

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**The Ancestors Remain: Dynamics of Matrilineal
Continuity in West Gao, Santa Isabel, Solomon
Islands**

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Abstract

Drawing upon 21 months of ethnographic research in West Gao District of Santa Isabel, Solomon Islands, this thesis argues that relationships of absolute difference or ‘alterity,’ existing internally to one society, are central to processes of social reproduction.

At the deepest level of ontology the West Gao lived world is based on *a priori* difference between three discrete categories of being. Each category - a matriclan, or *kokolo* - consists of a relational amalgam of genres of knowledge, human persons, and ancestral beings. These relationships are unified, bounded, and rendered distinct by virtue of a shared, inherent connection to a discrete territory. From a cosmogonic perspective, in isolation the three *kokolo* cannot reproduce their distinctiveness. To do so they must enter into relationships with each other. Consequently, two different forms of socio-cosmic relationships become crucial for understanding land-person connectivity in West Gao: those flowing internally to each exogamous matriclan; and those forged between different matriclans. I explore how these two forms of relationships are continually balanced against one another in both quotidian practices and ritualised exchanges. Whilst this balance is dictated by the poly-ontological structure of West Gao cosmology, I illustrate how the balance shifts in response to historical and politico-economic processes, in particular, conversion to Christianity and the increasing value of land as a monetary resource.

Participant observation, extended interviews in Solomon Islands Pijin and the local vernacular - Gao, and two weeks of archival research in the National Library of Australia comprised the main methodologies used. I draw upon this data in seven analytical chapters that address: the role of ancestral agency in the shaping of historical processes; the ‘ancestral’ dynamics of Christian communities; place, personhood, and movement; origin narratives; the trans-generational reproduction of matrilineal identity; ritualised exchanges focused on the ‘father-child’ relationship; and practices surrounding mortality and burial.

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Gao Language: Pronunciation and Orthography¹

The inhabitants of West Gao speak both the ‘Gao’ language that is indigenous to West Gao District (see figure 3) and the language of the independent nation of the Solomon Islands, Solomon Islands Pijin. Gao is a Melanesian ‘Austronesian’ language, one of six language-groups reported to have been spoken on the island in the 1970s: Bugotu; Gao-Reirei-A’ara; A’ara-Blabla; Blabla-kilocaka-Kokota; Laghu; and Zabana (White 1978: 51). As can be seen in this list, linguistically, Gao language is closely related to the A’ara (or Cheke Holo as it is now most commonly known) language that indigenous to Maringe District (White 1978: 44-53; White, Kokhonigita, and Pulomana 1988; see figure 2). However, Gao speakers repeatedly asserted during fieldwork that their language is distinct from Cheke Holo and often commented to me on the inability of Cheke Holo speakers to speak Gao language proficiently. Throughout this thesis, both Solomon Islands Pijin and Gao language words are italicised. To differentiate between the two languages, I precede Solomon Islands Pijin terms and phrases with the acronym ‘SIP’. Gao terms and phrases are simply italicised with no marking acronym. A glossary of key Gao terms is located after the appendices.

*Vowels:*²

‘a’ as in the first a of ‘banana’.

‘e’ as in ‘egg’

‘i’ as in ‘eat’

‘o’ as in ‘open’

‘u’ as in ‘new’

Other sounds:

‘ae’ – as in ‘I’.

‘ng’ – velar nasal as in ‘sing’.

‘gh’ – velar affricate.

¹ Given the similarities between Gao and Cheke Holo language, I have adapted these brief notes on phonics and orthography from White (1978: xii-xiii).

² Solomon Islands Pijin also follows this pronunciation system for vowel sounds.

‘gn’ – nasal palatal as in the Italian campagna.

‘h’ added after or before certain consonants is silent, indicating aspiration only. Following White’s (1978: xiii) orthography directly: ‘In the case of the aspirated ‘t’, the ‘t’ and ‘h’ are separated by an apostrophe to distinguish it from the English, as in ‘the’, for which there is no phoneme in A’ara [or in Gao].’

(‘) indicates a glottal stop (unless it appears between the letters ‘t’ and ‘h’).

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Gao speakers would insist that I begin by locating the ‘root’ (*nafugna*) of this project. I start, therefore, with Martin Holbraad. Without his inspiration and encouragement I would not have embarked upon doctoral research in anthropology. Martin is also the scholar responsible for introducing me to the work of Michael Scott.

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For Rosemary Ka'aza (Dodo).

Prologue On Arrivals and Foreign Origins

Like other travellers of the Pacific whose movements gave shape to this thesis - the apical ancestors of the three Gao matriclans, Spanish explorers, and Christian missionaries - I arrived in West Gao by sea. I can still feel the juddering thud, thud, thud, of the *Estrella*'s engine as I was disturbed from sleep by my friend Elina at 2am. She grinned at me reassuringly, struggling to rouse her four-year old twins who lay on the deck beside me. Beyond the lurid glare of the ship's lights the shoreline was dotted with blinking torches. The rugged hills were shrouded in moonlit clouds and I was immediately struck by the contrast between this largely invisible port and the neon colours of the national capital, Honiara (Guadalcanal - see figure 1), which I had left eight hours previously.

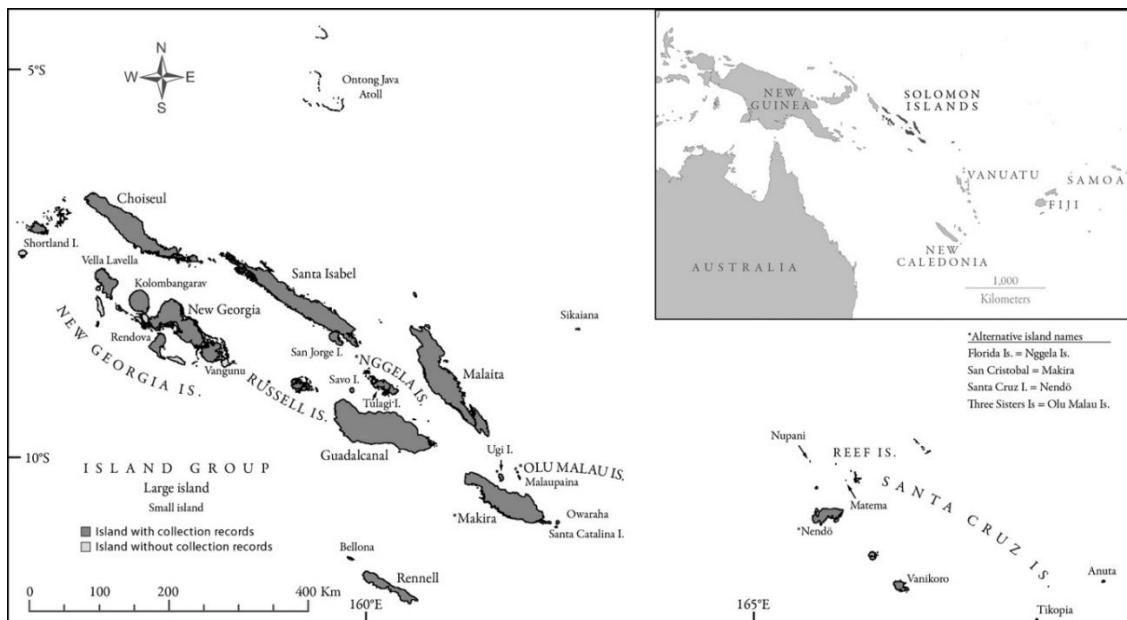


Figure 1 map of the Solomon Islands.

Original image downloaded from:
http://www.pensoft.net/J_FILES/1/articles/4156/export.php_files/ZooKeys-257-047-g001.jpg.

It was mid-November 2010 and I had been in the Solomon Islands just over two weeks. Having secured a two year residence visa, I was returning to Santa Isabel (see figure 2) to complete a project instigated in 2009. In June of that year I had been invited to reside in Poro Village (see figure 3), and under the guidance of local chiefs, to document and study the ways of life and custom (SIP, *kastom*) of Gao speakers.

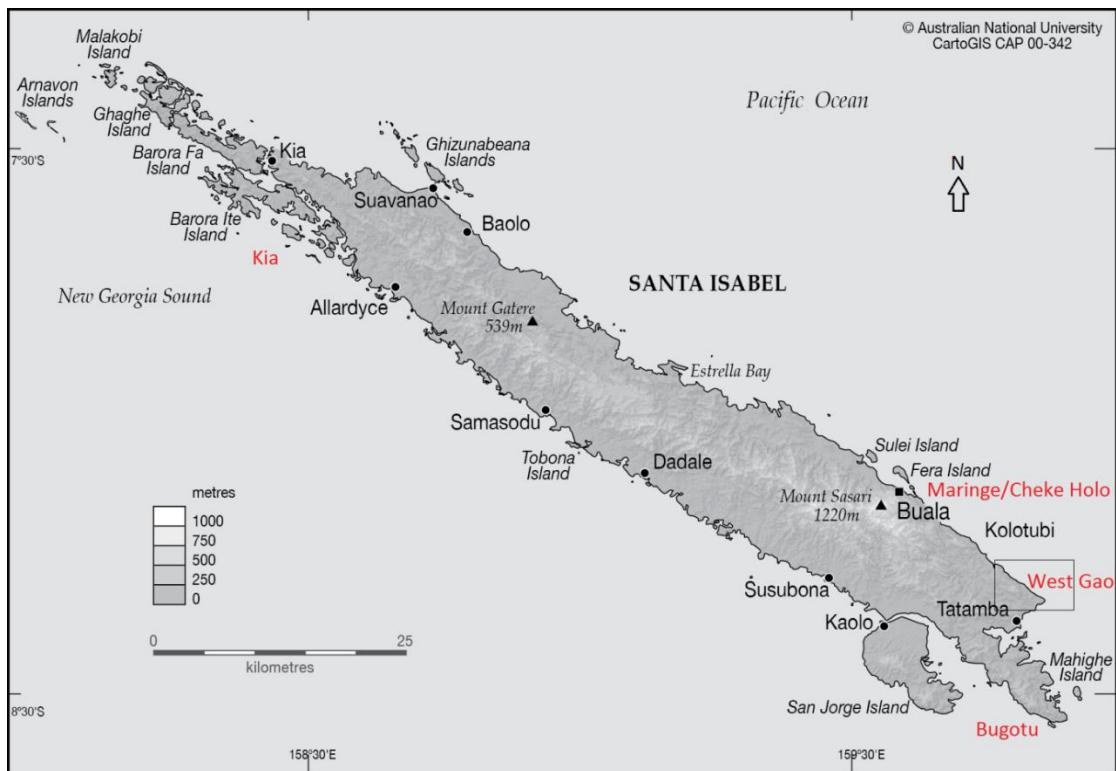


Figure 2 map of Santa Isabel.

Approximate locations of major Districts marked, West Gao with a box. Original image downloaded from: <http://asiapacific.anu.edu.au/mapsonline/base-maps/santa-isabel-island>.

Following my adoptive brother and father of the twins - a Honiara taxi driver ‘returning home’ (*ke pulo ka nau*) for a break from urban life - I picked my way across the deck. Within minutes I was lowered into the metal out-board motor boat along with fifteen or so other passengers variously splayed across sacks of rice and sugar. Gripping a rucksack (*gnaka*, SIP, *basket*) here, a carton of navy biscuits there, we shuddered carefully through the deep passage in the reef to the drop-off point for Poro Village. The white sand was filled with people, forewarned by a snatched mobile phone call or text message to expect the arrival of cargo or a passenger.³ Almost immediately, I was embraced by my adoptive parents and led to one of the houses in my host family’s compound where I had stayed in June 2009 as one of their ‘homestay’ guests.⁴

³ In June 2012 West Gao residents were awaiting a mobile phone signal tower provided by Solomon Islands Telekom. Plans had been delayed due to controversies over the tower’s prospective location. A patchy signal was ‘catchable’ in certain areas of West Gao such as hill top gardens, and increasingly, at Bibili, a coastal area lying between my host hamlet Jarava and the centre of Poro Village proper (see figure 3).

⁴ This homestay was inhabited by family members for most of the year. Due to the poor infrastructure, high cost of petrol, and lack of good advertising, tourists were exceptionally rare. When Poro Village hosted government and NGO workshops, however, my host family would on occasion house and feed the participants for a fee.

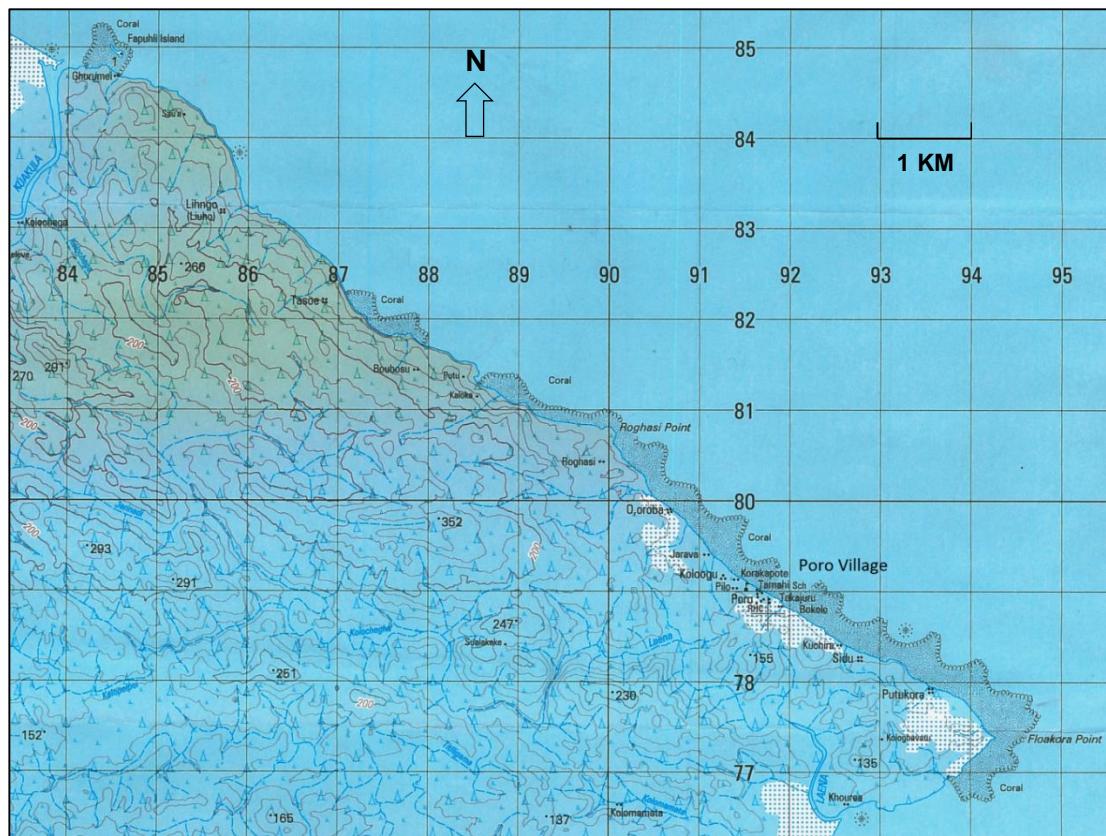


Figure 3 map of West Gao District.

The boundaries of the district are located at the two river-mouths at Ghurumei in the northwest and Khourea in the southeast. White areas mark large areas of coconut palms.

I took interest in the arriving cargo.⁵ It was one of the main purposes of my proposed research to study how imported foods had been incorporated into the mechanics of social reproduction in West Gao. An insight into such processes was early in coming. During my first weeks in West Gao, I was repeatedly told that if I wanted to learn about ‘custom’ (SIP, *kastom*) I had to attend a feast occurring once within the life cycle of West Gao families, called *fangamu taego*, the approximate translation of which is “to feed the caregiver.” During this feast a mother and her children present gifts to the father of their household to acknowledge the care he has delivered to his children. Many of these gifts included the imported products that comprised the *Estrella*’s cargo.

⁵ These imported products were largely supplied by the Chinese population of the Solomon Islands whose history in the islands and more recent entanglements in the 2006 Honiara riots have been summarised by Clive Moore (2008a).

The appearance of foreign goods in an event that has matrilineal kinship at its centre illustrates the ease with which Melanesians incorporate externally-sourced objects into the pre-existing relational structures of exchange (Foster 1995: 245-248). However, this obscures the fact that the cargo was, during this feast, being channelled according to locally-drawn differences. During *fangamu taego* Gao speakers participate as members of one of the three exogamous matriclans - *kokolo* - in exchanges that express the paradoxical dynamics of their socio-cosmic reality, a reality that is predicated upon *a priori* difference, or what Rupert Stasch (2009: 11) has termed ‘internal alterity.’ The non-indigenous ‘terms’ (Descola 2013: 389) - the rice, noodles, biscuits, and tinned fish - were being deployed according to local lines of difference, rather than simply instantiating a wider logic of global-local articulation. It is the purpose of this thesis to trace the shifting contours of such lines of difference.

The ethnographic data was collected during a period of 21 months of continuous fieldwork with Gao speakers - residing either in West Gao District on the island of Santa Isabel or in the national capital of the Solomon Islands, Honiara - between November 2010 and June 2012. Much of the data was derived from people residing ‘at home’ in the hamlets and villages that constitute West Gao District. According to the 2009 census, the population of *Kaloka Ward* - the political ward that corresponds to the geographical district of West Gao - was 962 (Solomon Islands Government 2014). Although I resided in a peripheral hamlet (called Jarava) of the largest coastal village in West Gao – Poro, I also spent extended periods in the coastal villages of Ghurumei, Khourea, O’oroba and Putukora, as well as overnight stays in hamlets and villages located inland: Lihngo; Bobosu; Koko; and Tasoe (see figure 3). As such, unless otherwise stated, the observations and arguments pertain to ‘West Gao’ and ‘Gao speakers’ in general rather than to one community in West Gao in particular. During fieldwork, I undertook archive research at the National Archive in Honiara, and in July 2012, I spent three weeks working with microfilm in the archives of the National Library of Australia.

When I arrived in West Gao, I had a working grasp of some Solomon Islands Pijin phrases. I became a competent user of the language after approximately twelve weeks. However, learning

the indigenous language ‘Gao’ was central to my methodology. Gao language was spoken consistently throughout West Gao. It was the language used in church services, community meetings, court cases, and in households. I was determined to learn the language in order to grasp indigenous concepts that might resist translation in to pijin, and also in order to interact with some older members of West Gao communities who were most confident communicating in Gao. This task took the entire duration of fieldwork. I worked systematically with a local man - Japhet Sikou - as my teacher. Japhet visited approximately twice a week during my first six months in Poro helping with grammatical formulations. Every Sunday I visited the house of my friend Agnes Leghunau, who understanding my need to learn Gao language quickly, steadfastly refused to communicate with me in pijin for the duration of my visits. My confidence in speaking Gao language was greatly enhanced after I became a member of Poro Choir and sang both liturgy and hymns in Gao language on a regular basis. However, it was largely due to the efforts of people like Japhet and Leghunau that by November 2011, I was sufficiently able to understand and speak Gao.⁶ This allowed me to conduct certain interviews solely in Gao and to make transcriptions of narratives and speeches recorded during earlier stages of research.

As far as the people of West Gao were concerned, I was there to investigate *kastom*. However, as stated above, my initial research proposal focused specifically on practices involving the production, consumption, and exchange of indigenous and imported food. My research plan was centred on a methodological framework that involved sustained participant observation in the domain of subsistence activities. About three months into fieldwork I realised this methodology was impracticable. The majority of gardens in West Gao are located in the forested interior. In coastal villages gardens are located at least a 40 minute walk through treacherous, muddy and mountainous terrain. With a few notable exceptions, the women of West Gao were unwilling to escort me to their gardens on a regular basis due to the safety risks involved in traversing the

⁶ The assistance and written materials provided by the Gao Bible Translation Group – such as the Gao Language Prayer Book - were instrumental to my learning of the language. During my fieldwork I co-produced a 60-page word-list with the translation group, distributing both printed and digital copies upon my departure from West Gao in June 2012.

terrain and because of the strenuous nature of garden work.⁷ Realising that my research was not progressing in the manner I had hoped, I decided to alter my focus. I started to explore the activities and genres of knowledge associated with the three matriclans. Very early into fieldwork, it became obvious that these matrilineal units (sing. *kokolo*) lay at the centre of what *kastom* in West Gao was all about.

I was struck by the importance of *kokolo* identities for Gao speakers in January 2011, at the first *fangamu taego* feast (the exchange event introduced above) to occur during fieldwork. It was also during this feast that I was allocated a *kokolo* identity of my own. I was taken to this feast by my language teacher, Japhet, and his wife Helen. I spent most of the day with Helen who, at the climax of the event, allocated me her own *kokolo* so I could participate in the redistribution of goods. Helen belonged to a different *kokolo* to that of my adoptive mother. People later commented that the allocation of my *kokolo* during this event was incorrect or “not straight” (*t'he'ome khohlo*). Following the logic of matrilineal descent I should, like my adoptive siblings belong to the same *kokolo* as my adoptive mother.

I was not born in West Gao. *Kokolo* identity did not run in my blood. However, as the above example shows, if I was to function as a part of the community I needed to be identifiable according to the triadic structure of the matriclan system. Moreover, the system was flexible enough in order to accommodate me, even if the (mis)allocation of my *kokolo* generated some controversy. This point can be expanded by reference to the case of another foreigner who became ‘local’ to West Gao. My adoptive father - Chief Paul Renton Fafale - was born in Lau, an area of Maliata Province, located in the southeast Solomon Islands (see figure 1). He once pointed out to me that his appointment within the Isabel Council of Chiefs (ICC) was contrary to its constitution, which stated that only persons born into the matrilineal system of Santa Isabel could become blessed chiefs (cf. Scott 2011: 207). However, according to my father, his

⁷ Although this was a matter of intense frustration for me during the early months of fieldwork, I realise with hindsight that my hosts in West Gao were quite right to be cautious.

fellow Isabel chiefs continually asserted that his long term residence (over forty years) on the island, and his experience of the chiefly system, rendered him indispensable.

It could be argued that Chief Paul's predicament indicates how chiefly authority in Santa Isabel, and the *kastom* that it has come to uphold, is not 'indigenous' in any straightforward way. Such an argument would stress that my Malaitan-born adoptive father's inclusion-by-experience in the ICC results directly from the fact that this institution originated largely within the politics of self-determination in a colonial state (Akin 2013: 344). However, this kind of analysis does not exhaust the significance of the case. Like many married-in persons, Chief Paul had been allocated a *kokolo* identity: he was given the same identity as that of his father-in-law. Moreover, as his encouragement and practical support of my own interest in West Gao *kastom* testifies, Chief Paul was fully committed to upholding the relations that constitute the ancestrally-established categories into which he had, as a result of his marriage and long term residence in West Gao, been thoroughly enfolded.

Writing of the interplay between 'arrival' and autochthony in Ranongga, an island in the western Solomon Islands, McDougall (2004: 252) has argued that a 'new lineage,' the founding ancestress of which was a female captive taken from overseas, nevertheless ensured that 'on the level of cosmological reproduction,' continuity was maintained. This was because such lineages venerated the existing emplaced ancestors of the autochthonous matrilineages that they replaced (McDougall 2004: 252). Analogously, I suggest that Chief Paul, by ensuring the on-going vitality of existing ancestrally-mediated relationships in West Gao, was perpetuating cosmological continuity in spite of his 'foreign' origins. Understood thus, Chief Paul's situation can illuminate the nature of my research participants' interactions with me during fieldwork, particularly as I began to collect information regarding ancestral histories (*pagusu*).

Narratives concerning ancestral activities and sites comprise some of the most precious knowledge that Gao speakers have at their disposal. They are carefully protected from appropriation and not indiscriminately passed on. This is because such information is a central

aspect of the evidence considered by courts - at both the local and national level - during the adjudication of land disputes. Land, and the property which grows on it (such as the coconut palm which provides the key cash crop - copra), are the means by which Gao speakers access money.⁸ Land is also necessary for the development of small businesses such as trade-stores, and, increasingly, homestays or rest-houses for visitors and tourists. Therefore in West Gao, as elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, land is the most highly-valued resource. Gao speakers are concerned that their knowledge of the ancestrally-formed landscape may be misappropriated by persons seeking to claim land illegitimately. In such a context, by sharing information about one's ancestors, one could potentially be risking one's very livelihood.

In order to navigate this situation I developed a particular methodology during fieldwork. I began to compile a three-page map showing the West Gao coastline and interior, on which I added the names of different parts of the landscape and mark different ancestral sites as I learnt about them (see appendix A). Although I certainly did not include all the information I had collected on these maps, as soon as I had learnt something about a specific area I would add a symbol to represent what I had learnt. As such, the maps became a visible catalogue of my progress. In the last six months of fieldwork, I began to take the maps with me on my visits to different persons. On studying my maps, research participants were able to add their own contributions by refining a certain detail or providing a story that had not yet been marked.

Whatever the maps achieved methodologically, I am certain that they communicated my commitment to understanding as much as I could about West Gao. As my research participants well knew, this was because I needed the information to complete my studies in England. I am sure that whatever other motivations my friends in West Gao may have had in telling me what they did, they shared their stories with me out of a sincere wish to assist me in achieving that goal. However, I also believe the maps 'worked' in a more subtle way, by providing 'evidence' of my commitment to the project. These maps, when situated alongside my presence in West

⁸Increasingly Gao speakers are relying upon the sale of kava, garden produce, and areca nut (*gausa*, SIP, *betel nut*), to supplement their incomes.

Gao for 21 months, my efforts to learn the language, my incessant questioning about all things ancestral, and my commitment to church-based activities, made my dedication to understanding *kastom* both visible and tangible. The fact that I was essentially from elsewhere was perhaps not the issue. What mattered was my willingness, much like that displayed by Chief Paul, to become enfolded by a lived and living landscape, learning what I could as a result, but also, most crucially, operating as an active node in the perpetuation and reproduction of the very relationships that I had come to study.

Throughout this thesis I have used real names wherever possible. However, out of respect for manner in which certain details were communicated, and to ensure that the data in this thesis cannot be used as evidence for particular land claims, I have rendered anonymous both those persons who shared sensitive data in privacy, and also the places and persons that were the focus of such communications. Where pseudonyms are used, or place-names removed, this is indicated in-text and through the use of footnotes. I have used my own discretion and knowledge of the local situation to make these decisions. I therefore accept sole responsibility for any problems and issues that may arise from the online publication of this document.

Introduction

Difference and similarity are ultimately to be resolved at the empirical ethnographic level in the context of the perceptual and conceptual procedures involved.

—Bruce Kapferer, *Outside all Reason: Magic, Sorcery and Epistemology in Anthropology*.

I: Internal or external alterity?

In a lecture delivered for the Association for Social Anthropology in Oceania, Marshall Sahlins (2013: 281) argues that difference - both between and within societies - is a ‘fundamental condition of the possibility of society.’ He begins by observing that throughout Oceania, ‘local terms for lineages or clans … often more generally mean “kind” in the taxonomic sense’ (Sahlins 2013: 281).⁹ Highlighting some under-emphasised passages of Lévi-Strauss’s *Totemism*, Sahlins (2013: 282) champions the ‘residual’ claim of this work, namely that totemic groups are ‘different social kinds. Indeed biological kinds’ (see also Biersack 1999: 70). He then develops his earlier claims regarding the cosmo-political importance of stranger-kings in Polynesia and Austronesia (Sahlins 1987; 2012), into a more encompassing argument about the constitutive role of externally-sourced objects, persons, and potent substances in social reproduction (Sahlins 2013: 285-291). In effect, Sahlins (2013: 284) subverts his leading argument by ultimately claiming that in the case of Oceania, the different units of one society/culture are achieved out of, and against, primordial similarity. More generally, for Sahlins (2013: 292) relations of difference are ‘invented’ by culture.

This slippage is discernible in light of the work of other scholars who have articulated Sahlins’s observations regarding the socio-biological differences between the ‘totemic’ groups of one society, in their arguments regarding the ontological nature of such units (Descola 2013; Scott 2007b; see also Harrison 2001: 266).¹⁰ In their efforts to excavate the contrasting ontological realities that underpin different societies, both Descola (2013: 145, 264-265) and Scott (2007b: 17) also focus upon observations made by Lévi-Strauss regarding the categorical singularity of

⁹ This phenomenon is also reported in Madagascar (Astuti 1995; Bloch 1971).

¹⁰ Pedersen (2001) and Ingold (2000: *chap. 7*) have also undertaken comparisons of animism and totemism with reference to the ontological assumptions that underpin their respective relational architectures.

the elements of a given totemic system. For Descola (2013: 124) this observation grounds his argument that totemism (newly defined) comprises one of the four ‘ontological matrixes’ that comprise the contrasting generative conditions of all human societies. For Scott (2007b: 12) it signals an affinity between ‘so-called’ totemic systems and the ‘poly-genetic’ cosmogonic conditions that characterise poly-ontological cosmologies. Both scholars argue for the existence of ontological systems that posit the independent coming into being of self-contained ontological categories (Descola 2013: 163; Scott 2007b: 12).¹¹ In both these works, difference is not created, culturally or otherwise. It is posited as (potentially) an essential aspect of the fabric of the universe. This possibility provides the entry-point into my fieldwork data.

In West Gao, all persons belong to one of the three extant matriclans, which early commentators described as ‘totemic,’ each being associated with a species of bird: *Posamogho* (red parrot); *T'havea* (white cockatoo);¹² and *Namerufunei* (eagle) (Bogesi 1948: 214; Allan 1988: 12).¹³ As White (1991: 33) has argued for the adjacent district of Maringe, *kokolo* means, ‘literally “type” or “kind”, connoting common origins or substance.’ In West Gao, *kokolo* identity is received from the mother at birth, remains unaltered through life, and is carried forward into post-mortem existence. Whilst throughout this thesis I use the term *kokolo* interchangeably with the term matriclan, my aim is to show how this purely sociological definition ultimately falls short of capturing the complex relational architecture implied when residents of West Gao enact and perpetuate their *kokolo* identities. Borrowing from Harrison’s (2001: 266) description of totemic sub-clans among the Avitip of Papua New Guinea (PNG), the three *kokolo* in West Gao are best understood as ‘basic categories,’ rather than ‘specifically or even primarily human social

¹¹ In an ethnographic aside that indicates how totemic species can be treated as persons (a situation that Descola (2013: 291) denies, at least insofar as ‘Australian totemism’ is concerned) Sahlins (2013: 293n4) offers his own view on the totemism/animism debate, namely that ‘totemism is a particular social organization of animism.’ A sole focus on social organisation overlooks the significance of differences in *primordial* organisation that can be illuminated through attention to cosmogony.

¹² It appears that in Bugotu and Kia, a further bird totem of this matriclan is the frigate bird (Bogesi 1948: 213).

¹³ W. H. R. Rivers (1914) dedicates a whole chapter to a discussion of totemism in the second volume of *The History of Melanesian Society*. However, with some notable exceptions (Harrison 1990, 2001; Biersack 1999; Mosko 2002), totemism has not been central to the debates that have animated recent Melanesian anthropology.

categories' (see also Scott 2000: 71).¹⁴ A *kokolo* consists of elements that may be distinguished as follows: narratives that trace ancestral histories (*pagusu*) and ancestral genealogies (*susurai*); ritual techniques (*fanitu*); human persons (*nanoni*); and ancestral beings (*na'itu*). Whilst apparently distinct, by virtue of a shared, inherent connection to a discrete territory, these elements are instantiations of the same 'substantive essence' (Descola 2013: 163). Each element comprises an integral aspect of an ontologically-unified entity – a *kokolo*, which, whilst originating in primordial conditions, is nevertheless an animating feature of action in the present.

Due to the inherent relationship between a matriclan and its territory – a relationship that an ethnographer of the matrilineal Lelet of New Ireland, Richard Eves (2011: 352), has described as being one of 'kinship' – sociality in West Gao displays the hallmark characteristics of a wider anthropological theme which, to borrow Hirsch's (1995: 9) apt phrase, traces the 'mutual implication' of land and kinship (see also Allerton 2013; Bamford 2009: 164-168; Gow 1995; Ingold 2000; Leach 2003; Myers 1993; Povinelli 2002b: *chap. 5*; Sahlins 2011a: 4; Stasch 2009). My thesis extends such approaches by exploring how such mutual implication can illuminate the ontological assumptions that underpin a given cosmology. Although Gao speakers no longer uphold relations with their respective matriclan totems, I argue that their cosmology is 'poly-genetic' (Scott 2007b: 17). Attention to cosmogony in West Gao reveals how, in their fusion with particular areas of the landscape, the apical ancestors established the three matriclans as discrete ontological categories. The structure of this cosmology, then, like that of the Arosi described by Scott (2007b), is poly-ontological. Furthermore, it is through activating ancestrally-mediated relationships to the landscape that Gao speakers render explicit the poly-ontological nature of their cosmology.

