wife Mrs Milne (Don, 1927:25) have many similarities to the methods used within the Survival Church today;

When anyone is sick the *na-atamoli tapu* [the “wizard”] is summoned. He comes with a few leaves of a tree in his hand and looks the patient in the face. Seeing there the demon in him, he spits upon the leaves and touches with them the head, shoulders, arms, breast, and legs of the patient, rubbing them over the chest. Then, with the leaves still in his hands, he pretends to pull the evil spirit out, exhibiting a small stone or snake in the leaves, which he says is the demon in that shape

Even though the leaves are excluded in contemporary healing practices within the church, we have seen that there is a similar practice of pulling out evil spirits from the patient's body in the form of small items, such as stones, placed there through sorcery. Thus, contemporary healing practices within the Survival Church have several similarities to traditional healing methods. This can be seen as another way of localizing Christianity, as described in chapter three. However, it is not uncommon for people to try different means of healing in order to be cured from illness. Furthermore, I was told that there were still healers on Nguna who used *kastom*-leaves in order to heal people, though I never witnessed such a ceremony. I did, however, witness a healing session when a *kastom*-healer from an island in the Banks group came to heal a man on Nguna;

Kastom-healing on Nguna, June 5, 2010

Thomas, a traditional healer, came to Nguna today. He came with Frank, who is from Nguna, but works in Port Vila, where the two of them met and became friends. Frank's father, John, has been ill for a while, experiencing pain in his foot, and the healer has come to help him. Thomas is a *kastom*-healer with many special abilities. It is late afternoon and after dark. We all gather in the living room; Frank, John's wife, their children and I sit on a mat on the floor, while John sits on the chair with his bad foot stretched out. The healer starts blowing intensely on John's foot, again and again. Suddenly the healer runs out, as if he has managed to catch the bad thing in his mouth. Once out of the house he starts spitting frantically. After returning back into the house he sits down with us and asks about the foot. John and his wife start explaining where the pain is located, when it started, and what the pain feels like. John points out that the pain first occurred one day a couple of weeks ago when he was walking to his garden to harvest pineapples. Thomas says that he should take him there next time he comes so that he can have a look at the specific place where he first noticed the pain, as there might be evil spirits there.

Within the lapse of one week both the *kastom* healer just described, and a healer from the Survival Church, were summoned to this same household, without any apparent contradictions or problems for the people involved. Likewise, going to the hospital or to see a medical doctor is not uncommon, if one has the money and opportunity. It appeared to me, then, that the different methods applied to cure illness were more or less juxtaposed. People acknowledged that there were different means to cure different afflictions, and at times one had to try out several methods before encountering the right one. Sometimes the only means

was to go to a hospital and get medicine; other times only a church-healer could help, while on some occasions the best solution was going to a traditional healer. There were thus no sharp boundaries made between “traditional” healing and “church-healing”, although praying to God was always an important part of the solution.

Literature on Pentecostal churches in Africa demonstrates how the view on traditional healing varies within the Pentecostal perspective. Matthew Engelke (2010:183,189) has for instance shown that within Pentecostal churches in Zimbabwe there is often an emphasis on breaking with ancestral spirits and not consulting with traditional healers. However, non-Pentecostal outsiders view healing practices within these churches as having many similarities to traditional African spirituality and healing (Engelke, 2010:190). Similarly, Englund and Leach (2000:235) have shown that there are often several resemblances between healing through the Holy Spirit and healing through ancestral spirits in spite of contrary views being explicitly stated, as for instance by Pentecostals in Malawi who often express a negative view on “black people’s medicine”, condemning all traditional healers and linking their practices to Satanic forces (2000:233).

It becomes apparent, then, that the distinction between traditional healing and church healing can often be quite blurred within Pentecostal churches. I take this to be an example of the global while simultaneously local appeal of Pentecostal churches worldwide; the encounter or friction that may arise between the global meets the local. On the one hand the *form* of the healing is global, in that healing is practiced within all Pentecostal churches. On the other hand, the actual *content* of the healing is very much local, in that it takes up local and traditional practices of healing. Thus, the exact way in which healing takes place within the Survival Church demonstrates how the church takes up this very global practice, but turns it into something extremely local and particular for this church. Within the Survival Church there is not a negative view on traditional healing, and the likening of church-healing to *kastom*-healing has a sense of pride to it. In both Engelke’s as well as Englund and Leach’s examples from Africa, however, there are similarities between healing through ancestral spirits and the Holy Spirit, though this is not always acknowledged by church members themselves. In all contexts, however, there are obvious and important resemblances between traditional and church healing practices.

Thus far I have shown how healing is among the most important activities of the Survival Church. Healing is both a ritual that can be seen to increase the sense of unity within the local church and between Pentecostal churches on a more general, global level (Robbins, 2009b), while at the same time it provides an alternative to state-based health services, which

are often limited or scarce. Also, the church's healing practices can be seen as local, being strongly influenced by traditional practices of healing. Both *kastom*-healing and healing through the Holy Spirit may accordingly be described as continuations of the positive side of *kastom*. Conversely, healing is often used to cure the most negative side of *kastom*, namely sorcery or *nakaimas*. In other words, healing seems to be only one of the "halves" in an understanding of the connection between spiritual beliefs and health and wellbeing for church members. The other "half" is sorcery. Sorcery is often seen to be the cause of discomfort, illness and death, and can thus in many ways be seen as the opposite of healing. Furthermore, the cause of sorcery is very often jealousy or anger. I will now turn to the case of sorcery in Vanuatu.

Fears of sorcery on Nguna

Ellen Facey (1982:178) has commented that the only explanation she ever heard of the name Nguna was that it derived from the word "*naguna*", meaning sorcery. Further, Facey was told that "in the distant past Nguna was so riddled with sorcery that it had a fearsome reputation – hence its name" (1982:178). However, the word "*naguna*" is no longer in use today, and Nguna is no longer known as a place containing more sorcery than others. As Facey explains, this may perhaps be due to the missionary Peter Milne's forceful approach to rid the island of sorcery, which he saw as the greatest hindrance to the implementation of the Gospel (Don, 1927:30). Although Nguna is no longer renowned for its sorcery, sorcery is seen to exist on this island, just as it does elsewhere in Vanuatu³⁸.

Before I left for Nguna in early February, an Ngunese friend of mine living in Freswota took me aside to give me a warning. She said that I should be very careful on Nguna when it came to food. I should not to eat anything given to me by any person outside the family I was to live with. If anyone tried to give me food, I should politely accept, but not eat it. Rather, I should take it home to the family, tell them who had given it to me, and ask them if it was safe to eat. My friend said this was very important, because I would be in danger of being poisoned³⁹. Thorgeir Kolshus (2007:158-159) has commented on similar fears of sorcery throughout Vanuatu; newcomers being warned against eating food they are offered⁴⁰.

³⁸ In Vanuatu it is publicly acknowledged that sorcery exists, and the Penal Code [CAP 135] section 151 states: "No person shall practice witchcraft or sorcery with intent to cause harm or detriment to any other person."

³⁹ When I subsequently became ill from food poisoning after about a month on Nguna, my friend in Freswota was convinced I had not listened to her advice, and eaten food given to me by strangers.

⁴⁰ Kolshus provides the exception of Mota Island north in Vanuatu, where such fears of sorcery related to food are not as common as elsewhere in the country, as a result of this island's particular position in the country's Mission history (2007:159).

During my stay on Nguna I noticed that there was a general fear of sorcery on the island, perhaps especially within the Survival Church. More particularly, church members expressed that they feared sorcery attacks on them from non-members. This became particularly apparent towards the end of my stay, in May, as several church members began noticing strange things taking place. Firstly, several people became ill at the same time, but with different afflictions. One had stomach aches; another twisted his ankle, and one person started feeling pain in her arm. Secondly, the Prophetess of the Survival Church started waking up at night, feeling the presence of evil spirits in the village. She would go out of her house, though it was completely dark outside and no moonlight, and chase the evil spirits around the village. In order to help keeping the evil spirits away a special prayer group was set up by the Survival Church, consisting of Prayer Warriors, meeting up every afternoon to pray at the beach. Finally, the brother of one of the founders of the Survival Church had been experiencing similarly alarming incidences before his sudden and inexplicable death a year prior to all this. This man had been a central and affluent figure of the local community. The fact that it was almost a year since this man had passed away fuelled the fear that some other prominent member of the family would die at the anniversary of his death.