When viewed as elements that partake of the collective identity of the matriclan as a whole rather than as individual persons (Descola 2013: 298, 304), members of a given matriclan are – as the translation of the term *kokolo* suggests – quite literally, different in kind from those

¹⁴ From this point onward I abbreviate Papua New Guinea to PNG.

persons that partake of the collective identity of a different matriclan (see also Stasch 2009: 28; Sahlins 2011b: 235). The three matriclans in West Gao correspond to three ‘ontological races that, despite considering themselves as utterly different with regard to their essence, substance, and the places to which they are attached, nevertheless adhere to values and norms that render them complementary’ (Descola 2013: 297).¹⁵ The *a priori* existence of three distinct person-territory collectives infuses sociality in West Gao with dynamic that situates relations of difference internal to one society as the generative condition of social reproduction. This thesis engages with the wider debate concerning the social-(re)productivity of difference - also termed ‘the foreign,’ ‘otherness,’ or ‘alterity’ - in Oceania and beyond (Rutherford 2003; Sahlins 2005, 2012, 2013, 2014; Stasch 2009; Viveiros de Castro 1998; 2013).¹⁶ My contribution lies in elevating what has otherwise remained a submerged aspect of such debates, namely that the generative dynamics of relationships of ‘alterity’ can be traced directly to primordial conditions.¹⁷ By highlighting the intersections between cosmogony - in particular the ‘deep-seated’ ontological conditions it instantiates - and praxis in West Gao, I illustrate how ancestrally-mediated relationships rooted in ontological difference are foundational to a lived world that is wholly Christian.¹⁸ This begs a crucial question pertaining to the relationship between descent-based identities and Christianity on Santa Isabel as a whole.

¹⁵ As is the case in other matrilineal societies in the Solomon Islands (Allan 1957: 91), there is ethnographic evidence for Santa Isabel to suggest that members of the three matriclans possess distinct embodied characteristics that render them essentially different kinds of person. The Santa Isabel-born missionary doctor George Bogesi (1948: 214) notes that in Bugotu, women of the three different matriclans express different behavioural attitudes with regard to, and during, sexual intercourse.

¹⁶ I am not referring to the pursuit of ethnographic ‘alterity’ that certain critics have associated with the ‘ontological turn’ in social anthropology (Bessire and Bond 2014: 443). Rather I am contributing to a wider anthropological concern with the value of difference that indigenous actors themselves posit as a fundamental aspect of their lived world.

¹⁷ For example, Stasch (2009: 135-137, 218-219) discusses Korowai myths that mark the necessity to separate animals from the sphere of human kinship, and the origin of the categorical separation of the living and the dead. Viveiros de Castro (2007) provides a nuanced analysis of a state of original multiplicity that characterises certain Amazonian cosmologies. Although she does not frame it in terms of cosmogony, Rutherford’s (2003) engagement with the narrative of Doberok and the myth of Manarmakeri for understanding the constitutive role of ‘the foreign’ in Biak sociality, shares certain features with the approach undertaken in this thesis.

¹⁸ Peter Gow (2001: 26-7) has justified the use of the term ‘lived world’ in the context of his work on myth among the Amazonian Piro. For Gow (2001: 27) the concept captures his ‘search for the system in a state of transformation.’ For me the concept is similarly useful insofar as it implies from the outset the inherently dynamic qualities of the ‘system’ I attempt to trace in this thesis.

Geoffrey White (1991: 133) has argued that projects of social revitalisation throughout Santa Isabel focus upon ‘stories and symbols that contrast the “new” Christian life of the present with the “old” life of the past.’ The dramatic events that occurred during conversion to Anglican Christianity form the centre of such projects (White 1991: 134). During fieldwork, narratives and symbols of the type alluded to by White were certainly a feature of ceremonial church events in West Gao - such as the ordination of a priest.¹⁹ However, their formalised structure, pivoting upon a notion of temporal rupture, does not capture the variety of historical narratives told in less public settings. White (1991: 134) is concerned with collective identities, and as a result, he takes ‘public discourses’ as his analytic focus. Arguably, it is White’s emphasis on collective identities, which lies behind his claim that ‘the range of contexts in which lineage and clan membership *matter* are greatly diminished. The cultural and political significance of descent-based activities have been transformed by processes of Christianisation and colonisation’ (White 1991: 35). Later in the same monograph, however, White (1991: 117) acknowledges that lived realities in Santa Isabel involve a ‘complicated dialectic of descent-based identities and [Christian] village unity’ (see also Scott 2007b: 73n5). Taking such complexities as my starting point, I substitute an ethnographic focus on public discourses for an exploration of private – indeed often secret – narratives and ‘off-stage’ interactions. Such a move is necessary in order to unpack the significance of a phenomena that White (1991: 137) identifies, but leaves largely unexplored, namely the ‘regional particularism, rooted in definitions of lineage and clan ...’ My exploration of the cosmogonic architecture that lends substance to such definitions reveals that in West Gao, the relationship between descent-based identities and Christianity is co-constitutive, rather than a zero-sum game of competing ideological significance.

In the remainder of this introduction, I begin by delineating three aspects of the history of missionisation, discussing how the Anglican Church developed by engaging with, rather than dismissing, indigenous social forms and a pre-existing notion of efficacy. I then explore Santa

¹⁹ See White (2013) for a description of such events in Maringe, the content and form of which is identical to a ceremony for the ordination of a priest in which I participated as a member of Poro Choir in Tatamba (East Gao District) in Spring 2011.

Isabel's position within the British Protectorate, paying specific attention to the administrative interventions in land-person relationships. As indigenous church leaders on Santa Isabel responded to such interventions by protecting and reinforcing customary ways, or *kastom*, they envisaged a pan-island unity that recognised the pre-existing differences given by the matriclan system. Developing this idea, I argue that the emergent relationship between *kastom* and Christianity in West Gao, whilst certainly a matter of history, can also be explained by recourse to cosmogony, in particular the 'processual' nature of autochthony in West Gao. Finally I suggest that attention to cosmogony enables the 'anthropology of ontology' to address 'alterity' in a more nuanced manner than is currently the case. I conclude by offering a detailed chapter summary.

II: The Melanesian Mission

Due to the fact that the Melanesian Mission singlehandedly achieved the Christianization of the entire island, the rapid conversion to Anglicanism on Santa Isabel is considered to be the Melanesian Mission's most glowing success story (Hillard 1978: 89; Kolshus 2007: 303; White 1978: 152, 1991: 92; Whiteman [1983] 2002: 358).²⁰ Three aspects of this success bear directly upon the relationship between descent-based identities and Christianity in West Gao. Firstly, in line with the wider ideological structure of the mission, indigenous actors participated directly in the establishment of the Anglican Church on Santa Isabel (Hillard 1966: 13). Secondly, the resident missionary, Henry Welchman, lived in close proximity to his converts and developed a firm grasp of local institutions. Finally, the eagerness with which both white missionaries and indigenous clergy adopted the concept of *mana* to translate the efficacy of the 'new' religion, facilitated a situation in which emplaced ancestors and the Christian God could be brought into direct relation. In this section, I take up each of these points in more detail.

²⁰Between 2010 and 2012 the majority of West Gao inhabitants belonged to the Anglican Church. The few exceptions were those who originated on other islands and subsequently moved to West Gao as a result of marriage.

George Augustus Selwyn, who was originally handed the see of New Zealand in 1841 (Hillard 1978: 1) and went on to found the Anglican Melanesian Mission, employed a series of pioneering missionary methods. In order to grapple with the obstacles presented by the linguistic diversity, climate, and the ‘fragmented and egalitarian social structure’ of his potential Melanesian converts (Whiteman [1983] 2002: 102), Selwyn rejected the conventional tactics employed by other missions in the Pacific. Rather than relying upon resident European missionaries, Selwyn planned to ‘work through … Melanesian teachers who would Christianize their own communities from within’ (Hillard 1978: 8). The ultimate goal of this ““white corks” upholding a “black net”” policy (Hillard 1978: 10) was to establish a self-sufficient church spearheaded by indigenous agents (Hillard 1966: 13). Central to Selwyn’s project was a Mission ship that would visit the islands, collecting potential converts to be schooled in New Zealand under the guidance of resident European missionaries (Hillard 1966: 14; Whiteman [1983] 2002: 103). When the Auckland winter set in, the boys (or ‘scholars’) were taken back to their homes and instructed to spread their newly-gained knowledge through their communities (Hillard 1978: 9-10).

In 1862 the *Southern Cross* landed on the southern shores of Santa Isabel (Bugotu District), the island that was to form the northern boundary of the mission (Hillard 1966: 19). Whilst the ‘white corks, black net policy’ was certainly successful on Santa Isabel, the rapid adoption of Anglican Christianity by an overwhelming majority of the population is not dissociable from the actions of white missionary Henry Welchman who was – contrary to Selwyn’s original vision - resident on the island from 1890 until his death in 1908 (Hillard 1978: 173-176; E. Wilson 1935).²¹ The Melanesian Mission has been described as ‘unique’ in its accommodating attitude towards indigenous culture (Hillard 1978: 194).²² From its earliest years, the Mission was permeated by the general assumption that ‘Melanesian religion was not mere devilism but a system possessed of religious as well as social significance’ (Hillard 1966: 498; see also

²¹ During this period, ill health forced Welchman to take over two years break from his work (E. Wilson 1935: 61, 90).

²² Similar principles of accommodation, employed by missionaries of the Jesuit Madurai mission in South India have been analysed by Mosse (2007: 106).

Kolshus 2007: 137). Welchman was a unique instantiation of such principles. Hillard (1978: 174) observes that ‘Welchman dreamed of a morally disciplined and totally indigenous church for Santa Isabel in which the islanders, enlightened by the new knowledge of sin and salvation, would retain their old customs and livelihood … with minimal change.’ Directing his work from an indigenous-style house (Hillard 1978: 174), traversing the island’s coastline on his schooner *Ruth* (Hillard 1978: 176), and undertaking challenging treks on foot into the interior (White 1991: 169), throughout his time as a missionary Welchman cultivated a close relationship with the people of Santa Isabel. Despite being a strict disciplinarian and completely unforgiving toward the lingering ‘pagan’ sympathies among his converts (White 1991: 103), Welchman’s death was met with sadness by many on Santa Isabel (E. Wilson 1935: 114-115). In chapter 1, I explore how Welchman generated an alliance with a powerful Bugotu chief – Soga - in order to consolidate the Church’s position. Furthermore, the intimacy that Welchman established with his converts’ ways of life allowed him to have a formative influence on the matriclan system across Santa Isabel, a situation that is central to the analysis undertaken in chapter 4.

Welchman’s missionary success was visible. Hillard (1978: 176) reports that in 1908 ‘with thirty school villages, 1600 baptized and its own clergyman (Hugo Hembala), Santa Isabel was regarded as the “best district” in the Mission.’²³ The success of conversion on Santa Isabel cannot be explained simply by Welchman’s efforts alone however. The type of Anglicanism which he doubtless consolidated on Santa Isabel, had, in fact, already been established as amenable to the island’s inhabitants due to the ‘High Church’ foundations of the Mission. Both Selwyn and John Coleridge Patteson - who assumed management of the Mission in the 1850s (Hillard 1978: 15) - came from High Church families (Hillard 1966: 17, 27).²⁴ By the time Mota had replaced English as the lingua franca of the Mission in 1867, a decision that was followed by the relocation of the central training centre for island ‘scholars’ from Auckland to Norfolk Island (Hillard 1978: 34-35), High Church principles permeated the Mission’s operations. As Hillard observes, at the Norfolk Island school,

²³ Also spelt Hugo Hebala.

²⁴ These High Church beginnings were set to flourish. By the 1920s Anglo-Catholicism had become ‘the dominant religious ideology of the Mission’ (Hillard 1978: 232).

There was a characteristic High Church stress on regular and dignified liturgical worship, for it was to remain a principle of the Mission that the doctrines of the Bible should be interpreted only according to the traditional Christian creeds and forms of prayer. There were holidays on major saints' days, and convivial celebrations of the principal church feasts of Christmas and Easter. (Hillard 1978: 38-39)

Kolshus (2007: 147) argues that 'highlighting the mysteries and gestures in the High Church approach was seen as more compatible with the spiritual beliefs and aesthetic preferences of the potential proselytes.' Such awareness was augmented by the Mission's adoption of Mota language.²⁵ In a more recent historical reflection upon the appropriation and dissemination of *mana* by the Melanesian Mission, Kolshus (2013: 323) argues that Bishop Selwyn and the Melanesian Mission were eager to locate 'concepts related to spiritual power.' Due to their familiarity with the Mota language, a nominalised version of *mana* as 'the substantivized meaning of "a power"' (Kolshus 2013: 323) was part of the linguistic repertoire available to missionaries (see also Kolshus 2007: 253). Furthermore, on Santa Isabel, as elsewhere in Island Melanesia (Kolshus 2007; Taylor 2010; Tomlinson 2006; Toren 1988, 1995) this concept was, according to White (1988: 15), 'assimilated to indigenous notions of *mana*' (emphasis added).

The 'materialization' of Christian power achieved through the deployment of *mana* was presented to Santa Isabel converts in relation to the importance of upholding Christian ritualised practices. Bishop of the Melanesian Mission from 1894, Cecil Wilson (1895: 2) reports, 'I confirmed twenty-six candidates [in Bugotu], and spoke to them ... on the secret of retaining the *mana* (power) they had just received - regular prayer, self-examination, and confession, Bible-reading, and Holy Communion.' Missionaries situated the Christian power as susceptible to loss if the correct ritual practices were not followed. Santa Isabel converts were being given sentences of excommunication by missionary Henry Welchman during the 1890s (Hillard 1978: 235). Ideas surrounding the accumulation and retention of Christian *mana* go some way towards explaining the enthusiasm for Holy Communion on Santa Isabel that is documented by Bishop Cecil Wilson (1902: 4) and, over seventy years later, by White (1978: 186-187). The words of a

²⁵ As Pickering (1991: 68-71) notes, Anglo-Catholics in general adopted missionisation strategies that were closely aligned to Catholic methodologies.

Maringe Priest in the latter part of the twentieth century documented by White (1991: 107) provide further evidence for this, ‘Jesus Christ, his body his blood, come to help you on this morning. This is our shrine … It is just one name for us to receive *mana*’ (emphasis added; cf. Taylor 2010: 435). In sum, on Santa Isabel, as elsewhere in Island Melanesia, the articulation of High Church ideologies with a local notion of ‘sacred power’ was central to the Mission’s operations and became a key feature of indigenous Anglicanism on Santa Isabel.

The kind of Anglicanism typical of Santa Isabel is revealed through a brief overview of an Anglican Religious Order – The Melanesian Brotherhood. Established in 1925 by a Solomon Islander from Guadalcanal Province, the purpose of the Melanesian Brotherhood, *Ira Tatasiu*, was to undertake missionary work among heathen peoples (Hillard 1978: 229; Kolshus 2007: 151). Replicating a phenomenon reported elsewhere in the Solomon Islands and Island Melanesia (Jones 2008: 95-99; Kolshus 2007: 261; Taylor 2010: 436-437), throughout Santa Isabel today Tasiu (as they are colloquially called in Anglican Melanesia) are considered men of extreme Christian *mana* (see also Whiteman [1983] 2002: 195).²⁶ This is due to the rigour of their Christian existence as members of the order, which involves not only adhering to the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, but also strict daily routines of prayer. Kolshus (2007: 151) argues that Tasiu are possessed of a *mana* deemed to be exceptionally potent due to their ‘close association with the Bishop,’ an observation that would also hold true for Santa Isabel. And yet, such proximity to the formal ecclesiastical hierarchy must be understood alongside the Tasiu’s independence from such structures.

Echoing the Mission’s emphasis upon native agency within the church, the idea behind the founding of the Brotherhood was to fulfil a ‘Melanesian aspiration for an indigenous vehicle for Christianity outside the European-dominated framework of the Mission’ (Hillard 1978: 229). Displaying the continued vitality of this aspiration, each province in the Solomon Islands is home to a number of ‘households’ where Tasiu are posted. These ‘households’ organise missions varying in both size and purpose, during which teams of Tasiu undertake tours of rural

²⁶ Tasiu means ‘same sex sibling’ in Mota (Kolshus 2007: 151n15).

areas. These missions involve the confrontation of ancestral agency and the continued use of sorcery within Christian communities, a methodology, which, as noted by Carter (2003: 342), ‘the Brotherhood calls “clearance.”’ In channelling their *mana* toward the distant, and perhaps darker, corners of Anglican congregations, the Tasiu are a religious order governed by what might be called ‘applied Anglicanism.’ This emphasis on application is necessary only insofar as it is elicited by the continuing reality of ancestral and non-Christian agency within the quotidian environments that comprise the focus of the brothers’ spiritual methodologies. Indigenous ‘brokers’ of Christianity elsewhere in Melanesia, such as the young Urapmin (PNG) pastors, evangelists and deacons described by Robbins (2004: 153), derive authority from an ability to reinforce the divide between Christian interpretations of events and traditional ways of thinking. In contrast, the ‘authority’ of the Tasiu, in West Gao at least, is based on their successful interventions in a lived world shaped by the interpenetration of Christian and ancestral forms of efficacy and influence.

To summarise, the Anglican Church on Santa Isabel – now part of the independent Anglican Church of Melanesia - involves a unique combination of strict adherence to ancient Christian doctrine and culturally-specific elaborations of ritual institutions.²⁷ As epitomised in the operations of the Tasiu, at the centre of this synthesis was the concept of *mana*. The overt materialisation of Christian sacred power through the use of this concept renders Anglicanism on Santa Isabel starkly different from a more austere version of Protestantism, with its anxious and often paradoxical attempts - traceable to Calvinism - to liberate religious devotion from the trappings of materiality (Keane 2007). More importantly for this thesis, however, is the extent to which the concept of *mana* draws emplaced ancestors and the Christian God into a shared relational field. As discussed in chapter 1, direct relationships between God and the ancestors, mediated by the ritual channelling of *mana* by agents of the Anglican Church, allowed conversion to Christianity to reinforce rather than erase the ancestrally-mediated relationships between persons and particular territories in West Gao.

²⁷ The Church of Melanesia was recognised as an independent ecclesiastical province in 1975.

However, if such relationships were to remain robust as ontological categories, their unifying substrate had to remain equally undisturbed. The particular territories to which they inhered had to remain intact not only in the face of conversion, but in spite of the political and economic transformations wrought by British colonialism. In the next section, I provide a sketch of colonial administration, with specific attention to issues of land tenure. In the case of Santa Isabel, the salience of Anglicanism operated to mitigate wider socio-historical transformations in land-person relationships and encourage the development of grass-roots institutions in response to the dramatic changes of the twentieth century.

III. British administration and land tenure

The export of coconut oil from the Pacific, driven by the demands of the industrial revolution in Europe and America, was well established by the 1860s. However, it was not until the decision was made to process copra in Europe, which led to the export of dry kernel, that intensive copra production began to take hold - a decade later - throughout the Solomon Islands (Bennett 1987: 47). Alongside this rise in copra exportation, the archipelago also became a major source of labour for the plantations dotted across Britain's colonies in Australia and the Pacific (Bennett 1987: 103). In order to consolidate this labour pool the Solomon Islands was declared a British protectorate in 1893 (Bennett 1987: 106).²⁸ The need to generate internal revenue for the new colony was satisfied by the development of local coconut plantations,²⁹ a process that began in 1905 after gradual pacification paved the way for land alienation (Bennett 1987: 106).³⁰ In West Gao there was a noticeable absence of discourses regarding the alienation of land during colonialism.³¹ This can be linked to the fact that the early years of colonialism on Santa Isabel

²⁸Santa Isabel was not brought under the British Protectorate until 1901 (White 1988: 18).

²⁹ By 1915 there were 147 plantations across the Solomon Islands (Bennett: 1987: 158).

³⁰ Scott (2007b: 100-103, 113-115) and Akin (2013: 187-188) have discussed the appropriation of uninhabited areas of land ('waste land' as it was disingenuously termed by the Europeans) on Makira and Malaita respectively. Both scholars link fears regarding the appropriation of land by foreigners to the huge coastal settlements established during the anti-colonial movement *Maasina* Rule (Akin 2013: 187-188; Scott 2007b: 113-115).

³¹ Some West Gao residents did express interest (and at least one chief was actively involved with High Court proceedings) in claiming indigenous ownership over Fera - an offshore island in Maringe District where the airstrip is located. Fera was leased, early in the twentieth century, to a Chinese national named James Wong.

were dominated by the operations of the Mission and the independent establishment of local trading networks by the new converts.

Because the Melanesian Mission was so successful at securing a firm hold upon the inhabitants of Santa Isabel, the British colonial government assumed a stance of non-interference toward this part of the Protectorate: it was not until 1918 - seventeen years after Santa Isabel had been annexed by the British from German control - that a government station was established on the island (Hillard 1978: 279). This independence was also facilitated by the fact that Santa Isabel was rich in the natural resources desired by international traders, and its inhabitants were quick to exploit this advantage, establishing both internal and external trading networks (Bennett 1987: 250). This meant that, unlike other provinces, particularly Malaita (Akin 2013; Burt 1994b), there was little incentive for young men from Santa Isabel to seek employment on plantations (Hilliard 1978: 280). Rather, in order to pay the controversial head tax, introduced in 1921/2, and gain access to Western goods, people in coastal Isabel relied upon local trading networks, accessing money through the sale of copra, trochus-shell, and bêche-de-mer (Hillard 1978: 281).³²

Despite the necessity of land and marine-based resources for its internal revenue, the British Protectorate waited over 50 years before formally intervening in customary tenure. It was not until 1942 that official recognition was given to local councils and native courts. This intervention was part of wider shifts in the administration that occurred after the Second World War. Firstly, during this period there was a turn toward an ideology of indirect rule (Akin 2013: 130; Hillard 1966: 225; Tiffany 1983: 277-278). Secondly, changes in policy were undertaken to quell anti-colonial sentiment among local populations that culminated in the post-war resistance movement, *Maasina* Rule (Akin 2013: 156-157).³³ On Santa Isabel, locally-run

³² Trading networks were dominated by coastal dwellers rather than inhabitants of the rugged interior (White 1991: 87-88). By 1937 there were 52 trading stores operated by local licensees (Hillard 1978: 281).

³³ Although this anti-colonial movement originated on Santa Isabel (Akin 2013: 9, 102-105; Scott 2007b: 106-108) it did not reach the proportions that it was to assume on Makira (Scott 2007b: *chap. 3*) and Malaita (Akin 2013; Burt 1994b; Keesing 1992). *Maasina* Rule on Santa Isabel consisted of only a

courts had been noted by colonial agents from the early years of the Protectorate (White 1991: 199). As has been noted for the Solomon Islands in general (Tiffany 1983: 279) and more recently with particular reference to Malaita Province (Akin 2013: 156), these native courts played a key role in selectively codifying and reifying native ‘customs,’ particularly those related to land.

Across the Solomon Islands ethnographers have documented the relationship between descent groups and discrete territories as being one of mutual interdependence (Hviding 1996: 132) or ontological unity (McDougall n.d.: *chap.* 5; Scott 2000: 60; 2007b: 74). Daniel de Coppet (1985: 89) set the tone for such analyses by arguing that among the Are’Are speakers of Malaita, a concept of land ownership is encompassed by a higher value - central to the cosmological system, namely that ‘land owns people.’ The agency of humans with regard to the landscape operates with constant reference to deceased ancestors that are ‘fused’ with the landscape (Coppet 1985: 81). These notions of ancestrally-mediated emplacement form the basis of a flexible and inclusive system of land and marine tenure: rights in garden land and lagoon access are inherited as a result of one’s membership within a particular lineage, or can be negotiated through illustrating different kin relations to landholding descent groups (Burt 1994a: 319; Foale and Macintyre 2000; Hviding 1996, 2003; Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000: 80-81). This fluid conception of resource-use has been consistently threatened by the need to demarcate discrete and exclusive ownership of land. Such needs were fuelled by: the appropriation of land by traders and planters during the early colonial period (Burt 1994a: 331; Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000: 79); the re-definition of land as a source of financial revenue with the influx of logging companies in the late twentieth century (Bennett 2000; Hviding and Bayliss-Smith 2000; McDougall n.d.: *chap.* 6) and, most recently, as land has become the basis of local

handful of meetings, which, although well-received, were confined to Hograno District and quickly dissipated after the arrest of their organiser, a Cheke Holo man named Zalamana (White 1991: 200-202). The adoption of a new religion, coupled with their economic self-sufficiency, had inculcated in Santa Isabel inhabitants aspirations for higher standards of living. Historical records suggest that anti-colonial sentiment among Santa Isabel inhabitants (expressed as early as 1931) was rooted in a growing dissatisfaction over the lack of secular education in English and other trade-based skills that the Mission, although by this time well established, had failed to provide (Hillard 1978: 281). The mission did respond, albeit tentatively, to such concerns. By 1941 there were five district boarding schools on Santa Isabel that taught rudimentary English to male students (Hillard 1966: 213, 213n2).

provision for tourism (Foale and Macintyre 2000; Hvding and Bayliss-Smith 2000).³⁴ Despite such trends, between 2010 and 2012 in West Gao, a complete absence of logging and mining, meant that all land in West Gao was, during fieldwork, controlled by indigenous landowners who belong to one of the three matriclans.³⁵

Due to a series of reforms and reports undertaken by the British administration in the 1960s and 1970s prior to independence in 1978 (Burt 1994a: 331-332; Tiffany 1983), in the contemporary Solomon Islands ‘... customary rules of property ownership and land transfer are enshrined in state law’ (Foale and Macintyre 2000: 43n2). The existence, for over six decades, of officially-recognised native courts means that in contemporary land disputes across the Solomon Islands, cases are constructed on the basis of knowledge (including records of feasting practices, genealogical information, *tabu* sites, and origin narratives) concerning the ancestral significance of land tracts (Berg 2008: 138; Foale and Macintyre 2000: 38; Hvding 1996: 266; Scott 2007b: 167; White 1993). Yet opposite processes, where descent-based terminology such as ‘line’, ‘tribe’, and ‘clan’ (Tiffany 1983: 276-277; White 1993) and distinctions between ‘primary’ and ‘secondary rights’ (Burt 1994a: 331; Foale and Macintyre 2000; McDougall n.d.: *chap.* 5) have been introduced by colonial legal structures, must also be recognised.

Whilst the overtly matrilineal system on Santa Isabel did not present colonial administrators with the same ‘problems’ as those areas of the Solomon Islands where bilateral systems prevailed (Berg 2008: 139; Burt 1994a: 331; Foale and Macintyre 2000: 30), the administration’s intervention in the local court system undoubtedly reified customs relating to land-person relations in a legal straitjacket that may not reflect the nuances of praxis (Berg 2008: 139; Foale and Macintyre 2000; Tiffany 1983: 279). In the Solomon Islands, as elsewhere, indigenous populations have been forced to undertake violent translations of their

³⁴ For a general review of these issues in Papua New Guinea and the Pacific region as a whole see A. Strathern and Stewart (1998).

³⁵ The land on which the large government primary school at Poro was located – known as ‘Mission Land’ - is an exception to this. The establishment of the school is discussed in chapter 2. That land in West Gao is predominantly controlled by indigenous landowners reflects the situation throughout the Solomon Islands where ‘... 87% of land is held under customary ownership’ (Foale and Macintyre 2000: 43n1; see also Berg 2008: 137).

intimate relationships with the landscape into epistemic and representational forms – such as genealogical diagrams - that are ‘recognisable’ by the state legal apparatus (Hviding 1996, 2003; Povinelli 2002a, 2002b: *chap. 5*; Ingold 2000: 133, 151). However, assuming a critical stance toward the ‘genealogical paradigm’ and its concomitant ontological assumptions (Bamford and Leach 2009: 14-15; Ingold 2007: 114-115, 2009) should not lead us to ignore the spatio-temporal poetics of ‘descent’ within indigenous models of inter-generational continuity (cf. Thomas 2009). A concern with genealogy in West Gao does not lead to the positing of persons - as nodes in trans-generational flow - as ontologically-bounded entities. As explored in chapter 5, when tracing kinship relations backwards in time (*susurai*), and utilising an indigenous notion of descent (*posa*), Gao speakers enact a particular form of relatedness that is contingent upon the different spatio-temporal capacities attributed to ‘blood’ derived from different gendered sources and emphasise the constitutive role of movement through place in the generation of ‘descent-based’ identities.³⁶

Emphasising that land in West Gao remains in the control of indigenous landowners, and highlighting the tenacity of local models of inter-generational continuity in the face of sustained contact with colonial administrative interventions, is not to deny the role of historical transformations. One of the main aims of this thesis to trace how specific historical processes – such as conversion to Christianity and the increasing importance of land as a source of monetary wealth – intersect with longstanding cosmogonic dynamics to produce a particular set of tensions that animated land-person relationships in West Gao between 2010 and 2012. My argument pivots on the fact that the three matriclans in West Gao are differentiated into constituent matrilineages (sng. *t’hi’ā*) that replicate the matriclan on a reduced spatio-temporal scale: the generational depth and geographical scope of a matrilineage is shallower and narrower respectively. These spatio-temporally condensed units do not correspond to discrete categories. Rather, as discussed in chapter 4, they are encompassed by categorical similarity or

³⁶ Whilst such notions are a specific ethnographic example of Ingold’s (2000: 133) general claim that ‘genealogical thinking’ can occur ‘within a context of a relational approach to the generation of knowledge and substance,’ as argued in chapters 4 and 5, genealogical thinking in West Gao is most accurately analysed as involving relational flow that is confined to an intra-category register (see section V below).

‘identity’ at the level of the exogamous matriclan (*kokolo*). However, matrilineages are often the units mentioned in matters of land and property. Tracing the relationship between these two land-controlling units is central to the guiding claim of this thesis, namely that matrilineal ‘descent’, when analysed as an instantiation of a poly-ontological cosmology, can itself engender the pattern of historical transformations, even as such transformations can have consequences for the ontological structuring of the West Gao lived world (see also Scott 2007b: 20).

Whilst it is clear that for certain Santa Isabel inhabitants, descent and conception are inflected by knowledge of Christian texts (White 1991: 34), the strength of the island-wide Anglican Church also led to a level of autonomy with regard to indigenous concepts of land and ancestry. The latter claim is embodied in the late Paramount Chief and Anglican Bishop, Sir Dudley Tuti, whose life-long project was to ensure his home island’s political and economic ‘development’ moved forward on its own, albeit at this stage, wholly Christian terms (see also Akin 2013: 344). Born in 1919, Dudley Tuti, was educated in Anglican mission schools on Nggela, Guadalcanal and in New Zealand. Between 1945 and 1950 he was headmaster of the first ‘autonomous’ schools on Santa Isabel (run by neither church nor government) in his home region, Kia (White 1991: 214-216). Leaving Kia for the second time to train for the priesthood, again in New Zealand, he was eventually ordained in 1954, and returned to Kia to work as District Priest and Rural Dean for the entire island of Santa Isabel, work which led to his ordination as Bishop in 1963 (White 1991: 216-217). In July 1975, Tuti was ‘anointed’ as Paramount Chief of Santa Isabel (White 1991: 1, 209-240, 1992).³⁷

Tuti was deeply embroiled in the political-economy of development on Santa Isabel, establishing and promoting the locally-initiated Isabel Development Company (IDC) in the 1970s (White 1991: 25, 217). The IDC remains a robust organisation, responsible for running three cargo and passenger vessels, one of which – the *Estrella* – brought me to West Gao in

³⁷ Dudley Tuti was knighted in 1988 by Queen Elizabeth II (White 1991: 217). He died in early 2006 - see White (2006) for an obituary.

2010. Tuti also established the island-wide Isabel Council of Chiefs (ICC) in the 1980s to ensure that land disputes, largely instigated by ‘commercial development’ (White 1991: 237), were mitigated according to custom (SIP, *kastom*).³⁸ The ICC also sought official recognition for traditional modes of authority, which it achieved in 1984 when members of the Council of Chiefs were included as appointed members in meetings of the Isabel provincial assembly (White 1991: 238).³⁹

As Bishop and Paramount Chief of Santa Isabel, Tuti was influential throughout the island, and living testament to the productivity of aligning a single church and single chieftainship in Santa Isabel (White 1991: 219). Indeed, the idea of paramount chieftainship on Santa Isabel emerged as a result of conversion to Christianity, particularly the rise to island-wide dominance of a local chief, Soga, through his collaboration with the Melanesian Mission (White 1992: 81). However, it is significant that in the original plans for the office, outlined by Willie Betu, it was stated that the paramount chief should be selected from one of the ‘three “great chiefs,” each of whom would represent one of the three major clans of the island’ (White 1992: 85). Although the plan never materialised, it indicates the deep association between *kastom*, chieftainship, and the ‘triadic’ matriclan system. During his time as Paramount Chief, Tuti encouraged land demarcation at the level of the matriclan, or *kokolo*, throughout Santa Isabel.⁴⁰ His efforts were no doubt facilitated by his publicly-voiced assertions that land was responsible for separating (as opposed to unifying) people in Santa Isabel (White 1991: 235). However, comparisons with similar projects occurring elsewhere in the Solomon Islands suggest that church-led activities geared towards consolidating land-person relationships in the name of a unified *kastom* can take different trajectories.

According to Burt (1982: 393-394), the 1970s witnessed a renewed interest in the tracing of tribal origins and the demarcation of ancestral territories among the Kwara’ae of Malaita as part

³⁸ Tuti also monitored logging proposals from international companies (Bennet 2000: 292; White 2006).

³⁹ This provincial-level political recognition of chiefly authority was later enforced across the Solomon Islands. White (1992: 75) reports, ‘in 1985 the parliament passed an amendment to the Local Courts Act that expanded the powers of chiefs to act as magistrates in land disputes.’

⁴⁰ The ultimate failure of these efforts in West Gao is explored in chapter 2.

of a surge of activities related to the codification of *kastom*. A central facet of this project was the election of fifteen ‘paramount chiefs’ to ‘represent the major lineage’ groups of eastern and western Kwara’ae (Burt 1982: 393; emphasis removed). Interestingly, one of the key actors involved in orchestrating such activities was an indigenous priest – Reverend Arnon Wadili – who, like Tuti, had received overseas training as a minister of the Melanesian Mission (Burt 1982: 393). As we have seen, in West Gao, ideas of paramount chieftainship and efforts at land demarcation focused upon the specificity of the three matriclans. In contrast to this, the Kwara’ae projects involved efforts to trace the single origin - from one ‘first’ ancestor - of all Kwara’ae people, and even the entire population of Malaita (Burt 1982: 396, 398). This difference is significant because it illustrates the extent to which *kastom* in Santa Isabel, even when located at the centre of Christian-led, unity-seeking projects, *recognises* rather than seeks to overcome divisions between differently ‘emplaced’ collectives (matriclans). The Kwara’ae projects centred upon the figure of their ‘first ancestor’ who, not incidentally, was posited to have arrived from Asia ‘on a raft called Ark’ (Burt 1982: 374). This suggests that the relationship between Christianity and *kastom* can be further illuminated by attention to the activities of the apical ancestors, that is, to cosmogony.

IV. *Kastom* and cosmogony

On my first evening in West Gao, the communal sandy areas were over-run with children, running through the lengthening shadows and filling the air with their laughter. I noticed one child pluck a young sprig (*fusu*) of a tree (*gau sisiri*) and tuck it behind the ear of a younger child she was carrying. My adoptive brother, Caspar, described this act as a “customary way from the past” (SIP, *kastom from bifoa kam*), adding that dusk was a time associated with a sea-faring being (*na’itu kholo*; SIP, *devol long si*).⁴¹ Caspar explained that an encounter with this being would induce a dangerous vomiting sickness requiring immediate treatment by ritual techniques (*fanitu*). The leaf was a measure taken to prevent such an encounter. Our conversation was overheard by my adoptive father, Chief Paul Fafale, who interjected that some

⁴¹ A Makiran representation of this sea-faring being can be found on the Solomon Islands 10 cent coin.

people had cut these trees down to clear space in hamlets, but he had preserved one in order to “educate” his homestay visitors about *kastom*.

In this vignette, the *gau sisiri* tree both ‘represents’ a body of knowledge – *kastom* – and provides protection from a dangerous being that remains an active element of the West Gao land and seascape. As such, it illustrates that the capacity to objectify *kastom* does not necessarily undermine the fact that enacting *kastom* can be a matter of existential necessity. Chief Paul’s comment signals the importance of processes of objectification outlined in literature concerned with the relationship between *kastom* and the ‘invention of tradition’ (Akin 2004; Jolly 1992; Keesing and Tonkinson 1982; Lindstrom 2008; Lindstrom and White 1993). As illustrated in the previous section and explored further in chapter 6, chiefly authority in West Gao is in many ways predicated upon a historically-situated ability to assess *kastom* from the ‘outside’. Over a year later, however, Chief Paul revealed how this external ‘position’ must, on certain occasions, be reversed. As I was preparing to interview a man renowned for his knowledge of *kastom*, Chief Paul advised that under no circumstances should I “ask about *kastom*,” adding that I would not receive the kind of information I wanted, but only comments about the loss of *kastom* and the ignorance of contemporary people in comparison to the “old men of before.” Here the object of my knowledge (*kastom*) was accessible only by way of a silent negation of that relation of objectification. I would learn only if I ceased to ask for knowledge ‘about’ *kastom* and rather let *kastom* speak for itself (cf. Favret-Saada 1980: 16).

Tracing the ways in which my research participants spoke about *kastom* unprompted, the concept was frequently used interchangeably with an indigenous term – *noilaghi*, meaning power or efficacy (see also Scott 2011: 198).⁴² As elsewhere in Santa Isabel, in West Gao *noilaghi* is, in turn, used interchangeably with the term *mana*. As suggested above, *mana* also

⁴² *Noilaghi* is also associated with the phrase ‘*nafugna*’. Echoing similar pan-Austronesian botanical idioms (J. Fox 1996a: 5-9), *nafugna* literally means ‘the base of a tree’, but is used idiomatically to refer to ‘a foundation’, or ‘underlying cause’ (see also White 1991: 244). This further indicates the links between ideas of ‘efficacy’ and notions of ultimate origins. Indeed, when tracing ancestral histories in West Gao I was repeatedly encouraged to search for the “beginnings” of particular narratives and not be satisfied with incomplete or partial renditions.

refers to Christian potency secured by ritual means. White (1978: 116) describes these terms as meaning ‘generalized supernatural power … or personal efficacy.’ However, as Sahlins (2012: 139) observes, the term supernatural is not always applicable to ‘peoples who are engaged in a cosmic society of interacting subjects, including a variety of non-human beings with consciousness, soul, intentionality, and other qualities of human persons.’ Consequently, I suggest that the semantic links between the terms *mana*, *noilaghi*, and *kastom* are best captured by the notion of ‘efficacy’ (see also Toren 1988: 704, 1995: 166).⁴³ According to my research participants, *mana* or *noilaghi* (and therefore *kastom*) is known only by its effects, and indeed, it must be repeatedly put into effect (used, enacted, channelled) if it is to remain potent.⁴⁴ This situation mirrors the nature of efficacy when traced solely with reference to its ancestral origins, that is, to cosmogony.

As is the case among the Arosi of Makira (Scott 2007b: 13, 201) and for Ranongga, western Solomon Islands (McDougall 2004: 204, 206, n.d.: *chap.* 3), with regard to the origins of the three extant matriclans, Gao speakers tell no encompassing narrative that accounts for a shared state of coming into being. Rather, independently narrated origin stories tell of different groups of apical ancestors arriving at different times upon the shores of Santa Isabel and existing in isolation in different areas of the island. These groups of apical ancestors comprise, in their quasi-human isolated state, efficacy (*noilaghi*, *mana*, *kastom*) in its most potent form. However, this state is ultimately discontinuous. The ancestors must break out of their isolated state and forge relations with ‘other’ groups in order for the potency they instantiate to be reproduced through time. The association between efficacy, albeit discontinuous, and the primordial isolation of different categories of being indicates an extent to which *kastom* in West Gao, as a synonym for such efficacy, is also conceived of as plural. West Gao residents frequently spoke of a certain *kastom* as the property of a particular matriclan (*kokolo*) and/or matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*). When discussing a particular ritual technique people might say, somewhat proudly: “*fanitu tuae*

⁴³ The use of power here must be distinguished from physical strength for which West Gao people use a different term – *hneta*. Certain Gao speakers also describe Western medicines such as aspirin as ‘*mana*’.

⁴⁴ This directly echoes Toren’s (1988) early observations on Fijian ritual and tradition as historical process. As in Fiji, *kastom* in West Gao is remade and constituted in action (Toren 1988: 713).

nomi gheati”- that ritual technique belongs to us (cf. Mosko 2002). More than simply belonging to different people, however, *kastom* also belongs to different places. As explored in chapter 3, failing to follow the *kastom* of a particular place, by not seeking out the person with the correct ritual knowledge corresponding to that place, carries an existential risk.

This notion of *kastom* ‘belonging’ to persons and places obscures the extent to which such plurally-conceived ‘*kastoms*’ can be an instantiation of Scott’s (2011: 197) argument regarding Makira (southeastern Solomon Islands), in which *kastom* is defined as ‘an essential quality intrinsic to a … category of being.’ Understood in this way, different *kastoms* in West Gao are intrinsic to the relationships, inherent to a given territory, that form the ontological unity of a given matriclan. There remains, however, a key difference between the Arosi speakers analysed by Scott (2000, 2007a, 2007b, 2008, 2011) and Gao speakers. The latter do not possess a term that corresponds to the Arosi term ‘*auhenua*,’ the primary definition of which is: ‘autochthonous’ or ‘essentially and irrevocably of a place’ (Scott 2007b: 327). Rather, similar to the second meaning of *auhenua* outlined by Scott (2007b: 7) as pertaining to ‘the achieved condition of connection between a particular matrilineage and its territory established through the deeds and deaths of its ancestors,’ Gao speakers emphasise a notion of processual rather than outright autochthony.⁴⁵ Indeed, the apical ancestors of the three matriclans are explicitly described as ‘arriving’ on Santa Isabel from elsewhere. *Kastom* in West Gao is rooted in a dynamic of becoming enfolded into place rather than, as is the case in cosmogonic myths elsewhere in Island Melanesia, literal emergence from the earth, or from autochthonous beings who are already located in place (Bonnemaison 1994: 122-123; Scott 2007b: 139-141, 164; Weiner 1988: 93).⁴⁶ As explored in chapter 4, under the right cosmogonic conditions autochthony-as-process can engender essential differences between categories and thus form the

⁴⁵ I owe this term to Michael Scott, who suggested that it captured more effectively a state that I had initially termed ‘partial autochthony’.

⁴⁶ Arguably, an analogous ethnographic example of what I am calling ‘processual autochthony’ in West Gao, is found in McWilliam’s (2011) discussion of the Fataluku speaking peoples of Lautem, far Eastern Timor. Although the ancestors of the multiple origin-houses (*ratu*) that make up Fataluku society are said to have arrived from overseas, through long-term ritual engagements senior landowning groups and the wild, autochthonous forces that pre-exist their arrival become ‘mutually … consubstantiated’ (McWilliam 2011: 70).

basis of a poly-ontological cosmology. This notion of autochthony-as-process has consequences for understanding the nuances of discourses of *kastom* in West Gao.

Commenting on the ethical dispositions of the “old men of before” with regard to landownership, my friend Jone explained, “Those who owned the land, they wouldn’t talk about that ownership. They remained silent. It did not matter that they were heathen, these old men understood a lot. They knew that the land did not belong to you and me but that it belonged to God.” This comment was uttered in a conversational context that sought to express a disjuncture between contemporary existence and the wisdom of ancestors. Dissatisfied with contemporary movements toward land and property disputes, the speaker presented his ancestors’ way of doing things as being more ethically-sound than current Christian life (cf. McDougall n.d.: *chap. 5*). It has been noted throughout the Solomon Islands that, when juxtaposed with external market forces, ancestral ways (*kastom*) and Christianity are seen to share certain ethical principles (McDougall 2004: 7, 46; White 1991: 127). However, this observation should mark the starting point, not the end point of our analyses. As Bruce Kapferer (2002: 20) has noted with regard to ‘tradition,’ which, like *kastom*, is a thoroughly ‘modern concept,’ it is also necessary to acknowledge ‘the structural dynamics’ of the cosmology in question. Kapferer’s ‘structural dynamics’, I contend, are accessible through attention to cosmogony. In West Gao, claims regarding ‘heathen’ ancestors’ knowledge of God’s ultimate ownership of their land become particularly compelling given the predominance of a cosmogonic logic of processual autochthony. This was emphasised to me when another man commented, confidentially, that fighting over land was “funny” because “maybe we all came from elsewhere, from another island or another place.” Contemporary landowners who sought to make evident other people’s arrival-based relationship to a territory, not only acted in an un-Christian manner, they also revealed their own ignorance of the arrival-based origins that underpinned the apical ancestors’ relationship to the landscape. Such persons, although cognisant of God, have forgotten what the ignorant ‘heathen’ ancestors already knew: nobody ‘owns’ the land, one merely becomes organically-emplaced through succumbing to transformative processes and undergoing transformative acts in a pre-existing landscape.

Throughout this thesis, I seek to temper White's (1991: 247) claim regarding statements by Santa Isabel Christians that seek to 'locate Christianity "behind" the indigenous' are analysable simply as 'rhetorical strategies.' Whilst such discursive strategies are important, I argue that the relationship between the indigenous and the Christian in West Gao is also located in particular cosmological configurations that make efficacious, and ethical, action possible (see also Toren 1988). As noted by Kapferer (2002: 20), 'some practices which do have historical depth, even because of them, possess internal dynamics that make them always already modern' (see also Gow 2007: 237; Rutherford 2003: 18-20, 2007: 264). Taking up Kapferer's compelling assertion, I suggest that when pursued in a cosmological and existential register, *kastom* concerns the internal relations of 'efficacy' that exist between persons - living and dead, ancestral and divine - and particular localities. As I will illustrate in various ways throughout this thesis, conversion to Christianity in West Gao has engendered a situation in which the ontologically plural field of relationship implied by *kastom* can be actively perpetuated. Ultimately, it is attention to cosmogony that lends analytical momentum to this statement. In the next section I explore how this concept clarifies my contribution to, on the one hand, debates surrounding 'internal alterity', and on the other, current controversies surrounding anthropological engagements with 'ontology'.

V: Ontology, alterity and cosmogony

In Rupert Stasch (2009: 11) terminology, 'internal alterity' refers to relationships of fundamental difference that form an essential part of sociality (cf. Rutherford 2003: 145). I develop this notion of 'internal alterity' through recourse to debates that are currently animating an emerging subfield of anthropological investigation, namely the 'anthropology of ontology' (Scott 2007b, 2013).

According to Michael Scott (2014a) the new challenge faced by the anthropology of ontology is one of 'recognizing and analyzing [sic] different differences.' This statement is part of Scott's (2013, 2014a, 2014b) ongoing critical engagement with the anthropology of ontology. Despite

its overt commitment to ‘alterity’, this area of anthropological scholarship displays, according to Scott (2014a), a propensity to consign all non-westerners to singular mode of being.⁴⁷ Whilst noting that ‘the anthropological study of ontology is not a unified subfield,’ (Scott 2013: 859), Scott (2013: 861-863) traces a recurrent theme in the work of certain ontologically-minded scholars that hinges upon a distinction between a Western modernist ontology - exemplified in Cartesian dualism – and its non-Western anti-thesis, ‘relational non-dualism.’ From the perspective of relational non-dualism, ‘alterity’ amounts to no more than a radical inversion of ‘Western’ ontology (Scott 2014a, 2014b).

Certain writings of Tim Ingold (e.g. 2009, 2011) are exemplary in this regard. For example, his ‘logic of inversion,’ presents us with the unattractive choice of either existing in a positive, ‘open’ state of inhabiting an ‘animic world’ comprised of an expansive relational field, or, subscribing to a Western/modern/scientific way of negative being, in which existence advances by way of occupying the world, forever closed off from participation in its relational affordances (Ingold 2011: 68, 145).⁴⁸ In chapter 3, I argue that Ingold’s approach is inappropriate for the analysis of personhood and movement in West Gao. This is because the West Gao lived world, whilst undoubtedly displaying relational characteristics, is not an ‘animist’ world of continual becoming (cf. Descola 2013: 332-333). The West Gao lived world is as much based upon the fixity of essences as on the transformative capacities of relations. This may strike the reader as surprising given that Melanesia is a part of the world that is closely associated with hyper-relationality of the kind Ingold celebrates, a fact that can be linked to the work of Marilyn Strathern.

In her excavation of the ‘metaphysical problems’ addressed by Melanesians (in comparison to Euro-Americans), Strathern set in motion what Sahlins (2012: 132) might term a ‘paradigm

⁴⁷ Scott is not alone in adopting a critical stance toward engagements with ontology in anthropology. Certain commentators have noted that in their efforts to move the critical capacity of anthropology into a post-epistemological era (see e.g., Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007; Holbraad 2012), certain scholars have pursued their ontological theorising so far as to leave people (and therefore ethnography) behind (Fontein 2011; Killick 2014).

⁴⁸ Ingold’s earlier writings, however, depict a more nuanced picture of possible worlds. In an intriguing comparison of totemism and animism he claims, ‘the totemic world is essential, the animic world dialogical’ (2000: 114).

shift' in Melanesian anthropology. The genius of Strathern's systematic destruction of the opposition between 'individual' and 'society' lay in bringing Marriott's notion of the 'dividual' person (M. Strathern 1988: 348n7) into dialogue with the exchanged-based dynamics of Melanesian lived worlds. This instigated a focus on composite (and therefore partible) persons and collective individuals – plural singularities, or singular pluralities that - by necessity - alternate between unitary and differentiated states, gender being the predominant 'form through which the alternation is conceptualized' (M Strathern 1988: 13-14). Despite certain constraining or conventional 'forms' (M. Strathern 1988: 180-181; Hirsch 2014: 46-47), there is no encompassing notion of society or even structure here, by which to make sense of the 'unique events and accomplishments' (M. Strathern 1988: 13) that lie at the centre of Melanesian exchange-based activities. In lieu of this lack of an 'outside', discernible in *The Gender of the Gift* but elaborated in a later work (M. Strathern 1991), one finds only the infinite play of fractality by which parts and wholes imply each other according to relations of self-similarity (see also Hirsch 2014: 48; Gell 1998: 137-140; Wagner 1991). This latter point has been linked to the fact that, for Strathern, 'relations are logically prior to entities' (Holbraad and Pedersen 2009: 375; see also Crook 2007: 86).

The logical prioritisation of relationships in an argument that pivots on the opposition between 'Melanesia' and 'the West' accords Strathern's work a central place in the development of 'relational-non dualism' in the anthropology of ontology (Scott 2013: 862). As suggested above, the rise to ascendancy of a model on non-dualism in the anthropology of ontology runs the risk of reducing multiple theories of being to a singular form. Analogously, the *a priori* status accorded to relations in Strathern's work has been deployed so widely in the analysis of Melanesian socialities that a wholesale denial of fixed essences – somewhat ironically – has itself become an essential feature of anthropological engagements with the region (see also Rollason 2014; Scott 2007b: 24-31). Even within a posited poly-ontological cosmology, Strathern's relational model can remain a crucial analytical tool. However, given Scott's (2007b: 30) assertion that the model itself amounts to a 'virtual mono-ontology,' it should be

deployed with caution, and always subordinated to the indigenous ontology operant in a given cosmological system.

This brings us full circle. In the article on ‘difference’ introduced above, Sahlins (2013: 284) observes: ‘in the metaphysics of creation known to many Oceanic peoples, things generally proceed from an undifferentiated to a differentiated state.’ This kind of blanket imposition of monism is also traceable in the rise to ascendancy of models of non-dualism in the anthropology of ontology, and anthropological approaches to Melanesian sociality that employ the arguments of Strathern without due caution. In all these cases, the answer to the question, what are the ‘specific mappings of the number, nature, and interconnections among fundamental categories of being?’ (Scott 2007b: 4) has been specified in advance rather than posed as matter of ethnographic investigation. Most crucially for the argument presented in this thesis, imposing monism from the outset denies the possibility of an ontologically-informed investigation of relationships of absolute alterity that exist internally to a given socio-cosmic reality.

As hinted by Sahlins’s (2013: 284) own argument, attention to ‘the metaphysics of creation’ provides one way out of this situation. Building upon the work of scholars who have considered cosmogony and cosmogonic processes in detail (Feuchtwang 2007; McKinnon 1991; Sahlins 1987; Schrempp 1992; Scott 2005a, 2007b, 2014b; Valeri 1985, [1995] 2014a), we must attend to the ethnographic variety of cosmogonic formulations and avoid leaping to unexamined generalisations. Schrempp (1992: 186) suggests that cosmogonic formulations posit ‘different possible ontologies.’ Directly developing this observation, Scott (2007b) has illustrated how attention to cosmogony can render deep ontological premises analytically available to anthropologists. Whilst his notion of ‘onto-praxis’ rests on the premise that ontology is accessible through everyday practices that apparently have nothing to do with cosmogony (Scott 2007b: 21; see also Holbraad 2012: 145), a close reading of Scott (2007b: 32) reveals that the most accurate analysis of the relationship between ontology and praxis is one in which diverse ethnographic phenomena are analytically juxtaposed with ‘mutually informing representations of ultimate origins and cosmogonic transformations.’ In short, any analysis that seeks to link up

ontological premises and particular practices/concepts/categories is impoverished if cosmogonic processes are omitted from the equation.

In the pages that follow, I attend to cosmogonic processes in West Gao in order to explore the dynamic relationship between praxis (both quotidian and ritual) and the poly-ontological structure (comprised in the three matriclans understood as discrete ontological categories) of West Gao cosmology. My analysis rests upon the contention that internally-existing relationships of alterity are what lend the West Gao lived world its cohesion (cf. Stasch 2009: 255). Delineating my particular ‘ontological’ take on this situation requires a further exploration of Scott’s (2007b) notion of poly-genetic cosmologies and Descola’s (2013) engagements with totemism as an ontology.⁴⁹ Both scholars arrive at certain key conclusions with regard to the relational architecture of cosmologies that posit the existence of ontologically distinct categories. A comparison of these respective conclusions reveals some striking correspondences.

To elaborate, both Scott and Descola argue that the independent coming into being of ontologically discrete categories is accompanied by an attendant necessity to forge relationships between such categories (Descola 2013: 234, 266-267; Scott 2007b: 12, 18-19, 21). On the one hand, Scott (2007b: 18, 21-22) suggests that in poly-ontological systems - characterised by the *a priori* existence of a number (two or more) of discrete categories - the first-order burden on praxis is to generate relations between such categories. Related to this, is Scott’s observation (2007b: 14) that in a poly-ontological system, each category can be seen as a ‘micro’ mono-ontology such that ‘each ontological category initially lacks any meaningful or enduring differentiations.’ On the other hand, Descola’s (2013: 399) discussion of the ‘paradox of totemism’ describes the ‘excessive proximity’ of the terms that make up a totemic class, terms that are, moreover, in a ‘permanent quest for individuation’ (Descola 2013: 399). Thus, just as

⁴⁹ Although Descola (2013) does not place a heavy emphasis on cosmogony in the way that Scott (2007b) does, a notion of ‘mythical ontogenesis’ is central to his analysis of totemism as an ontology (Descola 2013: 162). Indeed, for Descola (2013: 267) what lends totemism its distinguishing features is its ‘cosmogenic’ nature.

Scott (2007b: 12) describes for mono-ontologies in general, according to Descola's analysis, differentiation of a totemic class must be *achieved* (Descola 2013: 399). This is executed by forging external (exchanged-based) relationships with other equivalent totemic classes (Descola 2013: 399). Here, we have exactly what Scott describes as the 'first-order burden' that a poly-ontological system places upon praxis, namely to forge cross-category interconnections.

I draw these comparisons in order to justify the analytic terminology employed throughout this thesis.⁵⁰ To differentiate between two forms of ontologically-structured forms of relationality, I employ two terms: on the one hand, the term 'intra-category relationships' refers to the intrinsic relationships that unify elements of a single ontological kind or 'class'; on the other hand, the term 'inter-category relationships' refers to externally-forged relationships across a divide of *a priori* ontological difference - in Descola's (2013: 297) terms, an 'ontological gap.' Whilst the former term describes relationships that constitute a given matriclan or *kokolo*, the latter term describes relationships that are actively achieved between the three matriclans (see figure 4).

This terminology allows me to employ a Strathernian-style relational analysis (differentiation out of, and against, the immanent flow of intra-category relationships) without that analysis undermining the integrity of the poly-ontological structure of West Gao cosmology: Descola's 'ontological gaps' keep the infinite fractal logics of Strathern's model in check (c.f. Scott 2011: 217n5). Thus, in direct contrast to Mark Mosko's (2010: 216) claim that a focus on poly-ontology amounts to a 'dismissal' of a Strathernian approach to sociality, careful use of analytical terminology ensures that even within a posited poly-ontological cosmology, Strathern's relational model can remain analytically useful (cf. Scott 2007b: 10). Ultimately, this terminology, allows me to take the observations of both Scott and Descola forward in new directions. In chapters 3, 6 and 7, I illustrate how Scott's notion of poly-ontology can be developed to illuminate issues more familiar to Melanesian ethnography, such as 'personhood' and large-scale ritualised exchange events. With regard to Descola's work, he notes the lack of

⁵⁰ Although such comparisons are ambitious, Scott (2014a: n10) has himself pointed to the affinities between his Arosi-inspired notion of poly-genetic cosmologies and Descola's notion of totemic systems as made up of 'ontological races.'

attention to kinship and social structure in his analysis of ontological matrixes (Descola 2013: 404). The analysis of cross-cousin marriage undertaken in chapter 5 is one step toward illustrating the possibilities of analysing kinship structures from within the part of his argument that considers totemism as an ontology.

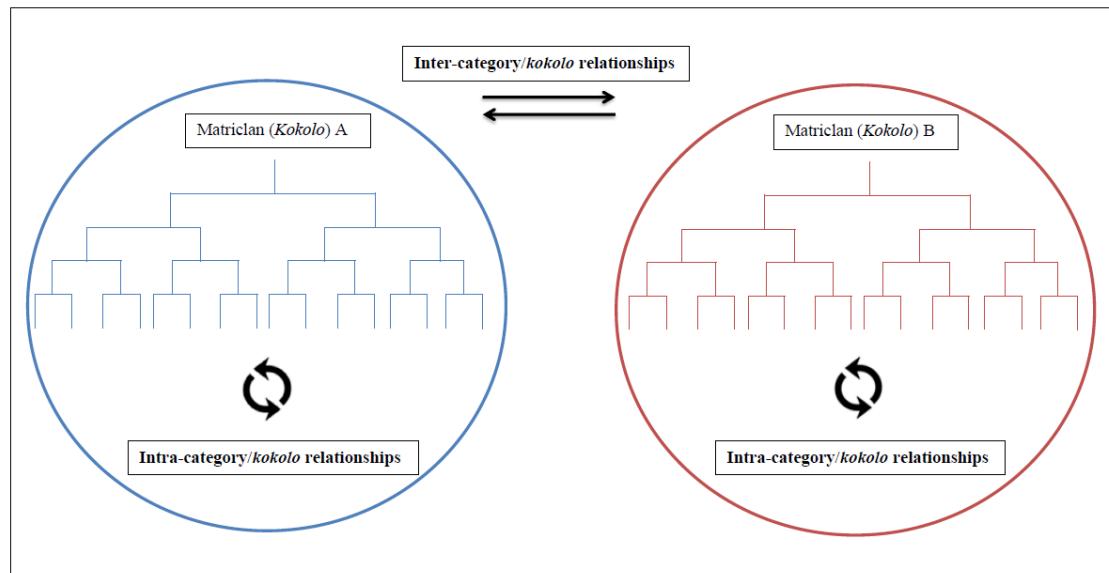


Figure 4 two types of ontologically-structured relationships.

The central argument of this thesis is that socio-cosmic renewal in West Gao is a balancing act. Inter-category relations actively forged *between* ontologically discrete units, or matriclans (sng. *kokolo*) must be continually weighed against intra-category relations that constitute a given *kokolo*. The direction in which these hypothetical scales fall is in no way fixed, but shifts in response to particular historical processes. This claim will become clearer as I trace the argument as it develops over the remaining chapters.

VI: Chapter breakdown

In chapter 1, I trace the agency of ancestral beings in the shaping of crucial historical processes such as: European ‘first contact’; colonial interventions in the landscape; and conversion to Christianity. I argue that history can revivify particular historically-situated identities through the incorporation of non-indigenous elements that might, from another perspective, appear as a threat to the very foundation of those identities. In terms of Christianity, by providing a set of

ritual mechanics to enter into relationship with the ancestors, the particular nature of conversion in this part of Santa Isabel lent historical momentum to ancestrally-mediated processes of emplacement.

In chapter 2 I address a key tension within the constitution of communities in West Gao – that between an underlying plurality of descent-based person/territory unities and an achieved, singular, Christian unity that is based in notions of community ‘togetherness’. Tracing the connections between households and villages as relational entities, I argue that village existence is based on achieving and maintaining cross-matriclan relationships through shared labour and commensality. However, an extended case study of my host village Poro - from its formation in the 1950s up until the present - reveals that community existence is predicated upon pre-existing categorical distinctions between persons, even if the surface level of existence actively seeks to override such distinctions. Ultimately, I argue that Christian unity arises from policing the level at which matrilineal difference is articulated, rather than from the outright denial of matrilineal distinctiveness.

In chapter 3, I move from communities to persons. Building upon Alfred Gell’s concept of ‘distributed personhood’ I argue that the existential security of Gao speakers is achieved by establishing and maintaining a relationship of familiarity to an ancestral territory. Although these dynamics affect all persons in West Gao, I argue that it is in fact *kokolo* identity that establishes a given locality as ‘familiar’ for particular persons and not others. In enacting ritual techniques that seek to localise, heal, or protect persons as they move through place, Gao speakers activate intra-*kokolo* relationships that render the West Gao landscape as internally divided into multiple centred territories. In the final analysis, the ancestral aspects of persons and places amount to a set of fixed coordinates against which all bodily movement is counterbalanced. This claim requires an elaboration of, on the one hand, the pre-social, cosmogonic origins of such coordinates, and on the other, how such coordinates are reproduced across generations. These paired issues are the focus of the next two chapters.

In chapter 4 I analyse the ancestral histories of Gao speakers, outlining two modes of primordiality, which, employing the analytic terminology of Scott (2007b: 201), I term ‘utopic’ and ‘topogonic’. During the former mode, geographical isolation of discrete groups of apical ancestors engendered a primordial condition in which the three matriclans (sng. *kokolo*) came into being independently of each other. The establishment of *kokolo* exogamy engendered the onset of the second ‘topogonic’ mode of primordiality in which different groups of *kokolo* ancestors moved through particular territories, reproducing descendants, naming places and persons, and burying their dead. These emergent connections to the landscape are articulated at the level of matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*), rather than at the level of matriclan (*kokolo*). The relationships between these matrilineal units are further explored through attention to historical transformations. In the early twentieth century agents of the Anglican Church encouraged the articulation of matrilineal difference at the level of *kokolo* by recognising and emphasising the existence of three ‘primary’ matriclans across Santa Isabel as a whole. In contrast, recent trends toward land disputes appear to be fracturing this Church-advocated triad of a *kokolo*-based difference. Despite such complexities, however, during fieldwork Gao speakers continued to emphasise matrilineal identity at the level of *kokolo*.

In chapter 5 I illustrate that contemporary marriages in West Gao are animated by the necessity to ensure that matrilineal land remains inhabited and used by members of the matrilineage which controls that land. However, control over the territory of the matrilineage of the mother is ultimately mediated by the trans-generational continuity of *kokolo* identity. Such continuity is conceptualised as a series of successive containments in the wombs (sng. *t’hi’ā*, meaning belly) of ascending female ancestors. The importance of notions of containment in achieving trans-generational continuity of *kokolo* identity is illustrated through two case studies of cross-cousin marriage. Cross-cousin marriage operates to counteract the spatio-temporal dispersal of the blood transmitted by males. By re-capturing the unity of persons and land, cross-cousin marriage, whilst focused on particular land-holding matrilineages, nevertheless draws its value from a primordial state in which the original incestuous unity of a single matriclan epitomises matrilineal potency in its purest form. Drawing upon comparative literature from Oceania and

Southeast Asia, I argue that cross-cousin marriage (as a kind of exchange) cannot be analysed as the structural opposite of incest, but as its logical extension over the categorical divides established by exogamy.

In chapter 6 I explore the quintessential *kastom* event in West Gao - a feast known as *fangamu taego* or, ‘to feed the caregiver’. I argue that the contemporary form of *fangamu taego* derives from the collapsing of different elements, taken from what were historically distinct feasts, into a single exchange event. This historical context facilitates an analysis of exchanges of goods by the two participating *kokolo* as instantiating the interplay between two forms of ontologically-opposed relationships. Turning next to the property transfer element of *fangamu taego*, I argue that the feast also provides a context in which the very substrate of this opposition is perpetuated in the present. In transferring properties, the father’s *kokolo* enact their relationship of precedence with regard to a particular territory. During *fangamu taego*, vertical intra-*kokolo* relationships are enacted in an exchange event that overtly celebrates the role of inter-*kokolo* relationships in the attainment of social harmony. This suggests that the overall importance of the feast lies in the extent to which it illustrates that these two kinds of relationships are continually balanced against each other in West Gao.

Chapter 7 begins with the premise that death is a moment in which the existentially and politically necessary inter-category relationships forged between the three *kokolo* are most threatened. I explore the manner in which Gao speakers approach their own death and theorise about post-mortem existence. Whilst conversion to Christianity has diversified the number of domains inhabited by aspects of the deceased’s soul, it has not eliminated the possibility that deceased persons can remain intimately connected to the localities that they shaped whilst living. I then offer an eclectic analysis of the mortuary sequence to illustrate: a) how memorial ceremonies operate to encourage the deceased to sever the relational entanglements in which he or she was enmeshed during life, and b) that the cementing of the grave ultimately works to counterbalance the return to categorical isolation of the deceased by expanding and emphasising cross-category relationships between the living. This latter point is consolidated through an

analysis of the Christian grave as a ‘dual axis’ monument that allows the deceased to be, as they were in life, a locus of both intra-category and inter-category relationships.

To conclude, I argue that the increasing number of land disputes, and an emerging disposition among younger generations with regard to the official registration of matrilineal territories, are generating processes that appear to be fracturing the overarching unity upheld at the level of matriclan (*kokolo*). This fracturing is visible in the fact that matrilineal identity is being increasingly articulated at the level of the matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*). In such a context, I highlight the association between the triadic structure of essential matrilineal difference in West Gao and the Christian doctrine of the ‘Trinity.’ Such correspondences, coupled with the notion of processual autochthony, suggest that Scott’s (2005b: 115, 117, 2007b: 266-267) argument that poly-ontological cosmologies exist in tension with the mono-ontological nature of Christian cosmology may not hold true in every ethnographic context. Rather, the relationship between a given poly-ontology and Christianity may appear as complementary at a deep level when a triadic plurality of matrilineal categories endorsed by Christianity threatens, as a result of the inroads made by advanced capitalism, to fracture into what might be called an anti-Christian, post-triadic poly-ontology.