When I asked why people were convinced that these incidences were caused by sorcery, it was explained to me that there was a lot of *jelas* (Bislama for jealousy) in the village towards the families that had started the Survival Church. Members of this family themselves emphasised how they had for many years focused on the importance of education and paid employment, as explained in the previous chapter. Most members of the family had a relatively high degree of education, and most of the younger men were working in Port Vila or abroad. Several of the women had also received schooling, and many focused on earning their own money; weaving baskets or mats to sell at the market in Port Vila. Further, as explained in the previous chapter, the Youth Group of the Survival Church arranged fundraisings for each of them in order to have their own money, something the Presbyterian Youth Group never did. This focus on earning money has led to a relatively good economic situation within this family, and the fact that they made money also made it easier for the younger generation to receive education, as their parents would sponsor it. It was also striking that the majority of the trade stores in the village were owned by Survival Church members, as these were funded by the aforementioned Survival/Evidence micro-finance loans.

The jealousy people felt towards this family, then, was believed to result in sorcery attacks and the manifestation of evil spirits. However, the appearance of sorcery was not linked to particular persons willingly causing sorcery attacks. Rather, it was expressed that

sorcery and evil spirits would appear as a force of its own, when feelings of jealousy were in motion. This way of viewing sorcery has several similarities to that described by Knut Rio (2002), from the island of Ambrym, further north in Vanuatu. Rio explains how sorcery (or *abio* in the local language) has changed from being a legitimate and concrete act, carried out by a known person (in pre-colonial times), to become an absented principle attached to interpersonal conflicts (2002:142). *Abio* in the present thus takes something of a life of its own, acting the role of a “third party” to a relation between two persons. For instance, the *abio* is able to discern the *real* relationship between two parties, and act out on the genuine feelings of the people involved. For instance, if person A is feeling jealousy towards person B, the *abio* can detect this, and act out the feelings of person A, causing harm to person B. Consequently, a negative thought of anger or jealousy may be enough to provoke an act of sorcery, for instance illness or death (Rio, 2002:142). As a result, people believe that if they provoke others by being selfish, holding back something and not sharing according to customs, this may lead to sorcery-attack. Likewise, people may fear that they have caused a sorcery-attack if they have felt anger or jealousy towards a person who becomes ill or dies.

Different interpretations of sorcery

There are various ways of understanding sorcery or fears of sorcery within a society. For the context of this chapter I will present a few theories on sorcery, starting with literature on Vanuatu, then providing comparative examples from Papua New Guinea and South Africa.

Knut Rio (2002:129) has argued that sorcery should be seen as “fundamentally an expression of people’s acknowledgement of the immanent powers of sociality itself”. According to Rio, sorcery can also be seen as commenting upon society and people’s lives in general, judging these by ideals of morality from the past (2002:152). However, Rio refers to this as moral “with a twist”; as it expresses itself in opposition to “the growing tendency amongst people of ‘keeping instead of giving’, yet simultaneously taking up the tenet from the Bible that one should not desire other men’s possessions or women” (2002:152).

William Rodman (1993) has also done fieldwork on sorcery in Vanuatu, on the island of Ambae, but has a somewhat different understanding of the importance of sorcery and its local effects. Lending cross-cultural support to African ethnography and theories on sorcery, Rodman argues that sorcery in Vanuatu can be seen as an idiom for local power-relations in “weak”, postcolonial states (1993:218). In eras of postcolonial politics, Rodman argues, sorcery accusations can be seen as a protest on the part of disadvantaged groups, such as women, young people and men of low rank. Rodman shows how there was an increase in the

numbers of accusations in the years leading up to independence in Vanuatu (1993:229). Further, the people accused were almost exclusively chiefs, while the accusers were young, women or men of low rank (1993:321). Although the cases were handled in the village court, few of the accused chiefs were condemned. However, Rodman's material shows that despite this the accusations undermined the chief's authority over time (1993:230), sorcery accusations thus being an indirect means of resistance and social control .

Richard Eves (2000) has noted how the Lelet of Papua New Guinea became increasingly suspicious of sorcery attacks from outsiders at the same time as they became gradually more economically successful. This development, Eves explains, was related to the fact that it has become harder to conceal one's wealth. Those most likely to become victims of sorcery attacks are the ones that own for instance a car or a trade store (Eves, 2000:458). Traditional valuables, such as shell money, were easier to conceal than modern valuables (such as trade stores and cars) which are highly visible, and consequently not easy to hide, Eves explains. Also, increased financial means leads people to buy their food rather than growing it themselves, something that can make ritual exchange difficult, as the taro and yams to be exchanged according to tradition should have been grown by the giver (Eves, 2000:465). As is typical throughout Melanesia, sharing is a fundamental activity to preserve social relations among the Lelet, and when sharing new forms or wealth becomes difficult, sociality also becomes negated, according to Eves (2000:464). Thus, fear of sorcery becomes an expression of "a discourse on inequality that arises with modernity" and "a failure of the morality and management of exchange in the new context of modernity" (Eves, 2000:466).