Chapter 1 The Ancestral Shape of History

Introduction

Approximately one week into fieldwork I attended a funeral in a West Gao village that I had not visited before. I retired to my sleeping room only to find that my efforts to record the day's events were interrupted by an itch on my abdomen caused by a series of red-rimmed white bumps. As the rash spread quickly to my upper-body, Mark - a church keeper and "kastom man" living in a neighbouring house - was called over to apply lime powder (*keru*) to my skin. Onlookers explained that I had been "touched" by an explicitly non-human "something" on my way back from the village that day. Although some people suggested that the incident had occurred because it was the first time I had travelled along the road,⁵¹ my elder brother remarked: "It's because you have come here to do research that it [an ancestral being] touched you like that."⁵²

Given the long history of arrivals by 'white people' (SIP, *waetman*) or 'ship men' (*maevaka*) who have made successive demands on the persons and places of West Gao, it is perhaps unsurprising that my presence - as a white researcher - did not go unnoticed. As the above incident testifies, in West Gao, ancestral beings continue to bear witness to, and even resist, the historical processes that impinge upon the land in which they reside. David Akin (2004: 300), writing of recent transformations in the ancestral religion of the non-Christian Kwaio of Malaita (southeastern Solomon Islands), writes that the Kwaio 'suppose that the spirits of their ancestors have noted their worries and humiliations voiced in *kastom* oratory and discussion, and that the *spirits themselves* have reacted by working through their descendants, priests, and diviners to "straighten out" Kwaio society.' Later in the same article, Akin (2004: 316) asks his readers to hold a different set of suppositions, namely, that there 'are no ancestral spirits, or that their

⁵¹ The dangers associated with moving through unfamiliar locales will be explored in chapter 3.

⁵² Debra McDougall (2004: 395) writes of a similar phenomenon in Ranongga (western Solomon Islands), 'people who ask about the land are likely to be "asked about" by the spirits of the land.'

reality emerges from within the social relationships they manifest.⁵³ This kind of Durkheimian sociological reductionism robs the Kwaio of what is arguably the most focal element of the ‘subjective’ force of *kastom* for them, that is, the reality of an ancestral response to social and historical transformations. In this chapter, I draw inspiration from certain scholars of Amazonia who have recently argued that taking the agency of non-human beings seriously is central to any attempt to trace indigenous history (Fausto and Heckenberger 2007: 13-15).⁵⁴ Just as I was asked to do during the first week in my host hamlet, I attend to the ancestors’ role in the shaping of historical processes in West Gao.

In the first section of this chapter, I bring ancestral histories recounted by Gao speakers together with official historical records to argue that ancestral beings in West Gao have long resisted the incursion of foreigners on their land. This insight sets the scene for the second section, in which I outline the delayed nature of conversion in West Gao, and suggest an alternative explanation for the eventual success of the missionaries’ endeavours to that posited by other commentators on conversion in Santa Isabel. This explanation, elaborated in the third section, is based on the contention that, in taking the agency of the ancestors seriously, agents of the Melanesian Mission managed to progress further into the lived worlds of West Gao inhabitants than any other foreigners before them. This success, based initially on relationships of opposition between Christian and ancestral efficacy (*mana*), in fact facilitated a situation in which relations of collaboration between the Christian God and ancestral ways of being and knowing were perpetuated. In the final section, I support this claim by introducing a recent Christian figure who channels Christian *mana* in order to forge an ancestral relationship to a locality. This case study reveals how an opposition of before/after with reference to conversion in West Gao implies a temporal rupture that masks deeper cosmogonic continuities. I draw the chapter to a close with the assertion that both temporally distant and more recent Christian ancestors alike

⁵³ In an earlier paper on interactions between emplaced ancestors and ‘foreign spirits’ among the Kwaio, Akin’s (1996: 152, 160) analysis does consider the ancestors as social actors in and of themselves and as beings with a particular perspective on unfolding events.

⁵⁴ Lambeck’s (1998) analysis of Sakalava spirit possession as a form of historicity, or historical consciousness, is also analogous to the approach undertaken here. His treatment of spirits, or *trombas*, as historical agents/actors that render history as ‘not simply past, but continuous in the present’ (Lambek 1998: 119) resonates with my own engagement with the historical agency of ancestral beings.

are key participants in the historically emergent processes by which West Gao residents enact and perpetuate their descent-based identities. Tracing such processes will be the focus of the remaining chapters of this thesis.

1.1: Ancestral responses to foreign interlopers

In October 2011, a West Gao resident – whom I shall call Ma’ane Bi’o – shared the history (*pagusu*) of his matriclan (*kokolo*) with me.⁵⁵ Ma’ane Bi’o opened his narrative with a historical encounter. He stated that a woman named X, who was born from an eagle, gave birth to a son who grew up to be known as Chief Billie Bangara, the man who met with the Spanish explorer Mendaña in 1568.⁵⁶ Ma’ane Bi’o explained that Chief Billie and Mendaña fought and then made friends, exchanging names as a sign of peace between them. Ma’ane Bio explained that the place where the Spanish originally landed - Estrella bay - is in Kokota District, near a place that Gao speakers call Gehe.⁵⁷ At Gehe there was a woman with Billie Bangara whose name was ‘Y’ and there is a place near Gehe that is also called ‘Y’ after this woman. The first place called ‘Y’ is located on an island off the coast of Kia, the area where the apical ancestors of Ma’ane Bi’o’s matriclan (*kokolo*) began their own ‘exploratory’ journey down the islands of Santa Isabel long before the arrival of Mendaña.

Taking lead from Ma’ane Bi’o’s narrative, in this section I draw together historical accounts of the Spanish ‘discovery’ of Santa Isabel in 1568 and ancestral histories told by Gao speakers.⁵⁸ This analytical move results in some interesting encounters of its own, namely between powerful ancestral beings and foreign explorers. When confronted with powerful outsiders,

⁵⁵ Places and persons named in the ancestral narratives considered throughout this chapter are consistently deleted and replaced with random letters.

⁵⁶ See Bogesi (1948: 213-214) for a Bugotu version of a ‘story from Kia’ that also mentions this named clan ancestress of one of the three extant matriclans in Santa Isabel.

⁵⁷ See Bogesi (1948: 345) for a report of Mendaña’s discovery that also includes the place name Gehe.

⁵⁸ Between the 7th February 1568 and the 8th May 1568 the Spanish documented systematic encounters with the inhabitants of Santa Isabel (Jack-Hinton 1969: 57). These accounts were written by Mendaña and various members of his crew, including the crew of the brigantine in which a smaller number of Spanish undertook a month long venture that included the discovery of the Nggela group, Savo and Guadalcanal and the circumnavigation of the entire island of Santa Isabel (Jack-Hinton 1969: 44-57). The accounts are accessible through the translations of the two Englishmen Basil Thomson and Lord Amherst of Hackney.

ancestral residents of Santa Isabel act on behalf of their human descendants to counter the extractive tendencies of foreign intruders.⁵⁹

Although it is undeniable that Ma'ane Bi'o - a retired teacher - was well schooled in European history, this learnt history is in fact encompassed in his narrative by a different form of history, namely ancestral history or *pagusu*. This encompassment is achieved by two details of his account. Firstly, the narrative that begins with a named apical ancestress of his *kokolo* – woman X - who gives birth to Billie Bangara. Secondly, the connection of Billie Bangara (and through him Mendaña) to another ancestress who shares her name with a place that lies in the north of Santa Isabel, points to a ‘time’ when his clan ancestors began their own topogonic movements in a south easterly direction across the island *before* the arrival of the Spanish (cf. Scott 2008: 155).⁶⁰ Mendaña thus becomes a node within a series of person-place connections that constitute a particular ancestral history of one matriclan - *kokolo*. In this case, Ma'ane Bi'o actively sought to render European history internal to his own ancestral history. A further example will serve to illustrate that such connections may be present within local narratives unbeknown to their narrators.

During an interview with a West Gao village chief – whom I shall call Chief Mikaeli – he shared certain sections of the deep genealogy of his *kokolo* with me. The notes I made during the interview revealed some surprising correspondences with the reports of Spanish explorers. The genealogy contained reference to two named female apical ancestors who separated, one of whom went to San Jorge, an island associated throughout Santa Isabel with ghosts and spirits of the dead (Bogesi 1948: 208-209; Codrington 1881: 308; Thomson 1919; Vilasa 1987: 61; White 1978: 188, 1991: 110). The ‘native’ name for the island of San Jorge recorded by a member of the brigantine crew - Catoria - is almost identical to the name recorded in my field notes for the sister who left the mainland for San Jorge in Mikaeli’s deep genealogy (Amherst and Thomson

⁵⁹ The death of Catholic Bishop Epalle as a result of an attack that occurred in Bugotu in 1845 (see White 1991: 142, 222) does not come into the purview of my analysis.

⁶⁰ Topogonic processes, and the centrality of naming therein, will be analysed in chapter 4.

[1901] 2010: 293).⁶¹ We have seen from Ma’ane Bio’s narrative that there is a propensity for overlap between proper names of places and people in the ancestral histories told by Gao speakers. It is therefore possible that the inhabitants of San Jorge encountered by the Spanish, derived their island’s name from that of a deceased female ancestor who had arrived there in the past, the same ancestor who is documented in Mikaeli’s genealogy.⁶² Although Mikaeli did not make this connection himself, the point is not incidental, for it indicates the extent to which ancestral beings in West Gao become infused with place – an organic connection that is captured in the esoteric knowledge that accompanies a ‘name’. This fact can shed further light on another feature of the Spanish material.

According to Mikaeli’s genealogy, the apical ancestress who arrived on San Jorge was the genatrix of the powerful ancestral being known throughout Santa Isabel to reside on San Jorge, and described as being ‘chief of the spirits, and enemy of the ghosts’ (Bogesi 1948: 208; see also Codrington 1881: 308). Bogesi (1948: 208), calls this being ‘Bolofaginia,’ a spelling also recorded in my own field notes.⁶³ However, for reasons that will be outlined in due course, West Gao residents employed the euphemism “*na’itu bi’o*” (big ancestral being) when referring to this being in general conversation.⁶⁴ Bolofaginia continued to influence the lives of West Gao residents during fieldwork. In April 2011 I visited my mother’s eldest surviving sister in an adjacent hamlet and the conversation turned to a woman who had recently gone to hospital in Buala in order to deliver her baby. The woman was well beyond her term when she left for hospital and subsequently, a further message had been sent that she still had not delivered. The aging lady sitting opposite me said in an offhand manner that the woman was “*pluka na’itu bi’o*,

⁶¹ The native name for the island recorded by Catoria is the same as the name of the ancestress in my field notes except for the addition of an extra ‘r’ in the middle of the name in Catoria’s report. Out of respect for the secrecy of such knowledge I do not reveal the name here. I have also omitted the page number of Amherst and Thomson’s account where the name is recorded.

⁶² It could be argued that the makers of this genealogy, aware of the original name of San Jorge told to the Spanish as a result of missionary teaching, constructed their genealogy around this information. I would argue that whilst this is possible (see e.g. Scott 2008: 154), for mission educative material to include this kind of detail on Amherst’s and Thomson’s translation seems unlikely. Furthermore, Mikaeli’s genealogy clearly states that the name corresponds to a female ancestor, not the island itself.

⁶³ Missionary R. H. Codrington (1881: 308), writing of this ‘lord’ of San Jorge, spells the name ‘Bolafagina.’

⁶⁴ The adjective ‘big’ here does not refer to physical size, but to scope of influence, or power (in the political sense) as in the pan-Melanesian notion of a ‘Big Man’.

moumolu ae" - "pregnant by the big ancestral being [from the] island yonder." I was told later that the pregnant woman could not give birth to her human offspring because the powerful ancestor who resides on the island of San Jorge (Bolofaginia) had impregnated the woman with a non-human child that was blocking the womb and preventing the human baby from being born.⁶⁵ This unusual illness can be caused if the name "Bolofaginia" is uttered in the presence of a pregnant woman.

Although West Gao is located on the opposite side of Santa Isabel to where Bolofaginia is said to reside (San Jorge, see figure 2), the uttering of his name renders him immanent to the lived world of Gao speakers.⁶⁶ This fact highlights the extent to which apical ancestral beings are unbound by time and space. It is perhaps unsurprising, therefore, to find that this big ancestor was, arguably, also encountered by the Spanish explorers. As summarised by Valeri (2001: 75), the Spanish explorers gave contradictory versions of the nature of political power on Santa Isabel, at the root of which was the enigmatic figure of an island 'king' called Ponemanefaa.

Valeri continues:

Certainly, the supremacy of this Ponemanefaa (or Benebonefa) had to be an objective fact, since his authority was recognized in Santa Isabel up to the Bahia de la Estrella and additionally on the island of Saint George,⁶⁷ and when Sarmiento tries to penetrate the internal part of the island, it is his name that gets invoked by the natives in order to induce him to renounce the undertaking. (Valeri 2001: 75)

Bringing Valeri's summary together with Bogesi's ethnography regarding the 'chief of the spirits' said to inhabit San Jorge, and the deep genealogy of Mikaeli, suggests a further interpretation of this 'king' Ponemanefaa. Firstly, as stated above, the name used by the 'natives' for the island of San Jorge in the Spanish accounts is the same as that of the ancestress said to be the genitor of the 'Bolofaginia' recorded in Mikaeli's genealogy. This suggests that this ancestress had arrived on San Jorge and generated her powerful offspring before the arrival

⁶⁵ After being treated with ritual techniques (*fanitu*) by a practitioner who immediately left for Buala by outboard motor boat (taking the plant materials that she used to prepare the tincture - *pinu* - with her) the woman successfully delivered her baby.

⁶⁶ Whilst many extant ancestral beings in West Gao were described as male, I was told that certain ancestors were female.

⁶⁷ San Jorge.

of the Spanish. Thus, according to the temporal logic of Mikaeli's genealogy, 'Bolofaginia' was already in existence when the Spanish began their explorations of Santa Isabel. Secondly, the echoes across the nomenclature are suggestive. The Ponemanefaa frequently invoked by name by the 'natives' to the Spanish but never actually physically appearing before them (Amherst and Thomson [1901] 2010: 173) may have been the powerful ancestor, Bolofaginia, whose genesis Mikaeli's genealogy documents, and of whom Bogesi writes.

In the Spanish accounts, the 'natives' refer to Ponemanefaa by the word '*caiboco* or *cayboco*', which the Spanish translated as 'king' or 'high chief' (Amherst and Thomson [1901] 2010: 173, lxxxiv) in comparison to the different native word - '*tabrique*' - that occurs throughout the Spanish accounts as meaning, simply, 'chief' (Amherst and Thomson [1901] 2010; Jack-Hinton 1969: 45n1; Valeri 2001: 74-5). In the words of Mendaña's report: 'This Ponemanefaa has a quantity of land in Santa Ysabel; he is the most powerful of all the *tabriquis*, and therefore they call him *Tabriqui-Caiboco*, which signifies "Great-Lord" and all the others fear him' (Amherst and Thomson [1901] 2010: 151). The use of a different descriptive noun to refer to Ponemanefaa might have indicated less a difference in political power as the Spanish interpreted it (cf. Levin Rojo 2014: 22-23), but, rather, a difference in ontological status. By invoking the name of this 'big' ancestral being in order to deter the Spanish (Amherst and Thomson [1901] 2010: 151n2; Valeri 2001: 75), the 'natives' may have relied on the fact that the Spanish - as potentially powerful spirit beings themselves (Bogesi 1948: 354; Valeri 2001: 69) - would recognise the name of this being and not dare to venture further out of fear. Alternatively, the 'natives' may have uttered his name in order to harm the Spanish. As we have seen, the uttering of the name "Bolofaginia" *continued* to be a risky act during my field work in West Gao, an act that could place certain persons in danger of becoming seriously ill.

Whilst it is impossible to be sure that the P/Bonemanefaa of the Spanish accounts is indeed the Bolofaginia discussed by Bogesi and spoken of during my fieldwork, this being's reappearance in records from later periods of history adds further support for this hypothesis. Wilfred Fowler - colonial District Officer of Santa Isabel in the 1930s - writes of a white plantation owner -

Jardine - located on San Jorge who (not unlike the Spanish before him, and contemporary nickel prospectors (Regan 2014)) became obsessed with the idea that the island harboured mineral resources. When the man goes missing, Fowler takes a group of reluctant local men to undertake a search that yields unfortunate results. Whilst digging in the rocks, Jardine had fallen and was rendered immobile by a broken ankle. By the time the search party found the man's body, fire ants had already removed most of the flesh from his bones (Fowler 1959: 101). The local men flee from the site in fear. Later, Fowler's trusted local policeman - Hiro - warns his colonial officer against visiting San Jorge again,⁶⁸ asserting 'Bolifaginia sent ants to kill Mr. Jardine' (Fowler 1959: 102).⁶⁹ He is so adamant that he risks contradicting his superior: when Fowler attempts to dismiss his comment as foolery, he earnestly states, 'It's true' (Fowler 1959: 102).

Stories of this type are common in Santa Isabel. Bogesi (1948: 212) writes of a different 'evil spirit' residing on Jagi Island (off the south coast of Bugotu), which, similar to the narratives of Bolofaginia, was capable of killing 'any strangers, except the owners of the island'.⁷⁰ In 1919, when Europeans attempted to clear the island for a coconut plantation, their efforts resulted in the deaths of the majority of the labourers involved (Bogesi 1948: 212). During a project of the same type undertaken in 1941, further deaths were reported. Writing of this latter incident, Bogesi (1948: 213) explains, 'The news of these two deaths went round the Bugotu island faster than any other news. Of course, the deaths were said to be due directly to the devil at Jagi.' Returning to San Jorge, during fieldwork I was told how a foreign helicopter pilot had, sometime in the last decade, landed illicitly on the island. When attempting to leave, the helicopter's engine failed.⁷¹ The pilot was later air lifted to hospital and died of a mysterious

⁶⁸ Oral histories of my research participants suggest that Hiro was a man from West Gao.

⁶⁹ Across the accounts of Bogesi, Fowler, and Codrington it is only the fourth vowel that changes in the spelling of Bolofaginia. My own experience can testify that the name – when uttered at all – is whispered, never spoken loudly, a fact that may account for these phonetic differences.

⁷⁰ As discussed in more detail in chapter 3, Bogesi's description of these beings as 'evil' is a reflection of the influence of Christianity on conceptions of non-human beings, rather than an accurate reflection of pre-Christian attitudes towards such beings.

⁷¹ In a similar manner, residents of one village in West Gao reported that ancestral beings in the forest above their home had caused chainsaws to stop working until landowners had come and addressed their ancestors directly, explaining that the timber was for the development of the place and for the good of the people (their descendants) living there (cf. Allerton 2013: 178).

illness that the narrator explained was caused by ancestral beings still present on the island (see also Bilua 2012).

In this section, I have attempted a re-reading of historical documents in light of the ancestral histories told by Gao speakers. This suggested a historical trend in which non-human ancestral residents of Santa Isabel can be seen to ‘act’ on behalf of their human descendants to counter the extractive tendencies of foreign intruders. Capitalising on this insight, in the following two sections, I provide an alternative interpretation for the success of missionisation in West Gao to those explanations provided in the existing literature on conversion in Santa Isabel as a whole. It is ironic that Anglican missionaries - the only set of sea-faring white men (*maevaka* – ship men) *not* to be focused on the appropriation of land *per se* - were the ones to fully understand the need to ‘pacify’ the landscape if they were to succeed in their larger project of obtaining souls (McDougall 2004: 313). This is key to explaining the ultimate success of their enterprise in West Gao. To introduce this argument I draw on both local ancestral histories and more official records to lay out the social and political turmoil in which the missionaries found themselves.

1.2 Violence, chiefdoms and the onset of peace

The following ancestral history (*pagusu*) narrated by my adoptive ‘mother’ (MZ), Ka’aza, involved a female protagonist who was five generations distant from the narrator. By such genealogical reckonings, these events took place sometime at the turn of the eighteenth century - after the Spanish explorers had departed and perhaps contemporaneous with the arrival of the earliest European whaling ships - between 1790 and 1820 (Bennett 1987: 24-25). Ka’aza’s narrative captures the precarious nature of life on Santa Isabel when the Spanish explorers traversed the islands (Amherst and Thomson [1901] 2010: 154; Valeri 2001: 76) and when European whalers and traders first penetrated the Solomon Islands. The following excerpt is an edited version of Ka’aza’s *pagusu* taken directly from my field notes:

Woman C is very important in the history (*pagusu*) of this *t’hi’ā* [matrilineage]. When she was a very young woman C was fed *kastom* [efficacious substances] that made her very strong. One day she was in her walled taro garden. Suddenly she was startled by a

man who came upon her and the child she was carrying without warning. He was a man who came by surprise in order to kill (*nasura*). He grabbed her neck, holding his sharpened axe (*khila*) in his other hand ready to cut her throat, but she pulled his arm causing him to release the axe. She took the axe and bent it out of shape, flinging it down the slope. Disarmed, and amazed by woman C's strength, the man fled as she called the alarm. She picked up her taro tubers and carried them on her back with a stick down from the garden (*hugru posa*). All the way she kept a look out for further attack, the taro on her back and child on her front, until she arrived home. If she had been killed, the *t'hi'a* would have ended there, and we (*gheati*) would never have been. (Field notes, November 2011)

Here the narrator was illustrating her knowledge of how she came to be in the present. As she told the story, Ka'aza's eyes flitted to the numerous grandchildren that played around her on the sand. As she used the pronoun (first-person exclusive, pl.) - “*gheati*” - to describe herself and her descendants (members of her matrilineage, *t'hi'a*), she conveyed a firm sense of the contingency of their existence upon the strength of a temporally distant ancestress. In contrast to the cases discussed above, where ancestral beings counteract incursions by white foreigners, in Ka'aza's narrative it is a fully human ancestress's ability to deter the extractive desires of an equally human local outsider that is evoked. Ka'aza's emotive telling of the danger of *nasura* – raiders, captures a period of Santa Isabel history that was typified by fear and violence. And yet, her own ancestress survives due to her extraordinary strength and resilience. As we shall see, Ka'aza's ancestress embodies many of the qualities displayed by the West Gao people in the stories they tell of themselves, and in the events documented by the official histories of Santa Isabel.

In the later part of the nineteenth century, just prior to the arrival of the first white Anglican missionaries to Bugotu, the inhabitants of Santa Isabel ‘imported’ practices of head-hunting from the western Solomon Islands (Jackson 1975: 65). Central to this was Chief Bera of Sepi, Bugotu, who exploited connections with labour traders to acquire firearms for raiding (Jackson 1975: 67-69). Charles Woodford (1888), the first resident commissioner of the British Protectorate reports that in the latter part of the nineteenth century Gao and Bugotu people undertook raids on the northern coast of Santa Isabel, forcing the inhabitants to flee into the bush. Terrorised by internal raids and sustained attacks from the western Solomon Islands, many inhabitants of Santa Isabel sought protection in fortified mountainous stone forts – *t'hoa*

(White 1978: 149-150, 1991: 90) and tree houses (Jackson 1975: 78; Penny 1888: 47; White 1991: 90-91).⁷² Sustained raiding also instigated mass migrations of people that led to the majority of the population of Santa Isabel seeking refuge in Bugotu and Gao (Jackson 1975: 65; White 1979: 121). Agents of the Melanesian Mission who observed the demoralised state of Santa Isabel inhabitants (Hillard 1978: 87), were sensitive to their readiness for socio-political change. According to many commentators, this fact explains the rapid success of the Mission at gaining converts (Hillard 1966: 75, 1978: 87; Jackson 1975; White 1979: 110). As White (1991: 94) argues, ‘the climate of killing and fear must have disposed chiefs and their followers to new solutions or formulae for protection and prosperity.’ It is in such a context that the decision of the influential chief Soga to receive baptism in 1889 (Armstrong 1900: 274) must be understood. Although he rose to influence through violent activities during raiding (White 1988, 17; Whiteman [1983] 2002: 360), Soga – unlike his recalcitrant father Bera – showed early interest in the mission (White 1988: 16), eventually embracing wholeheartedly the missionary-instigated prospect of ‘prestige through peace’ (Hillard 1978: 88; see also White 1979: 127, 1988: 16).⁷³

Soga’s subsequent productive collaboration with English missionary Henry Welchman (Armstrong 1900: 299-300; Hillard 1978: 89; White 1979: 128, 1988: 16, 1991: 97; E. Wilson 1935: 8) paved the way for the rapid conversion of many in Bugotu district – and beyond – until his death in 1898 (Welchman 1900: 92). For example, Armstrong (1900: 282) reports that Soga landed at Gao in 1890 – given that Soga’s last visit to Gao had been a head-hunting expedition, the people immediately fled. However, Armstrong (1900: 282) reports that Soga addresses the Gao chiefs as follows, ‘of old I came here to fight, but now you need to fear me no longer … for I am Christian now and I want to be friends with you … You three [chiefs] sit down, and I will tell you what Christianity has done for us in Bugotu.’ The people of Gao, however, continued to fear Soga due to his violent past. This fear of violence in fact worked in favour of the mission.

⁷² Bogesi (1948: 210) claims that tree houses were unknown in Bugotu before Patteson’s time.

⁷³ The ‘symbolic’ key to this turn in the fortunes of the Mission on Santa Isabel, was the successful deliverance by Bishop Selwyn (through an improvised concoction of quinine and brandy) of Soga from the grip of a pervasive illness (Hillard 1978: 88).

Jackson (1975: 74) reports, ‘in September 1890 Welchman learned that there had been a plot to kill him and his party when they were there [in Gao] in July, but the prospective murderers had been restrained by fear of retribution from Soga.’ Nevertheless, the desire to eliminate Welchman implies that certain Gao residents recognised him as a powerful enemy rather than ally. It also suggests that the historical course of conversion to Christianity was slightly different from that which occurred in other parts of Santa Isabel. As stated above, Gao was a place that both instigated head-hunting raids and provided refuge from head-hunting. In light of this fact, coupled with the plot to murder Welchman, I contend that the Gao people were, at the end of the nineteenth century, less demoralised than their fellow Santa Isabel inhabitants.

Viewed against the case of Soga, West Gao does indeed provide an interesting exception. Missionaries describe the inhabitants of Gao as a ‘very suspicious people’ (Welchman 1901a: 22). Gao itself is singled out as a ‘strong’ and ‘quarrelsome’ place, providing refuge from head-hunters (Armstrong 1900: 200, 272). Whilst in 1918 Gao ‘should’ have been entirely Christian, missionaries instead encountered a ‘stronghold of heathenism’ (Thomson 1918: 87). The geographical location of West Gao - a long boat journey round some difficult coastline from Welchman’s headquarters in Bugotu (see figure 2) - rendered this area of Santa Isabel out of reach of sustained missionisation at the turn of the twentieth century.⁷⁴ This was exacerbated by the fact that its inhabitants, unlike many of the Cheke Holo speaking peoples who had fled to Bugotu from fear of head-hunters (White 1991: 89-92, 1979: 121), had not migrated from their ancestral territories during the violence of the nineteenth century. However, I argue that active resistance to Christianity undertaken by a chief named Ghabili also contributed to the delayed nature of conversion in Gao. Ghabili appears repeatedly in missionary reports as a trouble causer (Welchman 1901b: 114, 1905: 43). The following comment by Welchman is exemplary:

He [Chief Puloka of an area located to the north of Gao] further told us that after my previous visit a report had reached them that I was about to return with a man of war,

⁷⁴ The Kia region of Santa Isabel, even further beyond the geographical scope of the Mission’s headquarters (see figure 2) also posed problems for Welchman. His frustration caused him to revert to some quite violent tactics of missionisation, forcing some recalcitrant Kia inhabitants to actively destroy their ancestral shrines (E. Wilson 1935: 99-101; but see also White 1991: 103-104).

and destroy their village, which was then in existence, and they had been so much alarmed that they had deserted that spot, and now were living scattered hither and thither. This accounted for a good deal. As far as I could learn Gabili of Gao was the author of this libel. (Welchman 1896: 12-13)

A descendant of Ghabili explained that his ancestor had died a heathen and was buried following non-Christian practices: sitting upright in a grave over which a huge fire was built to burn the flesh from his bones, allowing his skull to be extracted and placed at a secret location (see also Hillard 1966: 75; Penny 1886: 86; White 1978: 101). Instead of embracing Christianity then, Ghabili rejected it until the end of his life and actively sought to disrupt the process of conversion.

Resistance to Christianity in West Gao was no doubt predicated on the realisation that the kind of power wielded by new Christian chiefs - like Soga - was fundamentally different to that wielded before the advent of missionaries (Penny 1888: 216). Importantly, however, chiefs like Ghabili were poised on the edge of an era of peace in which people no longer needed the protection that a powerful chief could offer from the violence of equally powerful chiefs elsewhere. As part of the British Protectorate, Soga's efforts at peace-making were augmented by government intervention. The pacification of the Western Province, undertaken at the turn of the twentieth century and secured through the use of naval power, meant that Santa Isabel was no longer targeted by external raiders from the west (Hviding 1996: 110-112). Throughout the Solomon Islands, according to Hillard (1966: 68), pacification 'succeeded in weakening the power of the pagan chiefs' (see also Hviding 2014: 81). Decline in raiding in turn diminished the need for propitiation of the ancestors for success and protection in warfare. This was further exacerbated by the mission-imposed necessity for chiefs to dispose of such relations with their ancestors completely (Penny 1888: 216-217). On Santa Isabel, as the power of the chiefs waned, indigenous Christians emerged as the new wielders of Christian *mana* (Kolshus 2007: 306; White 1991: 105-114, 1988: 15; Whiteman [1983] 2002: 338-339). These local deacons and clergy acted with ritual mechanics that channelled Christian efficacy so as to combat

ancestral agency, practices which had been established by the early activities of white missionaries. I now explore this latter contention in further detail.

1.3: Meeting the ancestors on their own terms

As I have explained in the introduction to this thesis, certain elements of the history of the Melanesian Mission are crucial for understanding the relationship between Christianity and ancestrally mediated identities on Santa Isabel. Firstly, the Mission did not dismiss the existing religious orientations of their potential converts as devilism but sought to understand and engage with such orientations as both religious and social systems that might include elements compatible with Christianity (Hillard 1978: 191). Secondly, missionaries working on Santa Isabel operated with an indigenous notion of sacred power (*mana*) - derived from their knowledge of the Mota language and assimilated with a similar concept existing on Santa Isabel - that rendered the potency of the Christian God and the High Church ritual practices of the Mission accessible and amenable to the island's inhabitants. Finally, the Mission's propagation of the new religion actively advocated the role of native agency, rather than a sole reliance on resident white missionaries. In this section I explore archival materials and oral histories to illustrate how these general observations worked 'on the ground'. I argue that ultimately they amount to a situation in which white missionaries met the ancestors on their own terms. This state of affairs was, in turn, extended and elaborated by indigenous agents of the mission.

Seeking to explain the stagnant nature of conversion in West Gao, which I have explored in the previous section, missionary Andrew Thomson describes an arresting incident:

Dr. Welchman landed near there at Tasele, where a canoe house stood, and the story I have been told about his visit is this: he gathered the chiefs together, and their people, and spoke to them, and apparently they were not indisposed; but when he prepared his meal he selected a large flat rock and told his boy to lay the table on it, on which the elder men crowded round indignantly and demanded him to remove his things; it was a sacrificial altar. He told them if there was any mana, or spiritual power in the stone it would soon be proved, Jerubaal. From that time no chief or great man would allow a

teacher or Christian from Bugotu to come near, and they remained heathen. (Thomson 1918: 87)

This passage captures perfectly the extent to which missionaries presented the conversion process as a battle of spiritual efficacy. Indeed, as the invocation of ‘Jerubaal’ indicates, the scene could have been lifted from the Old Testament. Welchman contends that if the ancestral ‘god’ is indeed powerful then he should defend this desecration of his altar and thus strike down the perpetrator. How much of this was actually understood by the Gao onlookers at the time is impossible to tell. However, his actions certainly communicated his lack of respect for the ancestors. Anger at this lack of respect may indeed have led to the resistance to Christianity in this area of West Gao, as suggested by Thomson. At the same time, however, Welchman’s fervent effort to meet the ancestors on their own terms by invoking the concept of *mana*, and crucially, escaping without any apparent repercussion, boded ill for the ancestors. Even in the contemporary context ancestral shrines (*phadaghi*) demand caution: unannounced visits may cause violent changes in the weather, or sickness.⁷⁵ It is probable then that Welchman’s act raised some questions in the minds of the witnesses. What kind of a power did this missionary wield that enabled him to act toward an ancestral locus of power in such a fearless manner?

Support for this claim can be further gleaned from the following account given by the Bugotu based Missionary Andrew Thomson during a visit to West Gao in 1918, ‘In the deserted church at Menekia there were signs of recent occupation … the altar top had been unscrewed and inverted to keep it from ruin evidently’ (Thomson 1918: 88-89). It is interesting that the missionary sees the inversion of the altar top as evidence of an intention upon the part of West Gao residents to want to preserve the holy object. However, in light of the general reluctance toward embracing Christianity emphasised above, I would suggest that in turning the altar top

⁷⁵ In more recent histories of the interaction between Tasiu and ancestral sites I was told how in their efforts to “shut” or “close” these sites, their most powerful Christian object - their carved ‘walking stick’ - had split. Other narratives described the Tasiu becoming ill after approaching the sites. Both situations were posited as avoidable if the intervention of a landowner had been sought. I return to these issues in chapter 3.

over, the residents may have been more interested to ‘shut’ its power. Indeed during my fieldwork, turning ancestral stones the wrong way up (SIP, *opositim*) was one of method employed to neutralise their power, their potential to influence human affairs. Yet, these two divergent explanations of the significance of the overturned altar top point - in the final analysis - to a recognition of the power of Christian objects: the image of the overturned altar top encapsulates clearly that those responsible for this act – be it one of preservation or neutralisation – realised that they were dealing with a thing of power.

Realisations of potency cut both ways however. Missionary Andrew Thomson describes a visit in 1919 to the island of St. Jorge introduced above, or - as he presents it to readers of the Southern Cross Log - the ‘Hades of Bugotu’ (Thomson 1919: 135). Thomson (1919: 136) reports, ‘we then had Matins and travelled over the hills … I cut also a cross in a large rock as a reminder to future travellers. There is no doubt of it being a weird and mysterious place.’ Here, the white missionary’s carving of the cross on a large rock quite literally etches Christianity into the landscape of the ancestors, whose presence, although he does not directly say he sensed, certainly demand improvised ritual engagement (services, prayers and carving of the Holy symbol) rather than dismissal. However, the debatable extent to which inhabitants of Santa Isabel were assured of the success of Thomson’s mission to neutralise the ancestral presence on this sacred island, is evidenced in the fact that indigenous priests, Hugo Hebala and Ben Hageria, repeated the visit in 1924 (White 1978: 188). Despite the performance of a Holy Communion service by the priests, the visit in fact ‘confirmed belief in the existence of ghosts on the island’ (White 1978: 189; see also White 1991: 110). The interaction quoted above, involving a *white* missionary, pre-empted the extent to which the attitudes of *indigenous* priests towards ancestral locales were marked by a lack of destructive intent. Rather the goal was to Christianise the ancestral landscape: as White (1991: 110) argues, indigenous priests undertook

efforts to ‘reconstruct relations’ with spiritual agencies on Santa Isabel through acts of ‘blessing, baptism, and burial.’⁷⁶

The above examples signal recognition by the inhabitants of West Gao of Christianity as a source of power or influence parallel to that wielded by the ancestors. I collected many accounts, similar to those found in the ethnographic record for Santa Isabel and elsewhere in the Solomon Islands and Island Melanesia, of indigenous Anglican priests being called to subdue and neutralise potent ancestral shrines and diminish the agency of ancestral beings (Kolshus 2007: 286; Scott 2007b: 179-180; White 1991: 105-114). Common to such accounts is the removal of the stones of ancestral shrines to be used in the construction of Christian churches (Kahn 1990: 58; Scott 2007b: 181; White 1991: 115). During fieldwork I collected a story about the West Gao-born priest Hugo Bugoro who had broken apart two ancestral shrines and used the stones within the foundations in the original ‘birthing’ house associated with the Anglican woman’s group, the Mothers’ Union in Poro.⁷⁷ Given that the bodies of women are, in some circumstances, seen to have a neutralising effect upon the power of ancestral sites, it is perhaps not coincidental that this priest chose the Mothers’ Union site as the location for the powerful *phadagli* stones. Such indigenous actors, although following the actions of their white missionary forbears, in fact ensured the heightened success of such actions due to their knowledge of local matrices of influence and effect.

While some Christian transformations were appropriate, others were not, as the following example illustrates. During fieldwork I was given an account of the journey by the first indigenous Anglican priest on Santa Isabel, Hugo Hebala, to the sacred island of Onogo that occurred sometime after 1919 (when, as we have seen, West Gao was still resistant to Christian

⁷⁶ In her analysis of the healing practices of Bicolano Catholics in the lowland Philippines Cannell (1999: 127-128) discusses the ‘Christian’ status of ancestral beings, or *anitos*, some of which had received Christian baptism.

⁷⁷ The Mothers’ Union is a worldwide Anglican women’s group that focuses largely on ensuring the well-being of the (nuclear) family.

transformations) and before his death in 1947.⁷⁸ Upon his arrival the priest refused to perform the usual prayers and blessings that Christian actors undertook in order to neutralise the ancestral agency of places and shrines. Boni, an elderly West Gao resident, explained to me that when Hebala arrived at Onogo he said: “Some *kastom* is good and should be left alone.” According to Boni, Hebala cleared a place on the sand and set up a wooden altar to perform a Holy Communion service. When he had finished he decided to dismantle the altar in case “others” came and ruined it, but as he did so the leaves “came back” to cover the area of sand he had cleared.⁷⁹ The image of the leaves ‘coming back’ of their own accord to cover the area that had been cleared to perform the Christian ritual was interpreted by Boni as a sign of the continued efficacy of the ancestors on Onogo as a result of this priest’s decision not to neutralise their influence. Onogo continues to be understood as a place wherein interaction with benign ancestral beings and Christian transformative practices not only co-exist, but are brought into productive relation.⁸⁰ As such it is a microcosm of how Gao speakers more generally understand the relationship between Christianity and certain aspects of ancestral practices.

Reflecting upon his dual position as a church-keeper and *kastom* healer, Mark, an educated man in his late fifties/early sixties, commented, “At first I did not believe in *kastom*, but as we come and go along the road these things afflict us (SIP, *olketa samting save kasem iumi*). Eventually, I thought; maybe Big Man [God] is inside *kastom* too.” Mark, who was born approximately three decades after conversion to Anglican Christianity had occurred in West Gao (about 1950), often told me stories about his youth when he would fearlessly interfere with ancestral sites: his firm belief in Christianity made him treat sacred ancestral locales carelessly, and occasionally, with outright destructive intent. Age however, had changed Mark’s attitudes towards the domain of the ancestral, and when I came to know him in the years between 2010 and 2012, he was a

⁷⁸ Onogo is located southeast of West Gao lying between Santa Isabel and Malaita. Also known as Ramos Island, it is said, by the Kwaio of Malaita, to be the island where their dead reside (Keesing 1982: 110-111).

⁷⁹ Boni’s reference to ‘others’ was a euphemism for people from Malaita who also visit Onogo for fishing.

⁸⁰ As we shall see in chapter 3, the ritual introduction of males to the ancestral beings still active on Onogo is referred to by Gao speakers as a “second baptism.”

respected and much utilised practitioner of local ritual techniques - *fanitu*. Mark's life history marks the extent to which relationship between Christian and ancestral efficacy can shift from being oppositional to collaborative.

In the introduction to this thesis, I pointed to a nexus of semantic association between the terms *mana*, *noilaghi*, and *kastom* that I argued was best captured by the term 'efficacy'. As previously emphasised, *mana* can be of both ancestral and Christian origin. This is evidenced in one genre of knowledge explicitly referred to as *kastom* - *fanitu* - of which Mark was an established practitioner. This is a body of ritual techniques largely concerned with healing sickness, but also including the introduction of protective or productivity-enhancing additions to the body (via the incorporation of substances or the tying-on of plant materials). Gao speakers rely on these techniques alongside modern medicines provided by the medical clinic located in Poro village. *Fanitu* work, I was told, because they have efficacy (*au noilaghi*, *au mana*), but in order to retain this efficacy they must be performed regularly. The word *fanitu* is composed of the addition of the causative prefix 'fa' to the adjective '*nitu*'.⁸¹ The term *nitu* is derived from the noun - *na'itu* - which means non-human or ancestral being, suggesting that this ritualised efficacy is ancestral in origin. The ancestral associations of *fanitu* derive from two facts. Firstly, each *fanitu* possesses a genealogy of transmission wherein the current holder not only acknowledges the deceased person who originally held and transmitted the techniques to them, but also considers to whom among their descendants they will, in turn, transmit their *fanitu*. Secondly, as explored further in chapter 3, many *fanitu* are concerned with the operations of the invisible ancestral beings that continue to populate the environment of West Gao - either in curing illnesses caused by them, or enlisting their support for protection.

Despite being located within a network of ancestral relationships, Gao speakers use the word *fanitu* interchangeably with the word for Christian blessing, '*fablahi*' (uttering Trinitarian formula and making the sign of the cross). In most *fanitu* I collected, practitioners included

⁸¹ In the Cheke Holo language of adjacent Maringe district '*nitu*' is defined as 'magical, imbued with spirit power; sacred, ceremonial' (White, Kokhonigita, and Pulomana 1988: 130; see also White 1978: 111).

Christian blessing at some stage during the preparation or enactment of their ritual techniques. This linguistic and ritual association between *fanitu* and *fablahi* emerges directly from the historically established relationship wherein Christian efficacy (*mana*) could be channelled via ritual means to suppress ancestral efficacy (*mana*) (White 1991: 108).⁸² However, it marks a shift in the nature of this relationship. In the case of *fanitu*, God no longer combats ancestral agency from the outside, but rather, as Mark suggested, he is brought “inside” *kastom*. Another expert of *fanitu* – Ma’ane Iho – expressed this collaborative relationship in different terms. He explained that his ancestors had no access to a hospital (*suga fogra*): instead, they used the plants and trees that God had created in order to cure illness. Throughout our conversations, Ma’ane Iho repeatedly emphasised that God was party to his ritual techniques, summarising this conviction in the following words: “God listens to the cry of *kastom*, all the trees and the leaves he alone made them”. This assertion regarding divine creation raises the issue of cosmogony.

Analyses of the historical trajectories of conversion have shown that the expectations of foreign missionaries about indigenous responses to the ‘universal Truth’ of Christianity are often at odds with the interpretations forwarded by their converts, which frequently posit Christianity as revealing the veracity of local knowledge about the state of the universe (Cannell 2007: 36; see also Gow 2007: 235: 237; Rutherford 2007: 264). I suggested in the introduction to this thesis that analyses of local engagements with Christianity can be enriched through attention to cosmogony. As will be recalled, Gao speakers posit autochthony as a matter of process rather than an absolute condition. This allows room for the ultimate creation of a pre-existing landmass, albeit one animated by transformative processes in which the apical ancestors became enfolded upon their arrival, by the Christian divinity.⁸³ Such cosmogonic conceptions place both God and the ancestors as inherently connected to the landscape of Santa Isabel, and

⁸² Many *fanitu* in West Gao have been blessed by either the Tasiu or priests and are viewed as being more effective as a result.

⁸³ This ‘cosmogonic’ alignment of Christianity and a descent based poly-ontology differs to that posited by an Arosi of Makira, namely, ‘the spirit of God placed the lineages on the land; it split the land for us. These divisions in the land already existed’ (Scott 2007b: 14, 206). Of course, such differences are to be expected given the distinction I highlighted earlier between Arosi notions of ‘absolute’ autochthony and Gao speakers’ notions of processual autochthony.

concomitantly facilitate claims that imply collaboration between God and the ancestors, such as “God hears the cry of *kastom*.”

Unlike any of the ship men explored in this chapter so far, the white missionaries paved the way for a missionisation process that took the agency of the ancestors seriously. It is because of this fact that they succeeded in gaining ground where so many others before them had failed. It is by way of such processes, no doubt much encouraged by the death of Ghabili, that conversion to Christianity proceeded in West Gao. Resistant to the end, the figure of Ghabili’s instantiates a relationship of outright opposition to Christianity that did not, indeed could not, survive his death. As local Christians began to wield the efficacy of the Christian God, seeds were sown for a new kind of relationship between ancestral and Christian efficacy in West Gao. This was a relationship based on internal collaboration, mediated by a lived landscape that was, and continued to be throughout my fieldwork, posited as both of God and of the ancestors simultaneously.

Throughout this chapter I have illustrated how historical events, when explored from the perspective of the local ancestral histories, can be narratively re-tuned to revivify ancestrally mediated connections to particular places. We have seen how conversion to Christianity in West Gao inculcates this logic on a more macro scale whereby a non-indigenous element - the Christian God - has been rendered as foundational to the efficacy (both ancestral and divine in origin) of the landscape. However, this latter point does not engender a situation in which the plurality of ancestral identities - the connections of particular persons to particular localities - has been obliterated. Rather, Christian efficacy can be channelled to reproduce such differences (see also Scott 2007b: 184). In order to further evidence this claim, in the final section I explore how a local actor, himself an agent of radical historical transformation, nevertheless became a powerful Christian ancestor fused with a particular locality.

1.4: A government – mission ancestor

In April 2011 I collaborated with two academic colleagues to run a Cultural Heritage Workshop in my host village.⁸⁴ The workshop involved the allocation of cameras to work-groups (largely young people) who were invited to document important ‘*kastom*’ artefacts and sites. For that purpose, I accompanied one of the participants, Emily, and her mother, Pichu, to an area high in the bush behind her hamlet that was the site of an old village. As we arrived the older woman cast her eye around the thick vegetation explaining that in the past (SIP, *bifoā*) the area was full of food trees such as mango (*saeko*), ngali nut (*sita*) and coconut (*khoilo*). Now, however, the only evidence of past inhabitancy were three Christian cemented graves (see chapter 7). Upon our arrival the two women immediately knelt down and began to clear the graves of fallen leaves and other debris. Once cleared, the young girl photographed the graves and told me the story of the people buried there. Laid alongside his sister, they explained, was the man Japhet Hamutaghi, a ‘SIP, *bigman from bifoā*’ - a ‘Big Man’ of the past, who Emily and Pichu explained, was linked to the colonial government (White 1991: 119, 187-188, 193-194).

It is interesting that my two companions remembered Hamutaghi as a man of the government, because historical records reveal that he was in fact one of the powerful ‘Church Chiefs’. Emily’s and Pichu’s association of their ancestor with the government rather than with the church, points to the political confusion that surrounded local authority during the period 1920-1930 on Santa Isabel. The 1920s had witnessed the growing influence of local village headmen appointed by the colonial government to assist the indigenous Government Headmen and the white District Officer in his administration of the island (White 1991: 189). These men were appointed without reference to local political influence, but rather according to their experience with the labour trade and proficiency in pijin (White 1991: 190). As White (1991: 190) argues, the appointment of such men ‘worked to erode further the prestige and influence of local chiefs.’ In response, a white missionary - Richard Fallowes - who arrived on Santa Isabel in 1929, sought to bolster support for the mission in the face of rising government influence in local politics which he perceived as a threat to the influence of both local chiefs and the church (White 1991: 190). Fallowes began to align the mission – just as Welchman had done before

⁸⁴ Ane Straume and Evelyn Tetehu. The workshop was funded by Bergen University.

him, and in a way the British administration had failed to do – to locally recognised ‘Big Men’ (White 1978: 220, 1991: 190-191). As we have seen, the arrival of the mission had robbed local Big Men of the appeal to the power of their ancestral beings whilst indigenous catechists and priests rose to ascendancy as wielders of a new form of efficacy (Christian *mana*). Fallowes’ Church Chief idea therefore realigned that which earlier periods of missionisation had wrought apart (White 1978: 222, 1991: 192).

On a practical level, Church Chiefs were responsible for directing tasks related to the upkeep of the church grounds. According to White (1978: 233), ‘as Friday had been set aside for the Government work-day, Saturday was marked … as the Mission work-day.’ Supported by an official ‘licence’ that was drawn up by Fallowes on the day of their installation during mass (White 1991: 192, 1978: 222), they also undertook the moral policing of village residents.⁸⁵ Some Church Chiefs began to expand their influence as ‘arbiters and disciplinarians in dealing with adultery, sorcery accusations and misconduct of all sorts’ by imposing sentences of suspension from services and excommunication from the Church (White 1978: 224-225). In the words of Fallowes (quoted in White 1978: 224), ‘some of these Church Chiefs were men of outstanding “mana” and among them was Japhet Hamutaghi of [place name removed] brother of Walter Gaigai the priest and they took upon themselves to travel beyond their own village to encourage Church Chiefs in other villages’ (see also White 1991: 194). Although in some cases a single man filled both the role of Church and Government Headman, according to White (1978: 226) Japhet Hamutaghi was a Church Chief only, and shared his work at adjudicating cases of misconduct with a District Headman. However, that he was remembered by his descendants in West Gao as a man of the government suggests how closely the roles of these two ‘types’ of chiefs were aligned in Santa Isabel. But this was not the only information Emily and Pichu wanted to tell me about their ancestor Japhet. Where they certainly agreed with the

⁸⁵ As noted in the introduction to this thesis, the Isabel Council of Chiefs – established by Dudley Tuti – was recognised by the provincial authorities in 1984. In the period immediately following this event, Tuti and the then parliament member of Santa Isabel - Denis Lulei - toured the island to appoint district-level councils of chiefs who – in a ceremony that re-enacted the ritual appointment of ‘Church Chiefs’ by Fallowes - were blessed in a church service by Tuti himself and received certificates signed by him (White 1991: 239). During my fieldwork, West Gao District had a group of chiefs (The Gao House of Chiefs) who had been blessed in this manner. They operated under the leadership of a Head Chief, Alfred Bugoro, and his secretary – my adoptive father, Chief Paul Renton Fafale.

historical records was on his status as a ‘man of *mana*’. There was a “*kastom* place,” they explained, just down the hill from the graves, where Hamutaghi had planted a variety of cordyline (*hngole*). This was not an ancestral shrine (*phadaghi*) or site (*tifuni*) but rather “something from before for protection”. The two women asserted that the plant had “stayed the same size for years” (an index of its *mana*, efficacy), and they continued, if the plant was disturbed, huge thunder (*fila*) would shake the earth surrounding it. The younger woman was visibly afraid of the area, although she did manage to get close enough to photograph it for the workshop.

Japhet Hamutaghi was a key church-government chief and a propagator of the colonial transformations that have given shape to the social, religious and political architecture of Santa Isabel communities. The Christian *mana* that Hamutaghi was said (by white missionary Richard Fallowes and his matrilineal descendants) to possess, may have, in a similar manner to the youthful Mark introduced above, made him fearless of the ancestral agency that might animate unfamiliar territories. Indeed, as Fallowes states in the excerpt above, Hamutaghi and others travelled far beyond their own villages in the course of their role as Church Chiefs (see also White 1991: 193-194). Hamutaghi - and the Church Chiefs in general - signal how conversion to Christianity induced a state of heightened mobility in comparison to a pre-Christian past when movement was more restricted due to the agency of unfamiliar ancestors (cf. McDougall 2004: 204, 317, 430, n.d.: *chap.* 4). However, the particular case of Hamutaghi illustrates that this opposition of before/after implies a temporal rupture that masks the extent to which particular Christians used their *mana* in order to establish emergent connections to the new places through which they moved. The *hngole* shrub planted by Hamutaghi in the early part of the last century was posited to ‘behave’ in exactly the same way as many other plants of the same and different varieties dotted around the landscape of West Gao and associated with more distant ancestors. Being an active participant in historical processes makes Hamutaghi no less ancestral for that, even if his *mana* is analytically attributed to the Christian God rather than his ancestral status *per se*. From the perspective of my friends, however, the analytical distinction is of little consequence. *Mana* is *mana*, and knowing the narrative of the *hngole* plant is testament

to their current emplacement in the area that they live. The ground will shake if an unknowing stranger disturbs the leaves, no doubt with similar ill consequences to those which, as we have seen, befall other intruders who do not attend to the ancestors of a particular place.

This case study is an enactment of White's (1991: 136) insight regarding the 'agents of missionary change' on Santa Isabel as being analogous to 'mythic culture heroes.' However, such analogies are not simply discernible in narratives, but also as part of how people experience a particular locality. In narrating the tale of a colonial Big Man, an agent of missionary change, and their matrilineal ancestor, Emily and Pichu were capturing, in narrative, and through pointing to 'active' aspects of a locality, a mode of transformative action that is also attributed to more distant primordial ancestors. As Scott (2007b: 32) has argued for Makira (southeastern Solomon Islands) cosmogony is 'constant.' It is an emergent aspect of lived realities rather than confined to a 'primordial epoch' (Scott 2007b: 163). Hamutaghi's case exemplifies a situation in which Christian *mana* can exist in a constitutive relationship to a more longstanding condition of processual autochthony, a condition within which West Gao residents are enfolded and continue to – by various means which we explore throughout the remaining chapters – enact in the present.

As Gow (2001: 20) has argued, historically-minded anthropology must start from the 'problems ethnography presents.' Following this proposal, I began this chapter with the intervention of the ancestors with my own 'historic' arrival in West Gao. I then traced similar ancestral-foreign encounters by drawing together official historical records and local ancestral histories into the same analytical space. The potential encounter between Spanish explorers and a powerful ancestral being, supported by evidence from later periods of history, suggested that ancestral beings have displayed longstanding resistance to the incursions of foreign intruders onto the land. This argument paved the way for an analysis of conversion to Christianity that considered the role of the ancestors in the shaping of a more dramatic historical transformation. I argued that by meeting the ancestors on their own terms through the invocation of *mana*, white

Anglican missionaries facilitated the success of their enterprise and further, opened the possibility of collaborative relationships between the Christian God and the ancestors.

In the final section, I illustrated how Christian *mana* can be channelled to reproduce particular ancestral identities articulated in reference to particular territories. Recent ancestors, because of (rather than in spite of) their contact with profound historical change, can become powerful ancestral guardians. Ultimately, my aim throughout this chapter has been to illustrate that history must be understood as internal to emergent processes of emplacement in which contemporary inhabitants of West Gao continue to be engaged. This realisation forms the basis for the next chapter, in which I discuss the intersections between ‘Christian’ notions of community and ancestrally-derived modes of enacting socio-spatial unity.

Chapter 2 At the Ancestral End (or Beginning) of Christian Community

Introduction

Early into fieldwork, I asked one of my research participants about genealogies. She replied that many people in West Gao had genealogical information relating to their matriclan (*kokolo*) and matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) and that in some cases such information was recorded in exercise books. I speculated that such documents were probably kept secret. The force of her agreement took me aback: she asserted that the revelation of such documents would cause “divisions” that would spell “the end of peace” and “the end of community”.

As argued in the introduction to this thesis, West Gao cosmology is predicated upon the existence of three basic categories known as *kokolo*. Each category consists of a relational amalgam of genres of knowledge, human persons, and ancestral beings, which are unified by virtue of a shared, inherent relationship to a discrete territory. Much like the ancestral histories (*pagusu*) introduced in the previous chapter, genealogies are crucial to the performance and reproduction of these relationships. As hinted by the comments of my research participant, peaceful community existence depends upon keeping such knowledge hidden, or below the surface of quotidian life (see also McDougall 2004: 488; Scott 2007b: 66; White 1988: 21). This is because the surface level of village existence involves maintaining a peaceful unity through the successful enactment of two principles: working together (*loku faudu*) and existing together (*au faudu*). Community existence, therefore, is about achieving ‘togetherness’, it is certainly not about emphasising categorical differences between community members.

To explore the contours of community togetherness, in the first section I analyse houses and households as temporally-bounded entities that emerge from cross-clan relationships. Village life, or ‘existing together’ (*au faudu*), is achieved through the maintenance of a diffuse notion of relatedness which, although based on actual kinship ties between residents, is consolidated through the ‘scaling-up’ of notions of the family household to the level of the village. In the second section, I develop these connections between households and villages by exploring how

‘working together’ as a community depends upon contributions of materials, labour, and food from different households. The importance of food in maintaining the relational flow of village life ultimately reveals that land forms the substrate that makes such relations ‘performable’ in the first place. This contention is explored in more depth in section three, in which I discuss the historical formation of my host village Poro.

In the fourth section, I draw upon ethnography from a property dispute that occurred in Poro Village during fieldwork. Firstly, I argue that ‘existing together’ is ultimately based on a dynamic of invitation where established landowners welcome incoming migrants (*nanoni te mei ke leghu*, people who came later/afterward) to reside and work with them on their land. Secondly, in contrast to the claim of my research participant regarding genealogical knowledge, and the analysis undertaken in the first two sections of the chapter, I suggest that Christian togetherness is predicated upon ancestrally mediated relationships of precedence, rather than being achieved in spite of such relationships. In light of this claim, in section five, I delineate two levels at which ancestrally mediated differences between matrilineal collectives are articulated in West Gao. At the macro-level, *a priori* difference is upheld at the level of *kokolo* – an exogamous matriclan. At the micro-level, internal differentiation of a *kokolo* occurs by way of an emphasis on the differences between the matrilineages that constitute a particular *kokolo*. At both levels, differences are highlighted through appeals to temporal precedence with regard to particular areas of land. However, whilst the former macro-level assertion of difference is actively conducive to creating community ‘togetherness,’ the latter micro-level processes of internal differentiation threaten to erode community togetherness. Such complexities suggest that the Christian unity of village existence - enacting ‘togetherness’ - arises from policing the level at which matrilineal difference is articulated, rather than from the outright denial of matrilineal distinctiveness. Finally, I argue that descent-based identities in West Gao figure in the day-to-day concerns of Gao speakers, rather than being confined to occasional land disputes.

2.1: Houses: constructing relationships, or relational construction

In West Gao houses are built out of relationships as much as solid materials. This can be illustrated by the actions of my hamlet neighbours during fieldwork. For example, I once saw Smithi tying huge sago palm leaf bundles to send to his married sister who was building a new house in Buma (Maringe District). On another occasion I listened to the resigned tones of my neighbour Le'i narrating his long visits to his in-laws in Lepi (Bugotu) to saw timber for house-posts on their behalf. In a different vein, walking through the mountainous interior to harvest taro, I heard the quiet complaints of my adoptive ‘sister’ (MZD) regarding an expansive sago palm plantation. The woman who controlled the palms had neglected to invite her hamlet neighbours to harvest the palm for their own house-building endeavours.

In this ethnographic snapshot, practices surrounding the procurement of house-building materials involve a wide variety of relationships: siblingship; affinity; and hamlet neighbours. In this section I illustrate that house buildings and the ‘households’ they constitute, whilst including relationships central to matriclan identity (for example siblingship), are best understood as loci of achieved (and therefore temporally-bounded) cross-clan relationships. Revolving around daily activities of food preparation and visiting behaviours, houses form the epicentre of community existence because the ‘household’ as a relational entity based in commensality is ‘scaled-up’ to capture the relational condition of ‘existing together’ (*au faudu*) that constitutes village life.

A West Gao household consists of one or more sleeping houses (sing. *suga*) that share an attached kitchen house - *suga kuki/gahu*. A middle-aged Gao speaker named Aesaea once explained to me, “people help build houses, thinking, in the future I will sit will sit down in this house.” As I watched the construction of my own sleeping house (*suga*), I learnt that the project is indeed a communal one.⁸⁶ It begins with collecting materials and digging deep holes to sink the timber (*taba*) house-posts, the precise layout of which varies according to the design of the builder. During these initial stages only close male family members are involved. However, when the construction of the roofing panels and the elaborate triangular roof crest (*khiokilova*)

⁸⁶ See Bogesi (1948: 219-220) for a description of pre-colonial house building in Bugotu.

begins, extended kin and neighbours may help out. The ‘sewing’ (*chuchuru*) of sago palm (*nato*) into thatch can be undertaken by either men or women, but I saw it performed only by men. As they sit, rhythmically folding *nato* and puncturing the leaves with the tapered ends of the bush rope - *gnara* - men swap stories, betel nut and laughter (*gausa*) across the sand that separates them (see figure 5). A passing friend (*kheragna*) and resident of a nearby village might pause to sew one thatch and join the conversation, sometimes receiving food cooked by female family members before continuing on his way.



Figure 5 *chuchuru nato*. November 2010.

According to some, this kind of relationship-based construction is becoming less common and I was frequently told, “nowadays you must pay men for labour and for sawing timber.”⁸⁷ However, much of the house building I saw in West Gao proceeded with the help of kin and neighbours who were given a meal rather than money for their efforts. The work involves not only the sewing of thatch, but also the layering and tying of individual *nato* thatches to form the

⁸⁷ Between 2010 and 2012 the cost of timber required for the construction of a large family house building was in the region of \$900 S.D. (approximately £100). Labour was even more costly - in the region of \$2-3,000 S.D, hence most families relied on kin networks and friends/neighbours for help.

main body of the roof (and unless timber is available, the walls).⁸⁸ Thatches are also used to construct the triangular roof crest - the *khiokilova* - an immense structure that is lifted on top of a framework of house posts by way of a purpose-built 'ladder', a task which requires the work of many men (see figure 6). Both the construction of *nato* thatch and the *khiokilova* 'roofing' procedures continue to be undertaken according to local techniques and have yet to be displaced by corrugated iron (*kopa*), the roofing material that is chosen for church, clinic and school



Figure 6 lifting the *khiokilova*. April 2011.

buildings, and the houses of a few wealthy community members.⁸⁹ Whilst timber and concrete has increased the durability of West Gao houses, sago palm thatch and bamboo wall panels require on-going maintenance: *nato* thatch usually requires repair or replacement after about six years. My original sleeping house, where I resided until my new house was completed, was elevated on concrete posts that had once supported a completely different residence in previous decades (see figure 7). Despite the use of durable materials such as cement, houses in West Gao are always in flux, lacking the more enduring temporality of other aspects of a home-place (*nau*, SIP, *vilij*) such as food trees planted around residences, the cemented graves of recent Christian

⁸⁸ Local vines, *bu'e* (wild vanilla), and a sturdy climbing fern, *nalafe*, can be used for securing the thatch.

⁸⁹ During fieldwork, larger numbers of iron roofing panels were trickling into West Gao as gifts from the national parliament member (Honourable Samuel Manetoali) who was a man from the adjacent district, East Gao.

ancestors, or the more ancient ancestral beings (SIP, *laef devol*) that inhabit the surrounding landscape. This indicates that the processual, or time-bound, qualities of houses in West Gao capture not the processual nature of nature of kinship *per se* (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 39; Carsten 1997) but, rather, that the social unit to which house buildings correspond - the family - is temporary *in comparison* to the more enduring descent-based categories - matriclans - out of which it is constructed.



Figure 7 my original sleeping house - some free standing cement poles of an older house still visible.
November 2010.

The term 'family' in West Gao – *tabutua* - refers to a family attached to one 'household', that is, that is the persons living in the various sleeping houses arrayed around a shared kitchen house (see also Hvding 1996: 45). The household in which I resided consisted of my mother and father, my mother's sister, my married elder brother and his wife and children, and my unmarried brother (see also White 1991: 31). My five remaining older siblings had all married 'out' of West Gao either to other parts of Santa Isabel or to other provinces in the Solomon Islands. At Christmas or Easter, however, my siblings and their families would often 'return home' (*ke pulo ka nau*) in order to spend the holiday period with our household. Due to the rule of exogamy that is upheld at the level of matriclan (*kokolo*), a given household in West Gao is,

in the majority of cases, home to members of at least two different matriclans.⁹⁰ However, as implied by Aesaea's comment that people help build other people's houses because they might in the future 'sit down' in that house, they are the sites of constant comings and goings of persons outside the immediate family. These visiting behaviours intensify on Sundays when the community-wide taboo on work encourages people to spend their day, upon the completion of the Eucharist, with friends and relatives in other hamlets and villages. Much of this activity pivots around food preparation because all visitors should be fed in some form, even if this simply involves the provision of betel-nut. The kitchen is the heart of the West Gao household (cf. Allerton 2013: 60-61; Appadurai 1981: 497; Carsten 1995: 225, 1997: 49; Kahn 1996: 186).

As testified by descriptions of ground level houses among the Kwaio of Malaita Province who have long resisted colonial intervention into their lived worlds (Keesing 1992: 23), throughout the Solomon Islands the separation of living quarters into a ground-level kitchen and elevated sleeping house was a result of colonial insistence on hygiene and safety (Scott 2007b: 44).⁹¹ Throughout West Gao, the central rooms of contemporary elevated sleeping houses are light and airy spaces where sunlight dances off the newly swept pandanus mats (*gnagru*), glossy posters, or mobiles made from recycled cigarette packets. Kitchen houses, however, are saturated with a variety of other colours and sounds: the dark-red of betel nut and clay-earth; the soot of rekindled fires; muted conversations and occasional raucous laughter. With its dark corners and earthy smell, the kitchen house comprises an intimate family space where a respected guest would rarely tread. He belongs elsewhere, under the swinging decorations with his ear to the radio, awaiting tea from the readied thermos. Long before the arrival of any guest, however, the day of a West Gao family begins in the kitchen-house.

⁹⁰ I shall return to the issue of intra-*kokolo*, or endogamous unions in chapter 5 and the conclusion of this thesis.

⁹¹ Missionary Alfred Penny (1888: 80) states that both ground level houses and raised houses were built on Isabel prior to missionisation, adding, 'the latter is, from our point of view, much the better.' Relatedly, Scott (2007b: 43) states that the elevated houses built by the Arosi of Makira was based on a design derived from Bugotu, Santa Isabel.

The hub of subsistence activities starts at dawn: the lighting of kitchen fires to reheat the evening left-overs or the cooking of a fresh batch of new *kumara*, swamp taro (*khaekakae*), or rice (*raeci*); the mass exodus along the croton lined road (*nagliu*), which persons leave at different points to reach the mountainous, forested interior (*naguta*) to tend a garden site (*tobi*); the daily early-morning search for tiny hermit crabs (*nakhoka*) used as bait for fishing the reef. Food in West Gao is produced, procured, and cooked to be shared. As observed by White (1991: 126-127) on Santa Isabel, the antithesis of sharing food – eating alone – is a powerful idiom for expressing the breakdown of highly-valued interpersonal relations. The moral significance of sharing food was summarised by one of my older research participants, Hilda, who, during one of my visits, began an unprompted commentary on ‘*nakahra tifae*’ – ways of life in the past. After underlining the importance of feeding people who passed through a village, Hilda continued, “*tufa mala au gano ka khame mu, mala fodu sinabo*” – share in order to have food in your hands and a full garden. Hilda explained that according to *kastom*, those who did not share food would, as a consequence, suffer a dearth of food. She described this ‘*kastom*’ principle of sharing food (even with relative strangers) alternately as *tufa* (share) or *nahma* - free gift, or love (cf. Burt 1994b: 38). In Hilda’s commentary, sharing food with passers-by no doubt refers to the peaceful post-conversion period, when the cessation of raiding made casual visiting a possibility. However, there is evidence to suggest that the apparent cosmological necessity to share food, suggested by her comment about sharing food to ensure a full garden, has a much deeper history. My adoptive mother, Rosita once described an archaic principle known in Gao as *phile tabalaola* which dictated that if one person in a group had food he must share it with everyone present. If he neglected but one man, that man would live whilst the others would perish. This commentary, coupled with Hilda’s narrative, points to a moral principle with regard to food sharing that animated the lived world of the ancestors – Christian or otherwise. Furthermore, this principle dictated that acts of food sharing were loaded with existential consequences.