Jean and John Comaroff (1999:279) similarly relate the increase in sorcery accusations, following the abolishment of apartheid in South Africa, to growing economic inequalities, and "the contradictory effects of millennial capitalism and the culture of neoliberalism". Comaroff and Comaroff explain how those who were accused of witchcraft and subsequently murdered often were elderly people of good economic means, due to business success and the like. Furthermore, the majority of witch findings took place where financial differences were at its peak and people's living conditions most straitened (1999:288). In what follow I will look more closely at how one can relate these views on sorcery to my own material.

Sorcery within the Survival Church context

One way of understanding sorcery, then, is seeing it as a comment upon times of change within a society. Rodman connects sorcery accusations to post-colonial processes, while Eves' and the Comaroffs' cases demonstrate how fears of sorcery increase in times of rapid

socioeconomic change. Rio explains how sorcery can be related to both traditional moral values of sharing as well as more recent Christian values of not desiring or being jealous of other people's property.

As mentioned, fears of sorcery within the Survival Church were explicitly linked to increased economic means and altered financial disparities within the local community; Survival Church members understood the increase in sorcery attacks against them as a result of jealousy towards their personal economic success. I see this as an example of how ideologies can come into conflict, and how friction may arise when global influences come into contact with local views. On the one hand we find the traditional Melanesian morality of gift-giving and sharing; the local. On the other hand we find the global Pentecostal Health and Wealth gospel; arguing that church members will find solutions to their physical, spiritual and material problems through church membership and healing received therein. As we have seen, Survival Church members have largely focused on paid employment, education, earning money and not spending it on alcohol or kava. In doing this they have achieved greater financial success than many of their fellow Presbyterian villagers. Also, as we saw in chapter four, the fact that the Survival Church is a Pentecostal church with international connections has given its members some financial prerogatives. For instance, the Evidence-organization contributed to the micro-credit loan scheme which some Survival Church members on Nguna have used successfully, for instance establishing their own trade stores. In general there is a considerable focus laid on earning money, and it was obvious to me that Survival Church members on Nguna were more successful in this than many of their Presbyterian co-villagers. However, this success and the conflicting value systems of sharing, on the one hand, and accumulation and sharing with the church, on the other, may lead to an ambivalent situation for the people involved. And as both Rio and Eves have shown, having greater financial means than others can be enough to trigger fear of jealousy and consequently fear of sorcery attack. However, if sorcery can be seen as a comment upon change within a society, a change partly caused by the Survival Church, how can we interpret the practice of healing the effects of sorcery within this very same church?

Healing the effects of sorcery

As explained in chapter four, the Survival Church is in many ways influenced by global Pentecostal Health and Wealth or Prosperity gospels; maintaining a strong focus on working hard and accumulating money through the correct faith in God. The church community also has global connections that have helped them establish both a school and a micro-finance loan

scheme, both of which have in turn helped church members become more successful financially. Although there is a strong focus on sharing this wealth, for instance in that the church provides free healing also for people that are not members of the church, as well as loans to non-members, there is also a focus on keeping the money within the church. As mentioned, people often commented on the difference between themselves (the members of the Survival Church) who work hard, and the other members of the community (for instance Presbyterian) who sit around drinking kava instead of working. Thus, although people want to share, for instance with the church (for example through tithing and fundraisings), they may not always want to share with those that have not worked as hard. However, this may in turn lead to a feeling of guilt towards the rest of the community, as the dominant Melanesian reciprocal and redistributive economy is that of reciprocity, equality and sharing (Sahlins, 1965, Mauss, 1954). Thus, this sense of guilt can lead to fear of jealousy from non-church members, and thus a fear of sorcery attack.

As we have seen, healing is an important component of the Survival Church, used to cure various kinds of afflictions and hardships; everything from financial and social problems to physical illnesses caused by sorcery. However, if we interpret the economic rationality within the Survival Church as a factor in the increased wealth and financial skills of its members, this leading to a fear of sorcery, the church can in some ways be seen as a self-regulating institution; healing the effects of sorcery, caused by the church itself to begin with. However, this can also be seen as constituting a paradox for church members, as church membership and healing received therein is seen as something positive, at the same time this leads to perhaps the most negative thing that may happen to a person; sorcery attack. In fact, as I have showed throughout this thesis, the Survival Church may be seen to represent several instances of paradoxical situations for its members.

Concluding remarks

I started out this chapter by laying out one particularly important aspect of the Survival Church; its healing practices. The form of healing within the church can be seen as forming part of the global; a person from almost any Pentecostal church from around the world could step into a Survival Church service and recognize the outward appearance of the service; in addition to the discourse of for instance the Health and Wealth gospel. At the same time, however, Survival Church healing can be seen to represent something entirely local; both in that its execution has many similarities to traditional or *kastom*-related healing practices, but

also in that the content of the healing often deals with the opposite and negative side of *kastom*, namely sorcery or *nakaimas*.

In the second part of the chapter I dealt with the ways *nakaimas* is understood within the Survival Church context in specific, relating this understanding to general understandings of sorcery. Drawing on comparative examples from elsewhere in Vanuatu, as well as Papua New Guinea and South Africa, I argued that fears of sorcery within the Survival Church may largely be related to socio-economic changes in the society at large, and church members' ability to adjust successfully to these changes. Many Survival Church members' increased economic means have led them to fear jealousy from outsiders, which further is believed to generate evil spirits and *nakaimas*. The Survival Church intends to heal the effects of this sorcery, although in some ways, the church can perhaps actually be seen to be a partial cause of sorcery fears. This paradox may finally leave church members in an ambivalent situation, being caught in-between different ways of viewing value.

6

Conclusions

The aim of this thesis has been to consider the interplay between the local and the global, more specifically I have looked at the particular form this process takes within the Survival Church of Vanuatu. Accordingly, I have focused on the ways this church relates to and takes up global influences, while simultaneously defining itself as a particularly local and independent church. Following Anna Tsing (2000, 2005), my focus has been on the encounter between local and global in order to grasp a better understanding of how the global is met with a form of resistance at the local level. As Tsing notes, paying attention to frictions that may arise between diverse actors, perspectives or systems of value may be a good way of grasping processes of change affected by encounters between local and global. In opposition to earlier notions of globalization, seeing it as leading to cultural homogenization of the local, the case of the Survival Church is a prime example of how not only the local but perhaps even more the global is changed in the appropriation of the global Pentecostal movement on the local level. As David Martin has noted on the global spread of Pentecostalism; “You cannot go everywhere and not be changed” (2002:170).

Members of the Freswota Survival Church trace their church's origins all the way back to the first missionary encounter, which can be seen as an early case of friction between the local and the global within the discourses of this church. As missionaries and Ngunese people tried to establish a common ground for their new co-existence there seem to have been conflicts taking place between their two systems of value. These conflicts are brought to light through the story about the *kleva* described in chapter three. Although the *kleva* died after shaking hands with the first missionary, he also had several resemblances to Jesus Christ, and thus represents a form of indigenized Christianity. However, this indigenized Christianity is not resumed until the establishment of the Survival Church succeeding the arrival of the Revival movement, and the independence of Vanuatu as a nation. Simultaneously, the church's discourses describe a double break with the past; both with the missionary times and with the pre-Christian past.

Although the Survival Church breaks with certain aspects of the past, it does at the same time take up other aspects of this very past. As Matthew Engelke has noted; "Every rupture is also a realignment and how each is conceptualized and understood is a matter not only of discourse but decisions and dilemmas faced in everyday life" (2010:199). This can be seen for instance when it comes to Survival Church healing practices. While these are heavily influenced by global Pentecostalism, and thus have several resemblances to practices of healing around the world, there are simultaneously several local aspects in this. As we saw, Survival Church healing is linked to local *kastom* in two different ways. On the one hand, the way healing is performed has several resemblances to traditional ways of healing, and the healing practices within the church are attributed to inheritance from figures such as the *kleva* from the *kastom*-story, described in chapter three, thus representing the "good" side of *kastom*. Conversely, though, afflictions that are to be healed are often caused by the "bad" side of *kastom*, namely sorcery. The sorcery directed at, or feared by, Survival Church members, can be connected to a moral ambivalence that has started to develop on the local level, as a result of their practice moving towards keeping money within the church rather than a focus on reciprocity and sharing. This moral ambivalence is partly caused by global influences, as the Christian view on money is also changing, particularly within Pentecostalism. The religious change is in turn influenced by larger processes taking place in society at large, for instance those of neoliberal capitalism. While in "traditional" capitalism the focus is on hard work for profit and accumulation, neoliberal capitalism represents a more mystified and distanced approach to earning money, abstractly represented by the market, as well as a focus on consumption. This mysteriousness is taken up by Pentecostal Health and Wealth gospels,