In contrast to the pre-Christian ancestors, Christian ancestors enjoyed a peaceful existence that undoubtedly expanded the geographical scope of food-sharing behaviours. However, even in the

contemporary context typified by heightened mobility, sharing food prepared by unfamiliar persons can be a risky business. If, as we shall explore in chapter 3, establishing a fixed relationship to a home-place (*nau*) is constitutive of personhood in West Gao, a house building (*suga*) comprises the safe centre of that locality (cf. Allerton 2013: 37). In exactly the same way, eating within the ‘family’ is also the safest bet. However, the boundaries of the ‘family’ in West Gao can be extensive. Beyond the meaning of ‘family’ - *tabutua* - given above, this term can also be used to refer to the ‘extended’ family who are linked through the marriages of ego’s siblings and ego’s mother’s, father’s, grandmother’s, and grandfather’s siblings. In both meanings of the word (immediate and extended family) a *tabutua* is a locus of matrilineal/lateral and patrilineal/lateral connections; affinal and consanguinal ties. Consequently, the term for family can be used to describe not only those sharing a kitchen-house but also an entire village. Thus, residents of a particular village in West Gao, like those belonging to a particular household, will often describe themselves as being part of “one family” (*kahe tabutua*). This fact was expressed by one research participant who described the situation in Poro, my host village, in the following words: “You might hear people talk about three lines but in fact we are all related”.⁹² This comment highlights the extent to which village existence promotes rhetoric of a diffuse notion of relatedness. Categories of identity based on the principles of matrilineal descent such as *kokolo* (matriclan) and *t’hi’ā* (matrilineage) are encompassed by an overt emphasis on ‘the family’ - a locus of cross-clan and lineage relationships whose spatial equivalent, the household, can be scaled up to include larger sociological units such as villages. This form of pan-village relatedness underpins a condition which Gao speakers call *au faudu* - existing together, a condition that is steeped in Christian morality because as we shall now see, a village is defined by the presence of a church building.

Households are grouped into small settlements, which due to the lack of a direct local term for such sites, I label ‘hamlets’.⁹³ The distinction between adjacent hamlets is often purely

⁹² Here the Solomon Islands Pijin term *laen* was used to refer to the three matriclans, However, Gao speakers can also use *laen* to refer to matrilineages.

⁹³ The West Gao term for both hamlets and villages is *nau*, a term I explore in more detail in the next chapter.

geographical - usually made by reference to particular place names derived from features of the landscape. Due to the dynamic of 'invitation' that underpins residence patterns in West Gao to be explored below, tracing consistent patterns of kinship links between inhabitants of hamlets is difficult. In many cases, however, a group of siblings and their offspring will form the core group of residents (see also McDougall 2004: 91). The distinction between 'hamlets' and 'villages', depends upon the presence of a church. The 'prayer house' - *suga tarai* - where sharing the weekly communal meal of the Eucharist (*Ngamu Blahi* – literally 'Holy Eating') is the focal enactment of village unity. Shared eating within the 'house' of the church suggests that churches, like the house/kitchen complex that forms a 'household', comprise a unit formed through commensality. The conceptual connections between the 'house' and the 'church' are further revealed in the way different villages reciprocally host feast-based celebrations to mark the annual Saint's Day associated with their church building. These pan-West Gao Christian celebrations are called *Naga'e Suga* - 'Day House', suggesting that during such events, in communally preparing food and hosting guests from other villages, the village itself becomes one house, or a household writ large.⁹⁴ Given these relational similarities between households and villages, it follows that a household also comprises the unit through which the 'work' (*loku*), which one must perform if one is to be considered part of a 'community', is organised.

2.2: *Loku faudu* – working from house to village

In order to convince my hosts that I was not simply a guest, but an active member of the household, I spent many hours during the early weeks of fieldwork helping my sister in-law sweep leaves from the sandy space (*glalaba*) between our sleeping houses. Passers-by would comment frequently on my propensity to work, describing me approvingly as *sasa'a* ('willing' or not lazy). The clearing of leaves was a daily activity that ensured the area of our hamlet looked well-kept, an ideal central to community as well as domestic existence. Orchestrated by

⁹⁴ Different villages, which perform such reciprocal celebrations, do so within a given 'District' - such as 'West Gao District' - that is serviced by at least one main priest known as a 'District Priest'. In the case of West Gao this district also corresponds to the 'Ward' that is the political unit of administration for operations of the Provincial Government. West Gao or *Kaloka Ward* thus has one 'Honourable' – a resident who is also a member of the Provincial Government. In terms of the National government, voting is organised according to each ward, and any governmental or NGO-led development projects will be also orchestrated through this political unit.

the echoing cry of a conch shell (*kufli*), villagers in West Gao work every week to ensure the upkeep of village space. As we saw in the previous chapter, such routines of communal labour are a direct product of the power struggles between the colonial government and the Anglican mission in the early part of the twentieth century. Saturdays would see the relentless uprooting of offending grass shoots spiking up through the planted clover that formed a smooth blanket over the Church grounds; on Fridays attention was given to government-based institutions when the vegetation that had crept over the boundaries of the clinic and school grounds was cut back. Being ‘willing’ [to work] is a key attribute of a member of Christian community in other parts of Santa Isabel (White 1991: 129). In West Gao, through these weekly and annual routines of ‘working together’ (*loku faudu*), persons are perceived to *become* community members. As one research participant expressed this, failing to “contribute” to such work means that one’s status as a member of the community (SIP, *komuniti*) will be questioned.

Village life in West Gao, much like the houses that constitute it, is built out of cross-clan relationships. The materials, labour, and food required to complete communal projects are drawn from contributions of households - a process orchestrated during announcements made after the Sunday church service. As previously mentioned, when a new building was being constructed, the women of that household prepared food for those who contribute labour. Such micro-processes of feeding those who work also occurred during village work projects such as the building of a kitchen for the priest, or a market house. In these cases women cooked food such as coconut milk and tuber soups (*supsup*), rice (*raeci*), and stone-oven baked sweet potato (*motu kumara*) that was consumed ‘on site’ by the men whilst at work. Defined by commensality and complementarity of labour, working together (*loku faudu*) in this way generates a productive community by extending exchanges that occur within households and hamlets to create cooperation across village space. These interconnections were evidenced when a dispute arose. During a project involving improvement on the Poro clinic, money had been secured to pay those who worked. Certain villagers talked about the necessity to feed the workers, but others responded angrily: “No, they are getting paid, let them use the money they receive to buy their own food.” It was also claimed that because funds were limited and only a

few labourers could work the project was taking too long. In contrast, I was told that if the work had been undertaken by the community, “we would have had it finished in a week”. Just as West Gao residents decry the increasing monetisation of the labour involved in house-building, the provision of money to workers drove a wedge between the contribution economy of food and labour that engender communal productive endeavours.

If, during fieldwork, feeding was central to the enactment of community labour, it is not surprising that the different trajectories of crops grown in particular gardens crystallised the different kinds of social ‘work’ in which their owners were engaged. Individual gardens, even if explicitly described as “only for [household] eating” (*mala ngamu lana*), were used when the community was required to “*sausalu gano*” - collect, contribute, or pool food. For example, when the community was asked to provide food for a newly arrived nurse (SIP, *dresa*) at the health clinic, a gardener drew upon the household garden in order to contribute. Alternatively, household gardens also provided food for the village’s annual Saint’s Day feasts, various fundraising ‘bazaars’⁹⁵ and for private sale to supplement household incomes (SIP, *maket*).⁹⁶ These household gardens, used simultaneously to provide for ‘community’ projects, are differentiated from garden plots that were planted solely for life-cycle rituals such as *fangamu taego* and mortuary ceremonies (*semede*). This distinction between household and event-focused garden sites is an icon of the different ways in which social relationships can be mobilised: either a household unit, contributing to community endeavours, or the cooperation of networks of persons belonging to different households according to ties of matrilineal kinship. In contrast to garden plots containing raw food, the preparation of cooked food by different households illustrates the intersections, rather than the divergences, between community existence and ties of matrilineal kinship. Certain life-cycle rituals (baptism, marriage, and the mortuary sequence), whilst focused on particular persons and their immediate kinship ties, also

⁹⁵ Such bazaars were most frequently organised to raise money for the village-based Mothers’ Union. The nursery and primary school also organised fundraising bazaars.

⁹⁶ Marketing garden produce was difficult for many women in West Gao. Selling food in this way was a source of shame (*mamaza*). Some explained they would only sell garden food if asked directly by a neighbour or friend. However, many women were being encouraged by their husbands to produce garden plots only for sale, and as I left the field a handful of women were already doing so.

required the preparation of large amounts of cooked food for feasts that drew in the community at large.

Food exchanges, therefore, form the fabric of social relations in West Gao. This can be illustrated by attention to circumstances in which social relationships are threatened. Replicating a pattern described throughout the Solomon Islands and elsewhere in Melanesia (Scott 2007b: 218; Taylor 2008: 97) statements made during village disputes that explicitly seek to expose the external and ‘ungrounded’ origins of particular persons, as in: “you float” (*ghoe elo*) – are heavily criticised. Statements of this type are expressed as “breaking *kastom*”. The Gao term for this beleaguered practice is ‘*bresi mate’i*’ meaning ‘broken young banana leaf.’ Young banana leaves (*mate’i*) are used throughout Santa Isabel in the preparation of foods such as taro and cassava puddings, both during my fieldwork and in the past (Bogesi 1948: 222). The leaves are carefully prepared by thinning down the central spine of the leaf before gently heating it over open flames. During this process it is crucial that the leaf does not break: a broken leaf is useless for cooking the pudding. The image of a young banana leaf cut away from the main plant (jeopardising its growth), then subsequently broken, is a powerful metaphor for the collapse of social relations. The broken young banana leaf is an instantiation of a double termination of two processes – growth and cooking – that lie at the heart of successful social reproduction in West Gao. Furthermore, edible objects (raw or cooked) form the bulk of reciprocal ‘compensation’ or ‘reconciliation’ payments (*polouru*) that are enforced by West Gao chiefs when cases of *bresi mate’i* have occurred in order to re-knit the breaches in social relationships. As indicated by this discussion of breaking *kastom*, the biggest threat to social relationships are disputes surrounding placement on land. In section 2.4 below I show how land-person relationships form the socio-spatial foundation of West Gao villages. To provide some context, it is first necessary to explore the historical formation of my host village – Poro.

2.3: A city

Poro village contained approximately half the total population of West Gao. During fieldwork Poro consisted of nine large, individually named hamlets, as well as being home to the families

of the numerous teachers who work at the government primary school, and the resident nurse required to run the rural medical centre (SIP, *klinik*). Population estimates aside, given the fact that during fieldwork Poro was the only village in West Gao to offer these facilities, as well as it being the location of one of only two pre-school nurseries (SIP, *kindi*) in West Gao, the village became the focus of a daily influx of people from throughout West Gao. In addition, children from throughout West Gao attended the primary school.⁹⁷ During term times, they stayed with relatives in Poro in order to reside close to the school premises.⁹⁸ Poro also boasted a large concrete building called the Mothers' Union Rest-house, located next to the church and equipped with electric lighting and a private water supply.⁹⁹ The rest-house provided high standard rural accommodation for tourists, or, more frequently, visiting NGOs and government-based project workers. Residents also spoke nostalgically of a period in the late 1990s when Poro hosted US Peace Corps volunteer teachers who came annually to undertake their training (learning Solomon Islands Pijin and generally acclimatising) by staying with local families and teaching in the primary school. Before the onset of the devastating ethnic tensions brought this to an abrupt end in 2000 (Dinnen 2008: 11-17; Moore 2008b), inhabitants of Poro would reminisce, “the roads here used to be filled with white men”. Poro certainly deserved the nickname of “the city” employed by some of my research participants.

According to the oral histories I collected, Sir Dudley Tuti was active throughout West Gao in the 1960s encouraging villagers to form a large coastal settlement at Poro. In the 1950s, I was told, West Gao consisted of dispersed villages, each with their own church building, a fact that was problematic for the work of a single District Priest. Given the centrality of the church and the Eucharist service to the performance of village unity, a lack of servicing undermined the constitution of the various villages as coherent communal entities. According to local narratives, the re-settlement was encouraged in order for the District Priest to reach his

⁹⁷ The children of some families in Khourea (see figure 3) attended a Seventh Day Adventist-run boarding school located in adjacent East Gao District, despite being baptised Anglicans.

⁹⁸ These links between Poro and West Gao as a whole are indicated in the fact that ‘Poro’ was often used to refer to the entire West Gao district, particularly by people residing in other parts of Santa Isabel.

⁹⁹ In fact this water supply, throughout fieldwork, was repeatedly unreliable. An on-going water project in Poro was delayed following misappropriation of funds.

congregations more easily. Such accounts echo Geoffrey White's (1991: 217) observation for Maringe District, that the 'years around 1960 ... were in fact a period of renewed village amalgamation.' During this period Tuti encouraged the formation of 'larger villages which would be more accessible to the routes of transportation and communication, thus facilitating "development" and the work of church and government' (White 1991: 217).¹⁰⁰ Indeed, in the decade following these resettlements Tuti established the island-wide (IDC) commercial enterprise whose ships continue to underpin the economic vitality of Poro village.

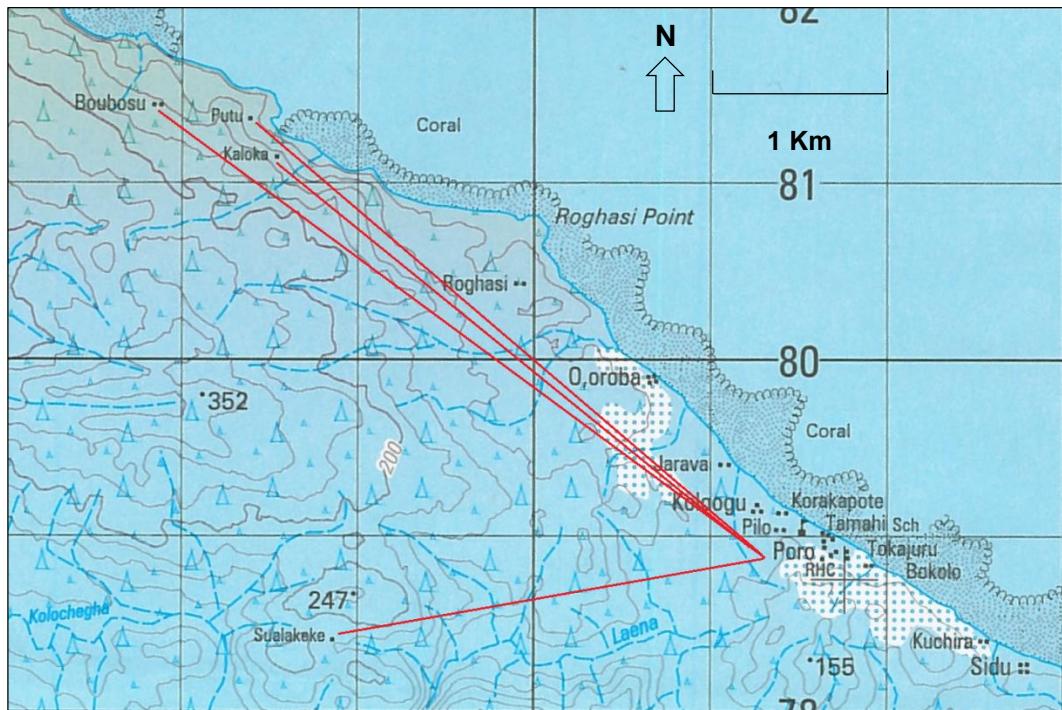


Figure 8 migrations to Poro during village amalgamation, 1950s.

Some villages in West Gao remained unaffected by these re-settlements. However, inhabitants of the bush villages - Bobosu and Sualakeke (see figure 8) - underwent an extreme relocation.¹⁰¹ For those settled in coastal villages – Putu and Kaloka - the transition was less profound, involving simply a movement southeast "up" (as Gao speakers will say) the coast (see

¹⁰⁰ Tuti's activities are also part of wider trends of post-war development focused on village consolidation that were taking place across Island Melanesia at this time, linked to modern notions of hygiene, political administration, and economic improvement (Taylor 2008: 137).

¹⁰¹ Sualakeke, Bobosu, Putu, and Kaloka were not completely abandoned. During fieldwork, each place was a permanent or temporary home to different families that had reassumed residence after the mass migrations of the 1950s. Moreover, connections were maintained on a more general level. Many Poro residents continued to make gardens and work copra at sites proximate to these settlements.

figure 8).¹⁰² Sir Colin Allan, who was District Officer for Santa Isabel in 1948, and in the 1950s, was commissioned by the British government to produce reports on local land tenure, observes that as a result of migration from the bush to form large coastal settlements in the early twentieth century in Bugotu and Kia, the land upon which these newly formed villages were located ‘could be owned by anything from one and five subclans [matrilineages]’ (Allan 1988: 26). This reflects the situation in Poro, although I was unable during field work to establish the exact number of matrilineages that wielded ownership claims throughout the Poro area. It was clear, however, that certain lineages had ancestrally-mediated relationships to Poro land prior to these mass migrations (see also Burt 1994a: 328).¹⁰³ In the next section I explore the land-person relationships that pre-existed, and thus facilitated, the formation of the ‘city’ of Poro. I argue that a case study of Poro village reveals the extent to which community existence in West Gao is predicated upon pre-existing categorical distinctions between persons, even if, as we have seen in sections 2.1 and 2.2 above, the surface level of existence overrides such distinctions.

2.4: Matrilineal or Christian unity?

Underlying the formation of the new ‘amalgamated’ Poro Village was the development of a local institution that was the forerunner of, and thus facilitated, Tuti’s 1960’s initiative. This institution is the primary school at Poro ‘Tamahi’, the formation of which was underpinned by the agency of a local chief or ‘Big Man’ (*mae funei*; SIP, *sif*) who, most crucially, had control over certain areas of the land at Poro.¹⁰⁴ Consider the following selection of verses taken from a ‘sung-story’ (*tautaru*) composed by a West Gao Big Man – Patteson Tada:

¹⁰² Describing movement from west to east as ‘up’, and conversely, east to west as ‘down’ is documented elsewhere in the Solomon Islands (Scott 2007b: 39). In Marovo (western Solomon Islands) this cartographic convention overtly linked to the downward/westerly trajectory of the setting sun (Hviding 2014: 78; cf. Allerton 2013: 153-155).

¹⁰³ This situation contrasts with that described by Scott (2007b: 70) for the Arosi (Makira/Ulawa Province) village of Tawatana, where the ‘socio-spatial condition’ is marked by an ‘absence of known or agreed upon *auhenua* [autochthonous] lineages’.

¹⁰⁴ I do not discuss the debates in Melanesian anthropology regarding a distinction between chiefs and ‘Big Men’. This is because Gao speakers use these terms interchangeably. See White (1991: 56-58, 1992) for a detailed summary of these issues with reference to Santa Isabel as a whole.

<i>Au nogu ne au</i>	I existed
<i>Ngamu keli ni au</i>	I ate well and existed
<i>Ko'u keli ni au</i>	I drank well and existed
<i>Tagna Suga na Gao</i>	The house of Gao exists
<i>Io dere dere</i>	Io dere dere. ¹⁰⁵
<i>E tobi gemi lana</i>	Our garden plots
<i>E rave gemi lana</i>	Our cleared forest
<i>E sikolu nomi lana</i>	Our school
<i>Ka nau favuavha gne</i>	Here in this created place
<i>Io dere dere</i>	Io dere dere.
<i>Rei iho noguza favuavuha gna nau gne</i>	I do not know what I have created at this place
<i>Henderi ghoе, Fredriki</i>	You Henderi, Fredriki
<i>Danieli ghoе Jamesi</i>	You Danieli, Jamesi
<i>Io dere dere</i>	Io dere dere.
<i>Ango rei na thani e</i>	I have just started to cry
<i>Mama Hugo Bugoro</i>	Priest Hugo Bugoro
<i>Mama Gililadi</i>	Priest Giliadi
<i>Mama Steven Thalu</i>	Priest Steven Thalu
<i>Io dere dere</i>	Io dere dere.

In this *tautaru* Tada explores the formation and enactment of his plan/scheme (*majora*) in the late 1940s to make an Anglican Primary school that would educate children from all over the island of Santa Isabel.¹⁰⁶ The song encapsulates the process of gathering people together in one space by an act of *kilo mei* (calling to come). The use of the verb *kilo* - to call, resonates with the pan-Santa Isabel term, derived from Bugotu language, for Christianity – *kilo'au*, meaning to “call out” [of darkness]’ (White 1991: 138). Such semantic correspondences mark Tada’s act as undeniably Christian, a fact reinforced by his invocation of the names of the three local Anglican priests in the final verse.¹⁰⁷ However, the reference in the first verse, to the ‘House of Gao’ is to an ancestral stone called ‘*T'hina Suga Na Gao*’ that is located off the coastline between Poro Village and O’oroba Village (see appendix A). This stone consisted of three layers, each of which, I was told, corresponded to the three extant *kokolo* in West Gao and Santa

¹⁰⁵ Untranslatable lyrical form of many sung stories in Gao and Cheke Holo language, another example of which is ‘*si sele sele*’.

¹⁰⁶ The idea behind expanding the school on a new site was no doubt influenced by the similar efforts of Sir Dudley Tuti and others to establish an autonomous school in Kia District that took place at approximately the same time that Tada was formulating his plan (the period between 1945-1950, see Introduction, section III). Burt (1994b: 206) discusses the expansion of ‘secular schools’ during the 1950s by the South Seas Evangelical Mission on Malaita. The primary school at Poro remained in church control until 1975, when it was absorbed by the national government education system.

¹⁰⁷ *Kilo* or ‘to call’ is also a key feature of ritual interactions between humans and ancestral beings (see chapter 3). This supports, albeit indirectly, my argument that the *tautaru* ultimately marks the co-presence of ancestral and Christian agency in the formation of Tamahi.

Isabel as a whole, and marked - quite literally - the sedimented unity of these matriclans that had occurred as a result of their intermarriage throughout history. An elderly research participant explained that intermarriage had resulted in all three matriclans “sacrificing [to the ancestors] together” at this site before the arrival of Christianity. The forging of cross-clan relationships can thus engender a more encompassing unity consisting of multiple elements. As I shall now argue, the *tautaru* captures a process whereby ‘moral wholes’ (for example, a Christian village community) emerge from an underlying socio-cosmic condition in which *a priori* differences between persons ensure that praxis is geared toward synthesis.

Patteson Tada operated in conjunction with two other local ‘Big Men’ landowners – Martin Ma’ane’ia and Marcel Hiro, who all agreed to “open” an area of land at Poro to facilitate the establishment of the school at Poro. This cooperative movement is captured in the name of the school, persisting to this day, ‘Tamahi’, which comprises an amalgamation of the three names of its founders: TA (Tada); MA (Martin); and HI (Hiro). Collectively, these men belonged to two of the prominent land owning *kokolo* in the Poro area, whose inter-clan and lineage cooperation had been established through a complex history of temporal precedence and various forms of *kastom* food presentations (*neigano*). Therefore, as indicated by my analysis of Tada’s *tautaru*, the decision to bring spatially-dispersed people together at a particular location (Poro) by the Christian-inflected process of *kilo mei* ‘calling to come’ was predicated upon pre-existing inter-*kokolo* relationships. Such acts of ‘bringing together’ not only articulate with cooperative cross-clan relations established through marriage and food exchanges in one particular place (Poro), but are also steeped in a more general moral politics of socio-spatial existence in West Gao.

During fieldwork I was frequently told how the “Big Men of before” would espouse the moral climate of ‘existing together’ - *au faudu* - under the rubric of certain forbidden tenets: “*ovi fakamafa*” - do not mark out an owned area; “*ovi a’ahé*” - do not divide people according to their origins; and “*ovi tusu khame*” - do not point a finger. Interestingly all these tenets share a common theme related to bodily activities that are associated with documentation and

quantification. Following the literal meaning of the words utilised in these metaphoric statements, *a'ahe* means not only to count objects, but also to read.¹⁰⁸ The root of the word *fakamafa* - *kamafa* - was explained using the example of measuring fathoms of cloth using outstretched arms to mark a fathom. Finally the gesture of pointing also carries connotations of measurement and dividing up. As these tropes suggest, the morally-valued condition of 'existing together' (*au faudu*), is based on an emergent holism attributed to land-person relations. It is this holism that is threatened by the imposition of boundaries or the delineation of discrete units. However, the marked nature of warning against such behaviours implies that this morally-inflected holism in fact emerges from discrete units.

To elaborate, one of the archetypical behaviours of these "Big Men of before" was inviting "other people" to reside upon a given area of land.¹⁰⁹ Such invitations would generate groups of persons who would willingly cooperate under the direction and care (*taego*) of their landowning benefactor. In building houses, making gardens and planting food trees, these 'people who came afterward' (*nanoni te mei ke leghu*) formed a composite polity composed of matrilineages belonging to different matriclans who would independently offer food presentations to the chiefly representatives of local land-owning groups. As reported by Geoffrey White (1978: 100) for Maringe District, in the pre-Christian past, feasts called *faphegra*, which were presented to a matriclan leader, involved 'first-fruits payment from gardens made by outsiders on clan land'. As I explore in chapter 6, *fangamu taego* feasts are the contemporary instantiation of such transactions undertaken between different categories of people in order to form emergent connections to the landscape. However, practical acts of making food presentations are backed up by a more subtle morality of incorporation. One of my research participants expressed this principle of incorporation rhetorically in this manner: "If I was to chase people off my land, who would work with me to establish a community?" Here we see that longstanding patterns of

¹⁰⁸ One elderly chief, who also organised the Bible Translation Group in West Gao, told me that another, very similar word - *ae'ahe*, meant to 'count' people's past sins. The concept of 'counting' in West Gao is thus another indication of the seamless intersections between 'ancestral' and 'Christian' ethical frameworks that I discussed in the introduction to this thesis.

¹⁰⁹Burt (1994a: 322-323) discusses similar processes among the Kawara'ae of Malaita, where in-coming migrants are welcomed by 'leaders of the land,' according to Burt's analysis, leaders gained political authority and military strength by welcoming migrants in this way.

co-operation between landowners and more recent arrivals on to the land are implicated in the contemporary enactment of ‘community’ explored in the previous two sections.

This complementary relationship between ‘prior’ settlers and ‘later arrivals’ is one of the ‘alternative forms’ that the pan-Austronesian concept of ‘precedence’ can take (J. Fox 1996b: 132). According to James Fox (1996b: 132) what distinguishes the concept of precedence from the Dumontian notion of hierarchy, is its ‘structurally relative’ and ‘often disputed’ nature. Whatever ‘form’ precedence takes, i.e. whatever the exact complementary categories employed to enact or assert precedence, the categorical distinction involved is inherently reversible rather than absolute (J. Fox 2009: 92). Indeed, when traced ethnographically, precedence frequently involves engagements with the socio-cosmic order typified by contestation and strategic action (Vischer 2009). Frequently, however, the micro-political agency of humans is bracketed by the existence of divine, or other-than human influences that reinforce the moral legitimacy of claims to precedence (Vischer 2009: 271; McWilliam 2011: 75). This latter point can be illustrated with reference to the construction of Tamahi School, which, as we saw above, was based upon the recognition of certain landowners’ temporal precedence with regard to the land upon which the school was built. I was told by one landowner that during building work, an underground ancestral ‘spring’ persisted in bubbling up and washing away the foundations of the new school library. It was only when he had gone to the site and performed particular ritual techniques (*fanitu*) that the spring ceased to flow and the building was erected successfully. I shall pursue the extent to which relationships of temporal precedence are mediated by landowners’ interaction with the ancestral beings and forces that inhabit and animate a given territory in more detail in chapters 3 and 4. For the present, focussing solely upon interactions between living humans, in this section and the next I explore the moral tropes surrounding claims to temporal precedence in West Gao, and describe how these tropes were used to evaluate competing claims in the micro-politics surrounding settlement history in Poro. Ultimately, these morally-hedged dynamics of precedence are central to my argument that Christian community in West Gao, far from comprising a rupture with ancestrally figured relationships, in fact emerges from such relationships.

In West Gao, both now and in the past, the dynamic of invitation between prior settlers and more recent arrivals should never be openly discussed (cf. McWilliam 2011: 68). To “count” or divide people up according to their origins (expressed in the image of pointing a finger) is to seek to reveal that some persons had long standing connections to a place whilst others had been more recently invited to come and live in the area. Such a revelation would be tantamount to chasing such people off the land. By counting and pointing out who is who, a person illustrates selfish concern for herself and her property over and above her concern for others. As one of my research participants explained, when pointing, three fingers turn back to the self. In a final twist, these morally-loaded acts of invitation and maintaining silence with regard to other people’s origins reinforces rather than undermines one’s precedential connection to a place. I was told that people who talked publicly about their ancestors’ temporal precedence with regard to an area of land actually rendered such claims questionable. People who held the intricate knowledge regarding longstanding relationships between an area of land and their matrilineal ancestors should, “SIP, *stap kuaet*” (literally, to exist in silence, also meaning, to live peaceably). As in many other parts of the Solomon Islands, by upholding this ethic of silence, such persons reinforced the incontestable nature of their longstanding ancestral connection to a place (McDougall 2004: 4, 396-397, n.d.: *chap. 5*; Scott 2000: 59-61, 2007b: 72-73).

These ethical dispositions can be revealed through a property dispute that occurred in March 2012, involving a plan to build a new house by a married couple who had decided to relocate from one side of Poro village to another. The location of the house plot (*mahla suga*) in hamlet X, was marked by a built-up pile of stones (*nali t'hina*). Pre-empting the relatively short life span of bamboo and sago palm house buildings, the previous resident had built this stone-pile as a more durable monument to his time spent living in the area. Indeed, in the context of the dispute, I was told that the stone-pile functioned as a “sign” (*falase*) of the previous resident’s house (*suga*) in that area of the hamlet. Prior to building his house (and the stone memorial to its existence) the man had to secure use rights in the plot. He did so by preparing a feast (*neigano*) for the Big Man or chief (*mae funei*) who was also a prominent member of a *t'hi'a*

(matrilineage) which controlled the hamlet land. During the lifetime of this man, his children had presented their father with a further feast – *fangamu taego* - and in doing so, had inherited the house plot from their father. The wife of the married couple was one of these children. Accordingly, in early 2012 she began to clear the ground adjacent to the *nali t'hina* in preparation for building a new family house in the place where her father had once resided. Her efforts were brought to an abrupt halt when a resident of hamlet X decided to raise a local court case in order to block the house-building project.

During the court case, held in the Mothers' Union building in Poro, the wife of the (now deceased) chief, who was also the original landowner in hamlet X, was called to speak in front of the gathered community and panel of chiefs. The woman tearfully recalled the behaviour and actions of her recently deceased husband as being “good” (*keli puhi gna* - his good way) because he always treated everyone the same, as brother and sister (cf. McDougall n.d.: *chap. 5*), invited others onto his land, and did not divide people up. This presentation of the behaviour of her deceased husband, landowner, and chief, emerged as a counter-image of the behaviour of the man (also a chief) who, in raising the dispute, was displaying opposite characteristics by contesting (rather than encouraging) the building of the house, and seeking (through the court case) to enforce a demarcation of the relationships between people residing in the hamlet. This desire to bring the micro-histories of residential entanglement to the surface ultimately worked against the disputant's goal to block the building project, and on a more profound level engendered private remarks about the legitimacy of his current placement on the land that was the focus of his property contestation.

As this example illustrates, processes of invitation, whilst reinforced by presentations of food, are rooted in certain ethical orientations. Such ethical dispositions - epitomised in the behaviours of previous generations of landowners - involved a stance of welcoming inclusion toward other people who came to reside on their land. A successful community was based on an established land-controlling unit (a matrilineage of one of the three matriclans) that, under the direction of a leading ‘Big Man’/chief, welcomed others onto their land and remained silent

with regard to the discrepant histories of the different groups of persons who resided there (see also Allan 1988: 14; Scott 2000: 65). It is for these reasons that the *tautaru* with which we opened this section achieves an almost seamless movement between Christian acts of “calling to come” and deeper ancestral histories of co-operation between different matriclans. In creating the school by calling together people from all over Santa Isabel to reside in Poro, Tada was not only undertaking a Christian act, he was *simultaneously* acting as a landowner of the place *could* and *should* act. Moreover, in a manner analogous to the narration of other secret ancestral histories to be explored in chapter 4, in performing the *tautaru* for me, the matrilineal descendants of Tada enacted and reproduced their matrilineage’s (*t’hi’ā*) legitimate placement on the land at Poro (cf. Allerton 2013: 113-114; Scott 2007b: 163-164).