which emphasize correct morals and faith in God as the most effective means towards gaining physical and material prerogatives. However, such developments may also lead to frictions on the local level. First of all, as the church emphasizes that spiritual growth is more important than financial growth, while simultaneously constantly underlining the importance of earning money, the situation may become ambiguous for the people involved. Second, local morality discourses of reciprocity and sharing are set up against the Pentecostal discourse of sharing mainly within the church. I have argued in this thesis that although church members in some ways may be seen to have become more individualized as a consequence of Christian Pentecostal discourses, where a key value is a personal relationship to God, the opposite is also true. The church creates new arenas for collectivity, on both local and global levels; internally through the connections between branches of the church in Vanuatu, and externally through the Pentecostal movement, and connections to overseas organizations such as Evidence. All this has, in turn, influenced church members to become more involved in financial transactions; on the ideological level this takes place through the line of thinking of Prosperity gospels, and on the more practical level, through for instance the micro-loan schemes or the Survival School, set up with assistance from Evidence. However, financial success comes at a price, creating an ambiguous moral landscape. Importantly, as we have seen, this has led to fears of sorcery attack; having limited their reciprocal obligation to focus it more internally within their independent church they also cut off from a wider form of sociability. This ambivalent situation is further developed as the church can be seen not only to mend (through healing), but also indirectly cause the appearance of sorcery.

As we have seen, then, the church's development has been marked by processes of change caused by frictions between the local and the global. As the church is still in a process of change, one question thus becomes; what will the effects of all this be in the long run?

A growing worry I noticed among some of the elder Survival Church members was that many of the younger members had started losing their spiritual gifts. As explained in chapter five, all members are believed to have received their individual spiritual gifts or abilities from the Holy Spirit. Although people do not always receive their gift until having been members of the church for a while, some of the younger members had received their gifts already in their childhood, for instance the gift of dreams and visions. However, it was believed that if one did not use one's gift regularly, one would be in danger of losing it. The church being small in size and relatively new deepened this worry. In particular the younger generation, Pastor Aaron explained to me, were not active enough using their gifts, and the gifts were thus disappearing. Especially in Port Vila, it was explained, the younger generation

was not very engaged in church activities, and there was no longer an active Youth Group within the Freswota branch. However, although the Ngunese branch was more active, the loss of gifts was also a growing worry on the island;

Pauvatu Survival Church service, March 18, 2010

During church service Minister Rebecca gave a long talk about how young people today are losing their gifts. Those who established the church, in the 1980s, had all been young at the time, Minister Rebecca herself included, she explained. They received gifts from the Holy Spirit, and they healed Kalsao, all by themselves! Young people in the church today are not active in the same manner, she said. Why is this? They never dare to stand up in church and talk about their visions. If this continues the church will die when its founders grow old and die, as there will be no one left to maintain and pursue the work of the church.

The fear of people losing their gifts, and the church thus dying out, can perhaps be seen to represent a moral crisis in the society at large. As described in chapter two of this thesis, the present situation may lead young people that have been born in town to neither have a sense of rural, island identity nor an urban identity. As many young people are caught in a situation of unemployment, and no land rights on their parents' islands of origin, many may end up wandering the streets of Port Vila, drinking alcohol or kava. Such moral decline is what the Survival Church aspired to distance itself from at the beginning. However, as the founders of the church see the younger generation engaging less in the church than they did themselves, not using their spiritual gifts and so on, this becomes a factor of worry.

Both branches of the Survival Church I studied came into being through a rupture from the Presbyterian Church in two different villages on Nguna Island, and a subsequent focus on a break with earlier ways. Such discourses on a break with elements of the past are among the main characteristics of Pentecostal churches world-wide (Meyer, 2004). The subsequent development of the Survival Church has been marked by a process of constant fission and fusion; people breaking out to form their own churches (such as Pastor Moses creating Life Revelation) and other churches joining in or fusing together (like the Pauvatu Survival Church joining with the Survival Church in Freswota). Such processes of fission and fusion are quite common within Pentecostal churches on a global scale. As Martin has noted, "Pentecostalism is not a church or any kind of system, but a repertoire of recognizable spiritual affinities which constantly breaks out in new forms" (2002:176). The founders of the Survival Church themselves explained how they previously had led sinful lives prior to

establishing the church; drinking and not working, but after receiving visions from God they decided to break with this past and start a better life in a new, independent church. Perhaps the younger generation of the Survival Church may in the future take up the revivalist discourse so common within Pentecostal churches, themselves breaking out of the church and founding their own, new churches? The future of the independent churches is of course hard to determine, but its leaders still seem quite optimistic, as the following, final anecdote indicates.