In light of the above, the current analysis meets an apparent paradox. In the opening vignette, I illustrated that certain genres of knowledge about the ancestors (such as genealogies) were, during fieldwork, perceived as an endemic threat to peaceful village life. However, in this section I have outlined that connections between land and ancestors comprise the very foundation of that unity. To solve this ‘paradox’, what must be made clear is that it is not knowledge of the ancestors *per se* that is antithetical to the maintenance of Christian community. Rather, it is the manner in which one activates the relations contained within such knowledge, and for what ends, which ultimately poses a threat to peaceful existence. To explore this contention I turn to a particularly divisive dispute that occurred prior to my arrival in Poro.

2.5: From synthesis to analysis

Two of the big-men responsible for opening the area of land at Poro in order to facilitate the expansion of the school subsequently purchased land in nearby Bugotu and decided to live there. Although the reasons for this decision are ultimately tied up with the individual life histories of these men, their departure is intriguing, given the pressure on land - for both gardening and house building - that currently plagues the Poro area due to its large

population.¹¹⁰ The movements of these two big men away from Poro were typical of more general discourses surrounding landownership in this area of West Gao. Commenting to me privately regarding the house-site property dispute mentioned above, one elderly Poro resident remarked, “Those two families who are fighting about that place do not even own the land, the owners all left long ago, moving out from Poro”. A West Gao resident – Mikaeli – who resided outside the Poro area presented himself to me as one of these ‘absent’ landowners.¹¹¹

During a private conversation regarding the Peace Corps volunteers mentioned in section 2.3, Mikaeli, expressed his irritation that the “lawyer” who had mediated the decision for Poro to be a training site for the Peace Corps had dealt with the “chiefs” rather than “landowners”. Mikaeli saw the Poro chiefs’ control of the Peace Corps volunteers during the late 1990s - directly benefiting from the land at Poro, and giving money to the host households in return - as an illegitimate appropriation of land-based wealth that should have been the responsibility of the landowners to control. Because some of these landowning groups had moved away from the village to other parts of West Gao after the formation of Tamahi School, according to Mikaeli, the Peace Corps volunteers should have been equally distributed throughout the whole of West Gao, and not merely allocated to families residing in Poro village. Following his complaint to the lawyer, Mikaeli agreed to allow the Peace Corps volunteers to be located solely in the Poro area on condition that the lawyer would pay the fee for Mikaeli to raise a local court case. During the case Mikaeli and another man revealed to the Poro chiefs a genealogy and accompanying narratives that revealed the ancestral connection of his *kokolo* to a large area of land at Poro. At this point, according to Mikaeli’s account, all persons except those belonging to his *kokolo* were ordered to leave the court room and three representatives - each belonging to a constituent matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*) of Mikaeli’s *kokolo* - were summoned in order to “straighten out” their respective genealogies according to the document Mikaeli possessed. Two people - each belonging to a different *t’hi’ā* to Mikaeli’s own - walked angrily out of the hall, refusing to

¹¹⁰ Two of the men had married women from elsewhere (Malaita Province and Canada) and thus were concerned about the land rights of their birth children who lacked inalienable connections to land in West Gao (see chapters 5 and 7).

¹¹¹ Mikaeli, as will be recalled from chapter 1, is a pseudonym.

participate. Mikaeli explained to me that these people were fearful that their own lack of genealogical information, in comparison to that which he possessed, would force them to acknowledge their status as “people who came afterward” or even, from “another place”.

Mikaeli’s narrative illustrates that controversial distinctions made in terms of temporally staggered connections to land exist not only between groups of persons belonging to different *kokolo* but also between groups of persons belonging to a specific matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*) within one *kokolo*. Thus, relations of precedence with respect to a given area of land exist at two scales: at the macro-level between different *kokolo* and at the micro-level between different *t’hi’ā* of a single *kokolo* (cf. Vischer 2009: 249).¹¹² Seeking to delineate precedence at the latter scale not only generated anger from the participants in the court case, but also required the ‘absenting’ of community members belonging to the two other *kokolo* (the persons who were asked to leave the court session). As such, Mikaeli’s actions led to the immediate fragmentation of peaceful community relations. Mikaeli explained that one particular chief of Poro had paid him a private visit after the court case to tell him that he had “ruined everything” with his actions. Despite this, Mikaeli asserted that since his intervention, cases of land disputes had significantly declined in Poro. The implication was that prospective disputants would be unwilling to compete with Mikaeli’s narrative and genealogical knowledge in a public hearing.

It could be argued that Mikaeli’s actions exemplify a phenomenon, documented throughout the Solomon Islands, in which genealogical information is deployed strategically in order to sever connections between related people so as to ensure that any economic returns from resource exploitation are controlled by a smaller group of beneficiaries (see e.g., G. Schnieder 1998: 191; Hvding 2003: 86). I contend that Mikaeli was not deploying his genealogical information instrumentally in order to claim land. Indeed, having already agreed to let the Peace Corps trainees reside only in Poro he would have gained nothing (economically) from the outcome of the court case. Furthermore, he was residing happily in another community in West Gao and

¹¹² I will return to these issues of scale with reference to *t’hi’ā* - *kokolo* distinctions in chapters 4, 5 and the conclusion to this thesis.

showed no signs of raising the dispute again. Consequently, I argue that Mikaeli exploited the 'external' figure of the Peace Corps lawyer in an effort to 'straighten' what he perceived to be the messy state of his *kokolo*. This act, I suggest, was undertaken to re-establish the correct socio-spatial foundation for successful (and peaceful) community existence. This was particularly necessary in the case of Poro because certain recognised landowners had - due to the various historical circumstances described above - moved elsewhere.

Mikaeli's actions can be illuminated by reference to analyses of socio-spatial politics elsewhere in the Solomon Islands. Michael Scott (2007b: 75) has argued that an acknowledged autochthonous *auhenua* matrilineage forms the stable centre of pre-colonial Arosi (Makira) polity. Analogously, Mikaeli sought to establish an accepted landowning lineage within his *kokolo* whose temporal precedence in the area of Poro land formed the basis of relations of 'invitation' by which later arrivals (either of the same or different *kokolo*) could exist peacefully together - *au faudu* - with the original settlers (see also Scott 2007b: 244-245). Recall that members of the two other *kokolo* left the building without protest. This act indicates either, that Mikaeli's claim to his *kokolo*'s precedence on the area of land in question was largely undisputed, or, that the persons leaving the courtroom accepted Mikaeli's claim for the sake of maintaining peaceable existence (SIP, *stap kuaet*). However, problems nevertheless arose. This occurred when two members of the matrilineages constituting Mikaeli's *kokolo* were unwilling to uncover their genealogical interconnections and order of arrival onto that land. In seeking to highlight and hopefully overcome such problems, Mikaeli was attempting to reduce divisive land disputes - an outcome that he claimed his actions had achieved.

The 'straightening out' of relations between landowning matrilineages of a particular *kokolo* was not simply the prerogative of Mikaeli alone. I stated in the introduction to this thesis that Dudley Tuti, during his time as Paramount Chief, had encouraged land demarcation at the level of *kokolo* throughout Santa Isabel. Such land demarcation would necessarily entail the co-operation between constituent matrilineages of each *kokolo* in order to record the boundaries of the respective blocks of land controlled by them. This cooperation was ideally orchestrated by a

kokolo chief – a ‘Big Man’ recognised as capable of organising the affairs internal to his own *kokolo*. In West Gao such *kokolo* chiefs operated alongside other members of the ‘Isabel Council of Chiefs’ within a given district who may not have the orchestration of *kokolo* affairs as their central role, but were anointed in a more general capacity as the mediators of community affairs. Although successful in some districts, the demarcation of land at the level of *kokolo* had failed to occur in West Gao. My father offered an explanation for this by describing the processes of ‘invitation’ by landowners mentioned above and underlined the ethical problems associated with revealing (SIP, *talemaot*) such micro-histories of incorporation as the reason for this failure. Other commentators in West Gao suggested to me more covertly that chiefs themselves could be men who had been invited onto land in the past and whose external origins it was forbidden to reveal. Aware of their own origins, such men might use their influence to block attempts to formally demarcate land ownership at the level of *kokolo*.

Tensions between chiefs and landowners have a long history on Santa Isabel. Bogesi (1948: 217), writing in the early twentieth century states that for Bugotu, ‘a chief of a place is not necessarily the owner of the land or all the lands under his jurisdiction but through fear of being killed by him, or in some instances by other chiefs under his direction, landowners yield to his demands.’¹¹³ Mikaeli’s distinction between ‘chiefs’ and ‘landowners’ was not, therefore, a ‘reinvention of social identities’ as has been claimed for similar distinctions made in response to resource extraction in Munda, western Solomon Islands (G. Schnieder 1998: 204). Rather, it tapped into longstanding ambiguities regarding the political authority (with regard to land) of chiefs in Santa Isabel.¹¹⁴ Recall the deceased chief who was remembered for his “good way” in the property dispute described in the previous section. This man was not only a respected chief, but also an undisputed landowner in Poro. It was widely claimed that this man had died before

¹¹³ In a contemporary instantiation of this tension, certain persons feared to speak out against a West Gao chief due to suspicions that he possessed sorcery. In support of this claim they invoked concrete examples of people who had died as a result of attempting to interfere.

¹¹⁴ Sir Colin Allan’s (1988: 15) comparison of the differing political influence with regard to land of two Santa Isabel ‘paramount chiefs’ operative in the first half of the twentieth century - Edmund Bako and Lonsdale Gado - is further evidence of the historical existence of such ambiguities.

passing on much of his knowledge regarding land boundaries in the Poro area: his death left problematic uncertainties that Mikaeli's actions sought to correct.

In Poro, and other communities in West Gao, the surface level of community 'togetherness' is based on a dynamic of invitation whereby established landowners welcome incoming migrants (*nanoni te mei ke leghu*, people who came afterward) to reside and work with them on their land. This fact, coupled with evidence from big man Tada's Christian project that focused on inter-*kokolo* relationships to promote the expansion of Tamahi School and the establishment of a larger village at Poro, indicates that Christian peace is emergent from ancestral relationships, rather than being achieved in spite of such connections. Michael Scott (2007b: 21-22) has argued that in poly-ontological cosmologies, *a priori* difference demands that praxis is orientated toward achieving unity by generating cross-category relationships. Furthermore, this kind of praxis is wholly compatible with Christian theology, which espouses fraternity and pan-human unity (Scott 2005b: 109, 2007b: 260, 317-319). I suggest that such correspondences (figured at the level of ethical practice rather than deep ontology) between a poly-ontological cosmology and Christian theology can shed light upon the socio-spatial politics that underpin Christian village communities in West Gao. Such communities comprise 'moral wholes' that are emergent from an underlying socio-cosmic condition in which the existence of *a priori* differences ensure that praxis is geared toward synthesis and cross-category unity. On the other hand, acts of differentiation within a pre-existing category - such as Mikaeli's - that seek to lay out the relationships between constituent matrilineages, comprise a form of praxis that is analytic. Although such intra-category differentiation may be undertaken with the ultimate aim of reducing land disputes, the analytic nature of such acts engenders anti-Christian (and therefore immoral) social fragmentation both between and within matrilineal categories. Ensuring the Christian unity of village existence - enacting 'togetherness' - is ultimately achieved by chiefs (who may or may not be landowners themselves) policing the level at which matrilineal difference is articulated, rather than from the outright denial of matrilineal distinctiveness.

The current discussion of ancestry and matrilineal descent categories is centred upon ethnography of court cases. This could suggest, as other ethnographers of Santa Isabel have argued, that the significance of descent-based identities is largely confined to land disputes and have little traction in more quotidian areas of social life (White 1991: 35). However, as alluded to in the introduction of this thesis, descent-based categories in West Gao, when situated as arising through the cosmogonic condition of processual autochthony and analysed as an instantiation of the poly-ontological nature of West Gao cosmology, lie at the basis of effective ethical action in general. When persons seek to activate the ancestral relationships within which they are enmeshed, they do so not simply to achieve an immediate goal within a particular socio-political context. Rather, as the following example will show, they are undertaking ethically-nuanced actions within a lived world that is entirely shaped by descent-based, ancestrally-mediated categories of identity.

An area of gardening land high on the ridge behind my hamlet was named *Gnobe*. It took its name from an ancestral stone *T'hina Gnobe* (stone taro pudding) that had rested there in the past. I was told by the stone's owners that their ancestors - a husband and wife - had one day decided to prepare a type of taro pudding called *gnobe*. As the pair stuck their fingers in to the body of the pudding to test its consistency, it suddenly turned to stone (*juruku*).¹¹⁵ *T'hina Gnobe* thus has a rounded pudding shape with three distinct 'finger' holes in one side (see figure 9). In 1996, six members of the Melanesian Brotherhood, or Tasiu, launched a clearance 'mission' on Santa Isabel whose aim was, in the words of their leader (whom I interviewed in December 2011): "To remove things that could be used to spoil lives of others and to advise those who possessed powerful *kastom* objects." This leader was keen to highlight that his mission had involved a tactic of least interference. Following the long-established patterns of behaviour towards ancestral sites by agents of the Anglican Church discussed in the previous chapter, the Tasiu blessed many ancestral shrines 'on site' whilst magical techniques (such as weather magic), recognised for their "protective" power, were left alone. Whilst the Tasiu were in West Gao, rumours circulated that *T'hina Gnobe* could be used to stifle the growth of particular taro

¹¹⁵ This key cosmological process is explored in more detail in chapter 4.

gardens. Upon hearing this, the Tasiu recognised the stone as potentially ruining (*fafafunei*; SIP, *spoelem*) the lives of community members and demanded its removal for blessing (*fablahi*) in Poro church. Recalling this enforced removal, an elderly landowner described how many had cried as the stone was rolled out of the bush to the church: “It belonged to our ancestors. It should not have been removed” (cf. Kolshus 2007: 126).

After being blessed, the stone was returned to its owners’ hamlet. Gardeners using the land nearby would often voice complaints regarding their repeated failures to grow taro successfully. A man, whom I shall name Putu, outside whose house the stone now rested, was under no illusions about the reason for such failed growth. According to many commentators, in order to counteract the destructive powers of the stone over the growth of nearby taro, the three holes must be “shut” by rolling the leaves of a particular plant and pushing them inside. Putu once explained to me in private that although his sisters occasionally performed this act, he repeatedly removed the leaf parcels and disposed of them. This action, he continued, was due to the fact that lots of people whom his deceased matrilineal relatives “did not know” now gardened on the surrounding land. To further justify his removal of the leaf parcels he continued: “I want to make us all suffer a bit.”



Figure 9 *T'hina Gnobe*. April 2011.

In the previous chapter I argued that ancestral beings have influenced the course of history in West Gao. In the example of T'hina Gnobe, ancestral influence is being turned toward more recent historical transformations, which, as we have seen, resulted in a large concentration of people residing in the Poro area. Rather than raising a court case as Mikaeli did, Putu turned to the agency of his ancestors - mediated by the stone - in order to placate his concerns over the contemporary socio-spatial situation in which he lived (cf. Scott 2008: 160). Crucially, however, Putu was not targeting 'other' unrelated people, even if the presence of such people on his land instigated his actions. If Putu had targeted others in this way, he would have acted in a manner that was *both* anti-Christian *and* contra to the ethical orientation of 'true' landowners by undermining the peaceful relations obtaining between him and his neighbours. Instead he wanted himself to suffer alongside the "other people" whom his ancestors "did not know". This act of channelling the agency of his ancestors in a manner that induced his own personal suffering, maintained peace whilst at the same time (privately) acknowledged the ancestrally-mediated precedence of certain persons' connection to a given locality. It is not coincidental that Putu chose the term "did not know" to explain his ancestor's relationship to some of the people who had come to live and garden on their land. As we shall see in the next chapter, the presence or absence of ancestral recognition is indeed a matter of existential concern for people in West Gao.

In this chapter I have argued that villages in West Gao are animated by a diffused notion of relatedness that arises from the scaling up of notions of the family household and the cross-clan connections embodied within it to the level of the village as a whole. Tracing the processes of 'working together' I further emphasised the importance of household-village connections that are predicated on the household provision of materials, labour, and most importantly, food, to community endeavours. If food forms the fabric of social relations internal to a village, land forms the substrate that makes such relations 'performable' in the first place. To support this claim I provided a case study of the largest village in West Gao - Poro - whose historical

formation was explored in order to expose how Christian unity is based on longstanding relationships between persons with ancestrally-mediated relationships to a locality and incoming migrants who arrived later. Ultimately, peaceful existence in West Gao communities is emergent from on-going connections to the ancestors, rather than being achieved *in spite* of such connections.

Developing this line of argument, I drew attention to two levels at which matrilineal distinctiveness could be articulated: at the macro level of clan (*kokolo*); and at the micro-level of matrilineage (*t'hi'a*). Whilst the former level of articulating difference promotes acts of synthesis and ultimately ‘togetherness’, differentiation at the latter level is analytic and engenders social fragmentation. Christian unity, therefore, results from policing the level at which matrilineal difference is articulated rather than denying such difference altogether. Finally, I sought to show how descent-based identities, rather than being activated solely during land disputes and court cases, in fact influence Gao speakers’ actions on a more day-to-day basis. This aspect of the analysis points to a deeper level of land-person relationships in West Gao than we have thus far considered. Such relations take us beyond social relationships of achieved unity between persons to the question of the ‘unity’ of persons themselves.

Chapter 3

On the Limits of Movement: (Un)familiar Places and Distributed Persons

Introduction

In 2011 Aesaea, the five year old son of my adoptive sister, became ill with loss of appetite and recurring bouts of fever. His parents were both practising nurses and their employment at Buala hospital meant that the family resided permanently in the provincial capital. After hospital tests proved inconclusive, his parents realised that Aesaea's symptoms had begun after a holiday in his home hamlet in West Gao, Jarava. In December 2011, the family returned to Jarava where it was deduced that Aesaea's matrilineal ancestors, unhappy with the care the human parents were providing for the boy, wanted to look after him themselves. This phenomenon is known throughout West Gao as *taego na'itu*, which may be translated as 'ancestral caregiving' (cf. Scott 2007b: 178). After establishing this as a potential aetiology for Aesaea's illness, his parents sought a non-medical treatment using ritual techniques, known in Gao language as *fanitu*. These techniques involved a *kilo*, or 'to call' ritual performed by his grandmother and the manufacture of a 'looped rope' or *sosolo*, made by his maternal uncle, that was tied loosely around his neck. As a result of these procedures, the boy showed immediate improvement.

Although it was staying 'at home' that caused the illness in the first place, Aesaea's parents never once suggested that they regretted sending him home for his holidays. By coming under the caring influences of his matrilineal ancestors Aesaea re-established a particular kind of relationship to his home place, or *nau*. Both the caregiving ancestors and the adults who successfully reversed their influence were members of Aesaea's matriclan or *kokolo*. Matriclans, or *kokolo* consist of intrinsic relationships in which both human persons and ancestral beings are implicated. These relationships are unified by virtue of an inherent connection to a discrete territory. It is by virtue of being enfolded within such relationships that Aesaea became ill. Ultimately, however, it was his grandmother's and maternal uncle's position within, and ability to manipulate such relationships through their use of particular *fanitu*, which secured Aesaea's recovery. Aesaea's case is a particular instantiation of a wider territorial system in which members of all three matriclans share a fundamental connectivity to the places

they call home. The essential nature of these connections are emphasised as Gao speakers pursue careers and opportunities that involve movement away from home.

Tim Ingold (2011) has underlined the centrality of movement in how humans construct place. Whilst sympathetic to this emphasis on movement, I disagree with his larger claim that all places everywhere are engendered by movements of human persons who are themselves, as ‘wayfarers,’ constituted by movement (Ingold 2011: 149-150). As we shall see in the next chapter, both persons and places in West Gao arise from dynamic primordial processes - often involving particular patterns of movement (cf. Allerton 2013: 165-166). However, from the perspective of the living inhabitants of West Gao, ancestral aspects of persons and places amount to a set of fixed coordinates against which all bodily movement is counterbalanced. Ingold’s (2011) argument, like other phenomenological approaches to place, is inapplicable to ethnographic contexts such as West Gao, in which modes of emplaced being involve socio-cosmic relationships or processes that originate prior to the human body/subject and his/her movements (cf. Feuchtwang 2007: 25). By contrast, Stephan Feuchtwang’s (2007: 4) emphasis upon ‘centres’ and ‘processes of centring’ in what he terms ‘territorial place making’ is apposite for the West Gao case. In this chapter, I discuss the extent to which human personhood is constituted through activating a relationship of familiarity to an ancestral territory, or home place. Ultimately, it is *kokolo* identity, mediated by the agency of ancestral beings, which instantiates the ‘centrifugal’ pull (Feuchtwang 2007: 7) that different home places exert upon particular human persons. Furthermore, such centrifugal forces are deployed by Gao speakers to ensure that well-being is maintained in a contemporary context, which is characterised by heightened mobility.

In the first section I lay out some intangible aspects of Gao speakers’ lived world in order to argue that establishing relationships at birth - mediated by ancestral recognition - to a particular place is necessary for the constitution of fully human personhood. The existential security conferred by being in one’s birth place is further illuminated through the realisation that adults are vulnerable when navigating unfamiliar environments. Drawing such observations together

with ethnography concerning sorcery fears,¹¹⁶ in the second section I build upon Alfred Gell's (1998: 104) concept of 'distributed' personhood to illuminate the particular manner in which bodies and places are entangled in West Gao.¹¹⁷ I argue that whilst persons are always and everywhere 'distributable', this only becomes existentially threatening when navigating unfamiliar locales. In the third section I show how Gao speakers protect themselves against the risks associated with such movements by using protective devices which, through processes of shutting, or tightening, reduce the permeability of bodies and reverse the distribution of personhood.

In West Gao then, movement and travel engenders existential risks, whilst being in one's home-place, or *nau*, confers existential security. However, highlighting this opposition between 'home' and other, 'non-local places', risks imparting familiar uniformity to the former in contrast to the unfamiliar diversity of the latter. In the final section I explore the relationships that bind particular persons - like Aesaea - to particular localities within West Gao. Attention to the ancestrally-mediated relationships between persons and particular parts of the landscape suggest that West Gao is itself made up of a plurality of distinct ancestral territories. The existence of such territories is predicated on the categorical singularity of the three matriclans in West Gao. Ultimately it is *kokolo* identity, conferred by membership in one of these matriclans, which renders certain places in West Gao familiar to certain persons and not others.

3.1: On localised separations

Human persons in West Gao are possessed of a combination of tangible and intangible elements. A middle-aged West Gao lady once explained, as she pointed out the graves of her mother and father, how the people before - *mae tifa* - refused to "shut" (*fofoto*) the grave (*beku*)

¹¹⁶As Ian Keen (2006: 515) has noted, the tendency - traceable to the work of Durkheim - to separate ancestral practices from sorcery into two separate analytic domains (religion and magic) obscures the extent to which such practices can be experientially intertwined. Although Keen's (2006) ethnography is restricted to the Yolngu of central Australia, in marking out the interconnections between sorcery, ancestral agency and indigenous models of the person his observations resonate with the argument pursued here.

¹¹⁷The notion that bodies and places can be 'entangled' is derived from one of Catherine Allerton's (2013: 183) concluding remarks in her recent monograph on place-making in Manggarai (Flores, Eastern Indonesia), 'the body does not always constitute the boundaries of the self, and people (and their blood) can be entangled with places in often mysterious or not fully understood ways' (cf. Povinelli 2002b: 191).

by laying cement over the top, preferring instead to leave only a covering of earth and gravel. This reluctance, she told me, was based on the fear that a full cement covering over the graves of buried persons would operate to “close their hearts” (*bobotho gnagnafa dire*) and result in their “not being able to breathe well”- *t'he'ome phapanga fakeli*.¹¹⁸ This implies that both the heart and breath possess an existential significance that extends beyond their biological function. Writing of Maringe District, White (1978: 116) reports that prior to conversion to Christianity the heart was associated with the ““mind” or “soul.”” In an apparent divergence from inhabitants of Maringe District, however, Gao speakers do possess a further term that could be said to have soul-like characteristics: the word for ‘shadow’ or ‘reflection’ - *naunga*. This term was used explicitly to refer to a person’s shadow - the image cast on the ground as a result of the sun’s rays hitting the body of a person, or other object. The term *naunga* is used alongside, and differentiated from, a similar Bugotu word (with which it shares the same root *unga*), introduced by missionisation, for the Christian soul - *tarunga* (White 1978: 116).¹¹⁹ *Tarunga* is used in the West Gao language version of the ‘Melanesian English Prayer Book’ to refer to the ‘soul’ and the Holy Spirit (*Tarunga te Blahi*).

When I asked directly about the meaning of the word *tarunga*, one Gao speaker explained that this is what is seen when a man dies. The term *tarunga di'a* (lit. spirit/soul bad), is also heard occasionally throughout West Gao to refer to an “evil spirit.” Often, such appellations are associated with sorcery-induced possession illnesses that are an emergent phenomenon in West Gao, closely linked to Christian divinatory practices.¹²⁰ I therefore concur with Codrington’s (1891: 177n1) argument that the notion of ‘evil spirits’ was absent from indigenous spiritual beliefs prior to the advent of Christianity on Santa Isabel. *Tarunga* and *tarunga di'a* are distinguished from ancestral beings, which are referred to by the term *na'itu* (SIP, *devol*). The use of the English word for ‘devil’ to describe such beings does not point to the inherently evil status of these beings. As we shall see in the remainder of this chapter, the threat posed by such

¹¹⁸ As discussed in chapter 7 cement covering is now a conventional feature of all new graves in West Gao.

¹¹⁹ Codrington (1881: 308), apparently speaking of pre-Christian religious beliefs, also defines the Bugotu term *tarunga* as meaning soul.

¹²⁰ Space restrictions dictate that I cannot explore this phenomenon here.

beings is based less in their inherent immorality, but rather in a logic of their relative familiarity vis-à-vis differentially ‘located’ humans.

It is by way of relationship a ‘*na’itu/devol*’ that ideas concerning a person’s ‘shadow’ (*naunga*) assume crucial significance. This association, on the one hand between ancestral beings and a particular ‘image’ component of the soul (*naunga*), and on the other, between the Christian soul (*tarunga*), and the spirit of deceased humans, suggests that in West Gao, as elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, the soul is itself broken down into two components (Burt 1994b: 52; Firth 1970: 65; Keesing 1982: 105-107; Revolon 2007: 60; Scott 2007b: 173n8). The dual aspect of the soul in West Gao has implications for established anthropological engagements with the interplay between ‘society’ and ‘individuals’ that are illuminated by practices associated with death, burial, and the post-mortem dissolution of aspects of the person (Bloch and Parry 1982). These issues will be taken up in chapter 7. For the present, I am concerned with what the relationship between tangible and intangible aspects of *living* human persons can reveal about how human personhood is consolidated in West Gao in and through particular places. This point becomes clearer through a focus on interactions between humans and ancestral beings.

In May 2012 I was travelling from the provincial capital (Buala) back to West Gao in an outboard motor boat when it was slowed to a standstill alongside a gaping hole in the cliff face. I was shaken by a piercing cry and turned to see an elderly man facing into the dark space, speaking to invisible presences whom he addressed using the third person pronoun for “them” - *hatimare*. Recognising this paradoxically direct and indirect communication for a *kilo* (to call) ritual, I was unperturbed, having previously had this kind of ‘calling’ undertaken on my behalf when I had visited different areas of West Gao. This time the *kilo* was being undertaken for a baby who had just been delivered in Buala hospital. The elderly man called out (*kilo*) the name of the child and explained to his invisible interlocutors that the child was on the way to his home (*nau*). Later that evening I recounted the event to my friend Rota who responded that *kilo* was undertaken for every new born baby who passed by that cliff for the first time: It was a *khora na’itu* – a cavernous rock formation said to be the abode of ancestral beings.

Through the *kilo* ritual, ancestral beings variously located in different parts of West Gao, are caused to “recognise” (*kokofu falase*) the person whose name is being called. This recognition reduces the possibility of the ancestors causing illness. Alongside the calling of a baby’s name, the child may also be washed in the various streams that run into the sea along the West Gao coastline, a ritual that is also said to ensure the child is recognised. One research participant explained, however, that this ritual ensures that ancestral beings “know the child is from here”. This last comment indicates that processes of ancestral recognition are tied up with ideas of place, a contention that is borne out by a common feature of the *kilo* ritual wherein - as we saw above - the ancestors are often reminded that a person is returning to their home place (*nau*).

The word *nau* is one of the most frequently heard terms in West Gao. Gao speakers also use the noun ‘home’ as an English equivalent of the term *nau*. *Nau* is derived from the root ‘*au*’. White, Kokhonigita, and Pulomana’s (1988: 4) dictionary of Cheke Holo Language, spoken in Maringe District, records ‘*au*’ as meaning: ‘to have,’ ‘to exist;’ and to ‘be or stay at a place.’ These semantic links between place, existence, and possession are captured in the term *nau*. According to Rupert Stasch (2009: 28), similar nexuses of meaning among the Korowai of West Papua are best captured in the English term ‘belonging.’ For the Korowai, ‘places belong to people, and also people belong in relation to those places’ (Stasch 2009: 28-29). Furthermore, in Stasch’s (2009: 29) analysis, Korowai persons are ‘known and anchored’ by the places they own (cf. Coppet 1985). This kind of inter-subjective ‘belonging’ between persons and places captures nicely what Gao speakers mean when they use the term *nau*. However, there is a very specific notion of inter-subjective belonging at work in West Gao. As hinted above, the relationships entailed in a state of belonging are mediated by emplaced ancestral agents and have to be activated by rituals of introduction. Moreover, failure to undertake such efforts has existential consequences.

Ancestral beings who fail to recognise a person are said to be ‘shocked’ or ‘startled’ (*jahna*), an event that causes the ‘unrecognised’ person to become sick. This is because a ‘startled’ ancestral

being may take (*atha*) that person's voice (*naugla*) or 'shadow' (*naunga*). A physical affliction known as *glona* then develops, involving a flu-like malaise resulting in weakness, lack of appetite and bodily pain. The area surrounding my hamlet was said to be inhabited by two ancestral beings described as female children with pale skin and blonde hair, who were also sisters. My adoptive mother Ka'aza described the pair of siblings as follows: "They are able to take the voice of [human] children, the voice of a mature person. Those two [ancestral] children can cause both young and older people to suffer from *glona* by taking their shadow [*naunga*], their voice [*naogla*]." In contrast to reports from Aorigi (eastern Solomon Islands) where the 'shadow' is reported to be 'mute' (Revolon 2007: 60), in West Gao a person's voice is linked to the status of a person's 'shadow'. However, another meaning of the word *naogla* is 'echo' suggesting that it is not the breath-voice as such that is taken by ancestral beings but the echo of a voice: just as the shadow is the ethereal image of the human person, it is the echoed-voice - a kind of 'reflection' of the voice - that is taken by ancestral beings. Indeed, in all cases of *glona*, the person's living, breathing, speaking body (*tono*) remains at the house (*suga*) going about her business as usual - albeit in a decidedly listless manner - whilst her shadow and voice-echo is fixed to the place where the ancestral encounter initially occurred.

Glona is an existential state induced by the spatial separation of an intangible 'image' of a human person and their physical body that is the origin, or 'prototype' - to use the terminology of Alfred Gell (1998) - of that image. This image, if not visible to humans, is certainly audible. My friend Joselin, recalled how one of her neighbour's daughters (then a young child) became ill with *glona*. When Joselin went into the bush, she heard a small girl crying in her neighbour's garden and recognising this to be the voice of the sick child she shouted in the direction from which the crying was coming: "I know who you are, why do you cry here in the bush? Go home." Joselin explained that responding to the crying in this way was intended to "startle" her addressee. As mentioned above, an ancestral being, startled by a human person, takes the image of that person. Joselin's commentary reveals that a human person - external to the original encounter - can reverse that process by startling the sick person's image in return. In both cases the 'shock' is an event of either non-recognition or recognition that induces either a

‘displacement’ (from the body) or encourages a ‘re-placement’ (return to the body) of an intangible image of the human person.

Interventions such as Joselin’s, although based on positive recognition, may not be sufficient to induce a reversal of a state of *glona*. Consequently, a *kilo* or ‘to call’ ritual is usually performed in order to be certain of a cure. In a similar manner to the *kilo* ritual undertaken to ‘introduce’ the new baby to ancestral beings in the landscape, the *kilo* ritual performed to cure *glona* pivots around the use of names. I discovered this when I became ill with *glona* and was treated by a *kilo* ritual: after quietly addressing her ancestors by name (the two blonde-haired sisters reported above), Ka’aza traced a young shoot (*fusu*) of a plant named *gau sisiri* over my face and nose (causing me to inhale its sweet smell). As she did so she repeated softly: “come Johanna, come”, before placing the sprig behind my ear. During the *kilo*, both the ancestral beings that caused *glona*, and the *glona* sufferer’s image are addressed directly by name. I suggest that naming operates to differentiate the ancestral beings and wayward image of the living human.¹²¹ The act of ‘calling’ indicates that upon hearing her name, the stranded image of the patient is induced to return to her sick body.