Just prior to my departure from Vanuatu in June 2010, Pastor Moses came to the Survival Church and revealed a vision he had; that his church, Life Revelation should be reunited with the Survival Church and the Healing Ministry once again. There was a lot of talk amongst the three brothers to establish a new, fusioned church together again, under a new name. However, in May 2011, I talked with Pastor Aaron on the phone, and he told me that, for different reasons, their church fusion would not take place after all. But, he told me, the Survival Church's future still looked bright; "You remember how I first built the Survival *Church*, and then the Survival *School*?" he asked. After I answered affirmatively, he continued to explain about his own visions for the future; he was considering going into politics himself, and as he phrased it; "perhaps even create a Survival *Country*".

Appendix A: Central terms and glossary

Bislama glossary

aelan kakae	=	island food
aelan taem	=	island time
aelan dres	=	island dress
antap	=	on top of
blakenwaet	=	black-and-white (sea-snake)
cherubim/seraphim	=	In the Bible a <i>cherub</i> is a kind of divine being or an angel (i.e. Revelation 4 and 5, Ezekiel 1 and 11). Within the Survival church, however, a <i>cherubim</i> is a person who can be possessed by the Holy Spirit and heal. Although it is said that both men and women can have this gift, it is mostly common for women, and during my stay only women had this gift. The most central task of a <i>cherubim</i> is to heal the sick and perform deliverance. Although their actions may seem similar, all <i>cherubims</i> act out roles of different angels while possessed; waving their arms in different ways, some speak in tongues, and yet others sing.
isi	=	easy
jelas	=	jealous
jioj	=	church
kakae blong waetman	=	“whiteman”-food
kastom	=	The concept of <i>kastom</i> is widespread throughout island Melanesia, and has been in use locally for several decades. Within anthropology the meaning of the <i>kastom</i> -concept has been extensively debated since the early 1980s, and there are several definitions in use. Throughout this thesis I have chosen to follow Akin’s (2004:300) definition of the concept as; “a Melanesian Pijin word (from English ‘custom’) that at its most basic, refers to ideologies and activities formulated in terms of empowering indigenous traditions and practices, both within communities of varying levels of inclusivity, and as a stance toward outside entities”.
kava	=	an intoxicant drink of grey-brown colour with mildly sedative and relaxing effects. It is produced from the roots of the kava-plant (<i>Piper Methysticum</i>), and is common in many Pacific countries.

kleva	=	literary “clever”, meaning healer or diviner
laplap	=	a local pudding (in Ngunese called <i>nakoao</i>), made out of a grated root crop (usually yam, taro or manioc) or bananas, sometimes mixed with coconut milk, and/or fish, chicken or meat, wrapped in large leaves and baked for several hours..
nakaimas	=	sorcery
nakamal	=	kava bar
nambawan	=	number one; the best
nasara	=	ceremonial ground
ni-Vanuatu	=	a person from Vanuatu
sas	=	expensive
skras-skrasem kokonas	=	scooping coconuts, i.e. make coconut milk
smol	=	small; a little
spel	=	take a break/relax for a bit
wokbaot	=	walkabout; walking around

Ngunese glossary

lake	=	stump of tree
lakesikaiana	=	to be of the same origin
mistaare	=	white person
moli	=	common
munuai	=	healer or diviner
na-atamoli tapu	=	sacred person
natangura	=	wild cane
natématé	=	spirits of the dead
vaau	=	new

Appendix B: Letter from the Vanuatu Cultural Centre



VANUATU NASONAL KALJORAL KAONSEL

Vanuatu National Cultural Council
Conseil National Culturel du Vanuatu

VANUATU KALJORAL SENTA

Vanuatu Cultural Centre
Centre Culturel du Vanuatu

P.O. Box 184, Port Vila, Vanuatu, South Pacific.

Tel: (678) 22129 / 22721. Fax: (678) 26590

Email: vis@vanuatu.com.vu

8 Febuari 2010.

- **Ol jif, ol lida mo ol man o woman blong Nguna**
- **Taman Willie, Kaljoral Senta Man Filwoka, Mere vilej, Nguna**
- **Leisaruru Tanearu, Kaljoral Senta Woman Filwoka, Malaliu vilej, Nguna**

Leta blong talemaot risej mo wok blong Ms HILDUR THORARENSEN

Leta ia i blong talemaot wok blong wan riseja, Ms Hildur Thorarensen, we hemi kam long Vanuatu blong mekem wan stadi blong hem long Survival Jioj. Ms Hildur Thorarensen hem i wan studen long University of Bergen long kantri blong hem long Norway.

Hildur hem i wantem mekem stadi blong hem long histri blong Survival Jioj, wan indipenden jioj blong yumi long Vanuatu we i bon long aelan blong yumi long Nguna mo tedei i gat branj long Port Vila mo sam narafala ples long Vanuatu tu. Long stadi blong hem, Hildur i wantem lukluk long histri blong jioj, mo tu hao hem i wantem lukluk long: hao jioj hem organaesem hem wan; hao ol komuniti oli stap involv insaed long jioj; wanem kaen lidaship i stap insaed long jioj; mo wanem kaen aktiviti jioj mo ol memba blong hem i stap mekem.

Wok we Hildur bae i mekem i no kamaot long tingting blong hem nomo. Pastor Aron Richard, we hem i faonda mo semtaem lida blong Survival Jioj, hem nao i bin askem blong save gat wan man i kam blong raetem histri blong Survival Jioj. Folem rikwes blong Pasta Aron, we hem i bin talem long wan narafala riseja blong Norway long 2006 finis, Hildur i kam long Vanuatu long yia ia blong raetem histri ia.

Vanuatu Nasonal Kaljoral Kaonsel mo Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta, we hem i lukaotem ol risej long saed blong kastom mo kalja long Vanuatu, hem i apruvum finis risej ia blong Hildur. Hildur hem i saenem wan risej agrimen wetem mifala we hemi stap wok folem taem hem i stap long Vanuatu. Mifala i apruvum wan spesel risej visa blong hem tu, we hemi save mekem risej long hem be hemi no save wok blong kasem mane long Vanuatu.

Folem rikwes blong Pasta Aron, Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta i askem long Hildur blong mekem wan spesel wok blong kaontri, we hemi blong raetem histri blong Survival Jioj, mo afta mekem wan smol buk we i gat insaed histri ia, blong plante man i save ridim. Hildur i agri blong mekem wok ia olsem wan sevis i kam long Survival Jioj mo tu long ol pipol blong Vanuatu.

Folem bakgraon toktok ia, mi wantem askem blong yufala blong save givhan long Hildur long risej blong hem, from bae i gat benefit long Survival Jioj mo tu long kantri.

NASONAL MIJUSHIM
National Museum
Musée National

REJISTA BLONG OLGETA OLFALA PLES BLONG VANUATU
The Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey
Inventaire des Sites Historiques et Culturels du Vanuatu

NASONAL FILM MO SAON UNIT
National Film and Sound Unit
Service National du Film et du Son

NASONAL LAEBRI
National Library
Bibliothèque Nationale



VANUATU NASONAL KALJORAL KAONSEL
Vanuatu National Cultural Council
Conseil National Culturel du Vanuatu

VANUATU KALJORAL SENTA
Vanuatu Cultural Centre
Centre Culturel du Vanuatu

P.O. Box 184, Port Vila, Vanuatu, South Pacific.

Tel: (678) 22129 / 22721, Fax: (678) 26590

Email: vis@vanuatu.com.vu

Sipos yu nid blong save eni narafala samting long saed blong risej blong Hildur, plis toktok long Pasta Aron Richard long telefon 7760095, o sipos no toktok long mi long telefon 22129 o long Miusium long Port Vila.

Tankyu tumas mo sa


Ralph Regen vanu
Daarekta, Vanuatu Nasonal Kaljoral Kaonsel.



NASONAL MIUSIUM
National Museum
Musée National

REJISTA BLONG OLGETA OLFALA PLES BLONG VANUATU
The Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey
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NASONAL FILM MO SAON UNIT
National Film and Sound Unit
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NASONAL LAEBRI
National Library
Bibliothèque Nationale

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