Despite the commentary of my research participant given above, which asserted that mature adults *and* children can suffer from *glona*, during my fieldwork cases of *glona* occurred with much more frequency in children than in adults. Let us consider why that might be the case. Replicating a phenomenon documented throughout Santa Isabel (Bogesi 1948: 339; White 1978: 177; Whiteman [1983] 2002: 356), in West Gao, new born babies are vulnerable to ancestral beings in a way that adults are not. During my fieldwork West Gao mothers refused to take their new born babies into gardens located in the deep forest or ‘bush’ (*naguta*) until two months after birth. This is due, I was told, to the fact that new born babies emit a particularly strong smell that is attractive to ancestral beings. White (1991: 249n9), writing of Maringe District, describes a ‘traditional religious practice’ performed at birth that involved the sprinkling of lime powder (*keru*) as the baby was brought from the birthing hut to the village

¹²¹ The ‘differentiating’ capacities of names will be discussed further in the next chapter.

that was undertaken in order to ‘cover the “scent” of the baby so the spirits could not follow the baby back and cause illness.’ The vulnerability of babies to ancestral beings is therefore linked to the scent of their bodies (cf. Atkinson 1992: 71). Moreover, ritual modifications, such as those described by White which involve ‘covering’ a baby’s scent, suggest that the bodies of new ‘persons’ possess qualities of openness or permeability. As explored further below, adult bodies in West Gao are also attributed with qualities of permeability. However, in the case of babies, it appears that this state of ‘openness’ is particularly acute. This suggests that babies occupy a state of existential fragility, a condition which I suggest is linked to the fact that their ‘human’ status has yet to be consolidated.¹²² Indeed, in a description of child-birthing practices as they were performed in the past, my adoptive mother (MZ) explained how, immediately after birth, the women who were housed in the birthing hut (*suga boebone*) to assist the midwife with the delivery would sing and make jokes in order to ‘startle’ (*jahna*, SIP, *seke*) the baby. Given the ethnography provided above regarding the existential significance of ‘being startled,’ it is almost as if the women seek to ‘startle’ the baby into recognition of its human status.

In light of the above, I argue that babies in West Gao appear to exist in a liminal state as not-quite-human beings (cf. Stasch 2009: 151). Hviding (1996: 158-159) observes for Marovo (western Solomon Islands) that infants are considered ‘wild, or more specifically unknowable.’ Similarly, Scott (2007b: 152) reports for the Arosi of Makira/Ulawa Province, that children are born ‘stupid,’ lacking the ‘knowledge of the tabus associated with sacred sites in the land.’ Throughout the Solomon Islands then, infants exist in a quasi-wild, unknowable state. In a slight variation on this theme, ethnography concerning *glona* suggests that in West Gao the liminal state of babies is due less to their lack of knowledge than to the fact that they have not yet established firm connections to their birth place.¹²³ Babies possess *kokolo* identity conferred by their origin in the womb of the mother and are therefore, to some extent, already ‘emplaced’ at birth.¹²⁴ However, non-human ancestors also possess *kokolo*

¹²² Coppet (1985: 86) notes for the Are’are of Malaita, that babies have a ‘tiny and fragile “image.”’

¹²³ However, as indicated below, and taken up again in chapter 7, gaining ‘knowledge’ of how to interact with ancestral beings in the landscape can be further stage in the consolidation of human personhood.

¹²⁴ The trans-generational transmission of *kokolo* identity is discussed in chapter 5.

identity (see section 3.4 below and chapter 7). Babies therefore require ritual modification (through *kilo* rituals and washing in local streams) in order to become more firmly connected to their birth place and thus consolidate their status as a human being-in-place who is ‘recognised’ (as human) by the various ancestral beings that also inhabit that place.

It is important to emphasise that mothers will, after a period of time, display little concern about taking their babies to different villages and into the bush to their gardens. Although this may be simply due to a lack of childcare arrangements, I was often struck by the willingness of mothers to carry small babies everywhere, despite the potential risks of *glona*. Children as young as five will accompany parents to their gardens or tag along with groups of men who go deep into the bush in search of sago palm leaves (*nato*) or various bush vines for house-building. By way of these repeated movements through uninhabited places a child becomes increasingly familiar to the ancestral beings that may reside in such areas, a process that in turn reduces the risk of *glona* occurring. Indeed, I did not record any case of a particular *kilo* ritual (either of ‘introduction’ or to cure *glona*) being performed for the same child twice: ancestral recognition, it appears, once secured is for life. This contention is supported by ethnographic data regarding a ritual performed on young men during their first trip to the sacred island of Onogo, said to be the abode of ancestral beings (*na’itu*).¹²⁵ The men are bathed in sea water at the reef’s edge, and again, this ritual works to ensure that the *na’itu* recognise the men when they return to the island for fishing and do not make them sick. This ritual occurs only once in a man’s life; certain research participants were explicit in calling it a “second baptism”. This leads us nicely to the question of the ‘first baptism’, namely, the Christian one.

The sacrament of Baptism is also central to ensuring the well-being of children. All West Gao mothers will endeavour to baptise their new born as soon as possible after birth. When asked directly why it is necessary to baptise a child, Gao speakers say that an un-baptised child is much more likely to have an accident. It was noted by some that the un-baptised children of a family whose father was a member of the SDA church were frequently falling down or cutting

¹²⁵ Some of these *na’itu* are animals such as sharks and a large snake. I return to this issue in chapter 4.

themselves (SIP, *karekil*). Whilst baptism confers a general existential security that is also tied up with the movement of bodies through place, it is not sufficient to provide protection from contact with ancestral spirits. Even after baptism, cases of *glona* still occur. By adulthood, West Gao persons have undergone a series of ritual transformations that connect them firmly to a given locality. These transformations are reinforced by their constant and repeated movements through the areas proximate to their place of residence (*nau*) on a daily basis. Over time, personhood becomes increasingly consolidated and less likely to suffer the dispersal of its intangible elements. This process is augmented as certain adults - such as Ka'aza - grow older and receive knowledge regarding how to interact safely with ancestral beings resident nearby. However, all of these transformations do not amount to complete existential security. This is because, as the child grows into adulthood, he or she will increasingly move outside of his or her place, or home (*nau*). The following case provides evidence for the risks involved in such movements.

In August 2011 I accompanied the West Gao Bible Translation Group to the Gao-speaking village of Ole, located in the adjacent district of Bugotu.¹²⁶ On the first night a catechist and member of the translation team, Japhet, suffered a frightening encounter. Whilst asleep Japhet dreamed of a presence entering his sleeping room. Feeling a firm pressure on his chest, he found himself struggling for breath. Fortunately, Japhet was woken up by his neighbour, otherwise, I was assured, the encounter would have been fatal.¹²⁷ This occurrence is known throughout West Gao as *brubruku na'itu*. The word *brubruku* means to cover-over an object, usually with a weighted or heavy material. In this sense, the ancestral being, or *na'itu*, covers the victim's sleeping body, stifling his breath. Japhet's case is an example of 'one-off' encounters that occur between adults and ancestral beings in places that are seldom visited or being visited for the first time. Crucially, in such encounters, the ancestral being involved is unnamed. It now becomes clear that possession of a proper name differentiates categories of *na'itu*, or ancestral beings in

¹²⁶ The four-day programme paired daily Bible translation work with on-site workshops to generate support for the translation project and encouraged residents of the hosting community to use the Gao language version of the 'Melanesian Common Prayer Book' (published in 2008).

¹²⁷ Toren (1995: 167) describes a similar attack upon a teenage school boy in Gau, Fiji, during which an ancestral being presses on the body in an effort to induce fatal choking.

West Gao. Ancestral beings that cause *glona* are often described as similar to humans (*jateu nanoni*), and it was repeatedly emphasised to me that these anthropomorphic beings “were not dead”, but rather “alive like you and me”.¹²⁸ Such beings always possess a name, even though this name might only be known to a small circle of descendants. In contrast, ancestral beings (also known as *na’itu*, but never, to my knowledge described as ‘alive’ like humans), which also pose a threat to humans, but through processes such as bodily pressing rather than ‘taking’ the image of a person, were always unnamed.¹²⁹

Rather than corresponding to a strict typology, the distinction between named and unnamed ancestral beings in West Gao is relational: what may be a living, named ancestral person for some is an identity-less, dangerous ancestral being for others.¹³⁰ Consequently, ancestral beings are in no way inherently immoral, rather, the nature of their actions is contingent upon the presence or absence of mutual recognition. Moreover, such recognition is ritually activated by the knowledge of names. This relational definition of ancestral beings is contingent upon the fundamental role that *kokolo* identity plays in the constitution of particular places as familiar to particular people and not others. I shall return to this point in the final section of this chapter. Firstly, it is necessary to explore the entanglements between persons and places in West Gao that are illuminated by ethnographic data surrounding sorcery fears.

3.2. Sorcery and the ‘distribution’ of personhood

The threat posed by sorcery attack (*fafafunei* - an act of intentional harm/interference) was, at the time of my fieldwork, an accepted reality for the majority of Gao speakers. As elsewhere in the Solomon Islands, the ability to practise sorcery was generally said to be transmitted

¹²⁸ Accounts of ancestral beings in Maringe District also underline their anthropomorphic qualities. For example, Whiteman ([1983] 2002: 357) discusses a divinatory encounter during which the visiting ancestral ‘spirit’ is reported to have successfully smoked a cigarette.

¹²⁹ The distinction between ‘living’ and ‘non-living’ *na’itu* presents a regional parallel with a distinction drawn in Mono Alu (western Solomon Islands) between ‘the *nitu* of the recently dead and the “original” *nitu (nitu talu)*’ (Monnerie 1995: 106).

¹³⁰ Akin (1996: 163) touches upon a similar logic when discussing the ‘relativism’ that characterises Kwaio (Malaita Province) responses to dangerous foreign spirits. In West Gao, notions of non-human entities originating outside of West Gao were, to my knowledge, absent, although the potency of non-local forms of sorcery was a frequent topic of conversation.

(*fakhakasa*) from father to children (Hocart 1925: 229).¹³¹ In his discussion of witchcraft on Simbo, Hocart (1925: 229) describes a sorcerer as ‘an ordinary human being,’ an observation that certainly holds for West Gao. However, in West Gao, committing sorcerous acts is closely associated with being mobile. When sorcery accusations were sweeping through my host village, the brother in-law of an elderly woman renowned for possessing healing techniques (*au fanitu*) cautioned her to “SIP, *stap kuaet long haos*” (stay quiet at her house) in order to avoid accusations of sorcery. In one case that involved outright accusations, the man concerned was reported to have been seen dancing secretly in an uninhabited area of West Gao as he travelled between two villages.¹³² This relationship between capacity to perform sorcery and being mobile prefigures the connection between *vulnerability* to sorcery and mobility, a subject to which I now turn.

During fieldwork, the most common cause of sorcery-induced illness was the consumption of contaminated food. Until about twenty years ago, I was told, accepting food from anyone except close relatives was a risky business in West Gao, a fact supported by historical reports regarding sorcery fears in other provinces of the Solomon Islands (Hogbin 1964: 56). During fieldwork, this risk had decreased. Eating in homes throughout the numerous hamlets of Poro Village was generally regarded as safe by most persons. However, on one occasion I became ill with a sore throat after a recent trip to a Day Church in a different village in West Gao. A close friend immediately suggested that by eating food prepared in a place where people did not know me well, I had put myself at risk of sorcery attack. Further, when I attended a ‘Cultural Festival’ in a village in an adjacent district I was advised not to accept betel nut from people I did not know. Following a similar logic, for all West Gao residents, more geographically distant places, such as Buala (the provincial capital), Kaevanga (a port in Hograno District) and Honiara, demanded even higher levels of caution with regard to gifts of food. These observations indicate that risk of sorcery attack increases the further one moves away from one’s home village (*nau*)

¹³¹ However, no research participant ever stated that sorcery could not be transmitted following other kinship relationships such as MB/ZS.

¹³² Such examples of ordinary mobility of sorcerers in West Gao should be distinguished from the extra ordinary hyper-mobility of a *vele* sorcerer on Guadalcanal (Hogbin 1964: 56).

(see also Whiteman [1983] 2002: 351). This suggests an implicit connection between vulnerability to sorcery and mobility, a logic, which as we have seen, is emphasised in other aspects of adult bodily vulnerability such as encounter with ancestral beings. This connection is a feature of other sorcery fears that are concerned not with what is taken into the body through eating, but also with what is ‘detached’ from it.

Cautious persons pay attention to leftover food (*khata*), and more widely, things that have been in contact with the mouth, particularly when they are on the move. In the vicinity of their sleeping house (*suga*) and, usually, within their hamlets, West Gao residents will casually discard food leftovers, and disregard where they deposit the skins of betel nut (*fune gausa*). However, when moving outside their hamlet or village they will, without fail, carry some kind of bag (*gnaka*) to carry away their left-overs. It is not simply food leavings that are monitored. Hair trimmings, nail clippings and even clothing would be similarly desired by a sorcerer wishing to inflict harm upon their ‘owner’. Again, concern over the control of such bodily ‘leavings’ - or *excuviae* - increases when people are staying away from home. For example, when attending church events at different villages throughout West Gao, the women would always collect any clothing that had been hung out to dry and move it inside their sleeping room at night.

These sorcery fears might be suitably analysed with reference to Schwarz’s (1997) argument regarding Navajo cosmology. Her identification of a ‘complex network of effect’ inherent to the world, in which persons are rendered vulnerable by a principle of synecdoche, or a relationship between part and whole (Schwarz 1997: 619; see also Keen 2006: 527; Mauss [1950] 2001: 79-80), goes some way toward capturing Gao speakers’ cautious behaviour with regard to their bodily leavings. Alfred Gell (1998: 104) apparently seeks to move beyond a notion of synecdoche when he argues, ‘excuviae do not stand metonymically for the victim; they are physically detached fragments of the victim’s “distributed personhood” - that is, personhood distributed into the milieu, beyond the body boundary’ (see also Keen 2006: 516). Gell’s notion is compelling because the use of the term ‘distributed’ implies an opposite process by which

personhood might be in some way ‘gathered up’, a point that I shall develop later in this chapter. Like Schwarz, however, Gell does not consider the extent to which the ‘whole’ - either the ‘social world’ (for Schwarz), or the ‘milieu’ (for Gell) - might itself be internally divided. In West Gao, the existential vulnerability engendered by the potential of persons to become ‘distributed’ is contingent upon one’s shifting position within the social world, or milieu. More specifically, I suggest that anxieties surrounding the potential for Gao persons to become distributed increase when persons move beyond their ‘home places’ and navigate unfamiliar locales.

Consider the following excerpt taken from my field notes:

We sat and rested at Bule and chewed betel nut, when we stood up to go I was directed to clear the sand-beach by brushing over the imprint our backsides had left. [My companion explained]: “SIP, Nogud eni man kam fo spoelem iumi, bae hem save iusim ples fo mekem iumi siki.” (It would be bad if a person came by who sought to do us harm, he would use this place [where we sat] to make us ill). (Field notes, August 2011)

Here, the imprint of our ‘behinds’ on the sand became a potential vector of sorcery attack, again due to the physical contiguity of our bodies with the area of sand that we had sat upon (cf. Keen 2006: 521). Crucially, this event occurred whilst we were travelling to a Day Church event in a village some three hours walk from my host village Poro. Similarly, one of the most deadly forms of sorcery in West Gao during fieldwork, was known as *churu mina* (literally, poke/pierce footprint).¹³³ As White (1978: 115) reports for Maringe, in this kind of sorcery, the sorcerer uses a sharp instrument¹³⁴ to ‘pierce’ the footprint of the victim.¹³⁵ In both examples (the imprint of our backsides and footprints) the suitability of these imprints as vectors for inducing bodily harm is rooted in what Gell (1998: 104) identifies as a merging of the principles of ‘similarity’ and ‘contact.’ In both cases, however, this fusion of similarity and contact within

¹³³ *Churu* is connected to notions of needles and sewing in West Gao: the verb *chuchuru* means either to receive a medical injection or to ‘sew’ sage palm leaves into roofing thatch.

¹³⁴ Ian Keen (2006: 522) describes a similar ‘technique of ensorcellment’ among the Yolngu of Central Australia that involves ‘piercing a victim’s footprint with a hot wire while singing a spell.’ Certain Gao speakers suggested that the sharp instrument used in *churu mina* was a bone fragment.

¹³⁵ Sorcery is only one among numerous aetiologies available to West Gao persons, who draw upon a rich knowledge of illness causation. For example, in one incident of suspected *churu mina* that occurred during fieldwork, the victim went through a series of unsuccessful treatments by *fanitu*, eventually she visited Buala to receive an injection for yaws, which ultimately cured her painful foot and leg.

vectors of sorcery attack only exists as a result of acts of physical movement through the landscape.

In the cases of *glona* explored above, the intangible ‘image’ of a person becomes spatially separated from her physical body (*tono*).¹³⁶ Insofar as sorcery fears are concerned, an object or imprint - at one time contiguous with the body (*tono*) - also undergoes a similar spatial separation and becomes a vector that can be manipulated to cause harm to the original body. In both cases, however, the aspect which becomes separated continues to be linked - by what Gell (1998: 103) terms a ‘causal pathway’ - to its counterpart. If it did not, sorcery simply would not work in the way that it does, or in the case of *glona*, there would be no chance of reversing the separation through a *kilo* ritual. This latter point hints at the positive underbelly of distributed personhood, namely, the possibility of inducing a return of the distributed ‘parts.’ Incidentally, such an act also involves physical movement - a reunion rather than a separation: as Mauss ([1950] 2001: 76) astutely recognised for magical rite in general, ‘things come and depart’ (cf. Atkinson 1992: 90). One final example will serve to consolidate this connection. In mid-2011 a West Gao healer once revealed to me a piece of hard, dusty swamp taro (*khaekake*) with the teeth marks still visible in its flesh. As a result of his ritual techniques (*fanitu*), the man explained how this piece of half-eaten food had quite literally ‘flown’ back to its owner from the sorcerer. By instigating the return of the food-leaving of his patient, this *fanitu* practitioner had undertaken an act similar to the ritual experts who perform ‘*kilo*’ rituals in order to instigate the return of a *glona*-sufferer’s image: the food leaving, as a result of physical proximity to her body, had become a separable aspect of the sorcery victim’s personhood much like her image, and, just as in the cases of *glona*, it required ritual mechanics to ensure its physical ‘return’ and the restoration of her well-being.

I argue that West Gao persons are ‘distributed’ in exactly the way that Gell (1998: 106) articulates, namely, that images and imprints of the person, like bodily leavings, are quite

¹³⁶ Glona is, of course, an instantiation of a wider phenomenon of soul-loss traceable in the anthropological record to Sir James Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* (Frazer 1957: 244) and Edward Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (Graeber 2001: 97).

literally ‘parts’ of the person (cf. Keen 2006: 523; Taussig 1993: 53). However, in West Gao, this distributed nature of persons through their images, imprints, and bodily leavings is not infinite, but is contingent upon the presence or absence of particular inter-subjective relationships between persons and particular places. Young children must be actively made ‘familiar’ in order to reduce the risk of the loss of their ‘image’ due to a lack of ancestral recognition. During such ritual introductions, ancestral interlocutors are reminded that the named child belongs to a particular place. In adults, vulnerability to sorcery and attack from unnamed ancestral beings increases as a person moves outside his or her home place. In sum, whilst persons are always and everywhere potentially distributable, this distribution only becomes threatening in unfamiliar locales. West Gao persons do, however, have at their disposal the means by which to ensure protection from the existential vulnerabilities that attend the navigation of unfamiliar locales. It is to such protective measures that we now turn.

3.3: Shutting persons

In April 2011 I accompanied some of my extended family on a trip to make copra at a place - deep in the forest - that I had not visited before. Upon my arrival, one of my companions, a woman named Leghunau, made a protective talisman for me. This object, known as a *sosolo*, was constructed by rolling the strands of a particular tree species into a looped rope (see figure 10). The rope enabled a named ancestor living nearby in the forest to ‘recognise’ me. By wearing the *sosolo* he would consider me as his *kheragna*, or relative, and I would not become ill. Leghunau explained that the *sosolo* would also protect me from the ancestral beings located at different places in West Gao. When I returned to my home that evening, the rope looped around my watchstrap attracted the attention of my host family. Firstly, my sister-in-law, Arelana, pointed to the *sosolo* and remarked: “[That] belongs to me. I can make it too – the stick [tree species used] is the same [as I use]. My matriclan and Leghunau’s are the same [*kahe kokolo lana*], our families are one [*kahe tabutua*]”. Secondly, my mother, seeing the new addition to my watch, explained that her own *kokolo* could also make the looped ropes, but often found it unnecessary to expend the effort. Instead they used only a sprig of a particular tree (*gau sisiri*), simply picked and worn in the hair, or tucked in the spokes of an umbrella.

People in West Gao show great interest in the protective function of plant materials that can be channelled to ensure the well-being and safety of persons as they move around. Whilst these



Figure 10 two *sosolo* made from various plant materials, taken from different locations in West Gao. May 2012.

materials can be used for particular interactions (such as to ensure the recognition of a particular ancestral being) they simultaneously serve more general ‘protective’ functions. For example, my wristwatch *sosolo* was often referred to by different people as an explanation as to why my exceptional mobility (my research took me through many different places throughout West Gao and beyond) did not appear to have dramatic negative effects on my health. However, as time went on, I became aware that my *sosolo* was not the most effective one available. Recall that Arelana had revealed to me her ability to make the same kind of protective *sosolo* that I wore tied to my wristwatch. Much later in fieldwork, Arelana was preparing to take her one year old daughter to Honiara, where the girl’s father (my adoptive brother) had secured work chopping timber. It came to my attention that my brother had sought a particular *sosolo* for himself, his wife, and his daughter, from Ma’ane Iho, a man who resided in a nearby hamlet.

The plant materials for the *sosolo* were taken from a place said to be the abode of a named ancestor (*phadaghi*, see figure 11). Once tied by Ma’ane Iho to the body of its wearer, the

sosolo would protect (*foto*) that person against ‘any *devol*¹³⁷ in West Gao, Santa Isabel and other provinces in the Solomon Islands.¹³⁸ The efficacy of the *sosolo*, as with my wristwatch *sosolo*, is based on the recognition - mediated by the *sosolo* - of the named ancestor said to reside in the place from which the plant matter for the *sosolo* was taken. The ancestor ‘recognises’ the wearer as a friend/relative (*kheragna*), does not harm them, and also works to protect them in counteracting the influences of dangerous non-human beings or malign agency such as sorcery. In many other contexts in West Gao I heard suggestions of this ancestral counter-part of a *sosolo* – where a *sosolo* was present, so were stories of sounds that were associated with the protective presence of an ancestral guardian.¹³⁹

In light of the above, it is clear that *sosolo* do not serve a catch-all ‘protective’ function by which all ancestral beings everywhere are caused to ‘recognise’ the wearer and not harm them as a result. Rather, the named ancestor associated with the *sosolo* accompanies the wearer whom, by virtue of the *sosolo* is now treated as a ‘relative’, and counteracts the negative effects that contact with other ancestral beings might have upon its human companion. Given these shared logics associated with the mechanics of *sosolo* as ancestral protection, why did my brother, given that his wife herself possessed the ability to make a *sosolo*, go to such effort to seek a *sosolo* made by a different man? His justification was that the *sosolo* made by his wife was “for children” and was, therefore “not strong enough”. In contrast, the *sosolo* made by Ma’ane Iho was “stronger” and more effective at “causing the body to be shut.” The link made by my brother between stronger protection and increased capacity to shut the body was not idiosyncratic. Indeed the Gao term for protection - *foto* - semantically implies the physical action of shutting. For example, the word in Gao language for the lid of an object is *fofotogna*. Furthermore, *sosolo* is also a verb in Gao language meaning ‘to tie’ - as in ‘to tie a shoe lace’ -

¹³⁷ *Devol* is here referring to both ancestral agency and sorcery.

¹³⁸ My brother was keen to protect himself against ‘*vele*’ a form of deadly sorcery associated with Guadalcanal Province (Hogbin 1964: 56).

¹³⁹ This notion of a particular ancestral guardian mediated by a protective talisman differs from the protective talismans (including Christian talismans) described by Scott (2007b: 176) that his Arosi (Makira/Ulawa Province) research participants attributed with a more general capacity to ‘block’ ancestral agency, or potency.

and *sosolo* are always literally or mimetically tied to the body (see also Codrington 1881: 306), a fact that further implies that ideas of protection involve an action that secures ‘tightness’.



Figure 11 *phadaghi* associated with a named ancestor from which the material for Ma'ane Iho's *sosolo* was taken. April 2012.

This notion of protection - imparted through material additions to the body associated with particular ancestral beings such as a *sosolo* - as shutting, closing, or making tight, implies the opposite condition of vulnerable (unprotected) bodies as being open, or permeable. Such a state provides one explanation for the propensity of persons to become ‘distributed.’ This is so because permeability or openness implies not only passage inward (penetration) but also a lack of density of personhood, which in turn enables its ‘distribution’ in the manner explored in the previous section. The overlap between the protective mechanics of *sosolo* as reducing permeability of bodies and simultaneously counteracting the potential distribution of personhood becomes apparent in the exegesis provided by a different man - George - who possessed the skill to make a *sosolo*. George explained that as well as employing the usual ritual techniques of making the sign of the cross (*fablahi*) before harvesting the plants he needed, he

also uttered some archaic Gao words that he described as having efficacy - *au noilaghi*.¹⁴⁰ The meaning of these ‘words’ (SIP, *toktok*) was “to go all the way”, the idea behind them being that the vector of illness would not come to rest on the body of the wearer but pass over it. This *sosolo* would not only protect the wearer by making their body impermeable, but also from sorcery inflicted by manipulation of a food leaving (*khata*). However, the nature of the protection in the case of sorcery attack was different; the ‘*na’itu*’ associated with the *sosolo* would go and bring the food-leaving back to its owner, thereby, as we have seen previously, effecting a cure.

At this point, a caveat is necessary. As suggested above, the acutely ‘open’ state of a new born is linked to a baby’s not-quite-human status. On the other hand, however, recall the incident of ancestral encounter described above wherein a life-threatening event of ‘covering’ occurs as the adult victim is asleep. Living human bodies, it appears, have to maintain the right level of permeability and avoid states in which their bodies are completely covered or shut. Controlling the permeability and ‘distributability’ of personhood becomes of the utmost existential importance only when a person is present in a not-yet familiar place, as at birth, or when navigating an unfamiliar place, as occurs frequently in adulthood. Indeed, some of the most powerful protective *sosolo* in West Gao were ritually prepared by men who had spent many years working aboard ships. These men often evidenced the efficacy of their own *sosolo* through narratives that highlighted the ability of the rope to protect against sorcery attack in different provinces of the Solomon Islands.¹⁴¹ There is, perhaps, no better instantiation of a lack of familiarity with ‘place’ than moving on a completely different landmass. Perhaps this is also why people in West Gao continually took interest in my health during fieldwork - I couldn’t have been further from my home-place if I tried.

The action of shutting is also closely associated with discourses surrounding ‘efficacy’ – *noilaghi* or *mana* – in West Gao. As explored in chapter 1, the channelling of Christian power

¹⁴⁰ I do not reveal these words here out of respect for the confidence in which they were told to me.

¹⁴¹ Both Allerton (2013: 169-170) and Atkinson (1992: 60) have pointed to the association between the mobility of males and magical potency.

into the landscape by various agents of the Anglican Church has been occurring in West Gao for over a century. In describing the mechanics of such blessing (*fablahi*),¹⁴² people throughout West Gao employ the verb ‘to shut’. This process of ‘shutting’ (SIP, *sutim*) was described by one research participant as “putting to sleep” as opposed to “killing” ancestral power/efficacy in the landscape. As White (1991: 110) has argued, this process is not always guaranteed to be successful (cf. Scott 2007b: 182-183). A member of the Melanesian Brotherhood, or Tasiu, interviewed in December 2011, described one aspect of the work of his Order as “shutting the roads of ancestral spirits.” This capacity, attributed to Christian blessing, to curtail ancestral agency by a process of ‘shutting’ that renders it immobile (through putting to sleep, or shutting roads) suggests that ancestral agency, like the agency of a sorcerer, is itself predicated upon mobility. But in a final twist, it is this very ‘mobility’ of ancestral beings that makes them so effective at offering protection: their ability to move with the *sosolo* wearer (even if he is travelling away from Santa Isabel), and to retrieve items used in sorcery. The solution, then, to the heightened existential vulnerability engendered by mobility, is to take – quite literally – a portable piece of home with you: an ancestral guardian who, through the mediation of the *sosolo*, ‘shuts’ the body by utilising its hyper-mobility to counteract the processes by which personhood becomes distributed.

In the contemporary context, defined by heightened mobility due to people undertaking projects associated with Christianity, working on ships, or as we saw with Aesaea’s parents, as nurses, West Gao often appears as a singular locality against which other places are balanced. However, as Aesaea’s illness reminds us, the relationship between bodily health and locality in West Gao is not only predicated upon being at home in West Gao as opposed to, say, Buala. Aesaea’s illness was caused by his own matrilineal ancestors. Furthermore, his return to health was secured through the ritual techniques possessed not by a West Gao ritual specialist selected at random, but by his matrilineal relatives located in his home hamlet. This suggests that the relationship between the existential vulnerability of persons, place, and mobility that I have

¹⁴²Gell (1998: 116) suggests that the process of the dissemination of *dashan* in Hinduism as ‘the material transfer of some blessing’ can also be seen as involving a ‘distribution’ of divine personhood.

been developing must be understood alongside the existential concerns associated with particular places in West Gao.

3.4: The particularity of person-localities

In the months prior to receiving my *sosolo* from Leghunau, I often expressed a wish to extend my movements to places outside my host village. My family were unwilling to agree to my plans due to the health risks that attend encounters with ancestral beings. On one occasion, my friend Emily offered to take me to visit her relative in a distant West Gao village. Unfortunately, the coastal ‘road’ led us through a hole in a rocky outcrop of the cliff that was associated with a named ancestral being. The ancestral being was described by my mother as “*seksoni gheati*” (our matriclan).¹⁴³ She was loath to let me go, but finally capitulated if I promised to go and speak to her matrilineal relative who resided near the rocky outcrop before I went through the hole. I did so and was given a sprig of the sweet smelling-plant *boso* and instructed to bring it back to my sleeping house (*suga*) upon my return. As this case indicates, moving through certain areas of West Gao demands that one contacts particular persons who are descendants of the ancestral beings that inhabit those areas. Such persons will deploy specific means (a plant sprig taken from a particular place) of ensuring that their ancestor recognises the traveller and thus does not make them sick. This fact was emphasised in other contexts during fieldwork, as the following case will show.

In May 2011, a sense of relief flooded through my hamlet as news spread of the recovery of an elderly man who had been missing for three days deep in the forest above two of the smallest ‘bush’ villages in West Gao. The man had been seeking a vine (*gnara*) used for house-building. His search took him far up into the forest away from human settlements. When he did not return on the second day, it was assumed that ancestral beings were responsible for his absence. Whilst not necessarily malicious, these ancestral beings are often described as mischievous - causing people to become lost and confused (*fa'io'ih*), or even ‘abducting’ a person by taking them inside their cavernous rock-homes (*khora na'itu*). Because his route led him close by one of

¹⁴³ *Seksoni* is derived from the pijin term *sekson* meaning ‘group of people’ (Jourdan 2002: 202).

these ancestral residences, it was hypothesised that this latter fate had indeed befallen him. It was suggested that as he came from of a different area of West Gao he had not abided by “the *kastom* of the place.”

In early 2012, I managed to secure a visit to a bush hamlet that was located proximate to the *khora na'itu* that had been at the centre of discussions regarding the old man’s disappearance. The husband of my host - a man who had resided in the hamlet since 1974 - explained that ancestral beings had been a regular sight on the paths in the surrounding forest. I was told that if these beings strayed into the nearby gardens, the crops would die. Since 2003 however, the wanderings of the *na'itu* had been severely curtailed due to the actions of a group of Tasiu who came to bless (*fablahi*) the place. Whilst staying in the village, my host Agnes agreed that I would be able to see for myself the huge cliff face said to be a ‘place of regular inhabitancy’ (*tema*) of these named ancestral beings (see figure 12). Before we left, a young girl from a village in a different area of West Gao and myself were ritually prepared by Agnes - a direct matrilineal descendent of the ancestors whose home we were about to visit. Taking the sweet-smelling, white, ball-shaped seeds of a particular plant (*boso*) growing nearby, she rolled them in her hands and rubbed our heads and shoulders. As we arrived at the opening in the cliff face (*khora*), about thirty minutes’ walk from the hamlet, Agnes spoke aloud in Gao language to her ancestors describing us as her “relatives”, explaining that we had come to visit their “home”. It struck me what “following the *kastom* of the place” entailed.

As we stood at an opening in the rock face Agnes explained that this stone “doorway” had previously been much wider, allowing people to move easily inside the cavern (*khora*) lying behind. In recent years however, a stone had fallen to half cover the hole. When a local Anglican priest had come to bless (*fablahi*) the area, he had carried incense and prayed inside the *khora*, which was at that time, accessible. He also planted a hibiscus plant on a rock directly opposite the doorway of the *khora*, a plant, which as Agnes was at pains to emphasise, had not grown well and certainly had not produced any flowers. As indexed by the ailing hibiscus plant, despite the rock-fall and the activities of the priest, the *na'itu* continued to come and go with

ease from their home. Agnes explained that if her son had been with us - a boy whom, following the advice of her own mother, she had named after one of the ancestral beings who inhabited the cavern - he would be able to interact easily with his ancestral namesake (*khe hngagna*). Indeed, her son had never been afraid of their non-human neighbours. Agnes recalled that her son had once called his ancestral namesake to visit - *sigho* - his brother at their family home just prior to his departure to work for a logging company. Hearing the noises of his ancestral visitor outside the house, the older boy was thoroughly frightened by the whole affair.



Figure 12 the huge cliff face, said to be the 'place of regular inhabitancy' of Agnes' 'living' matrilineal ancestors, just visible through the vegetation. March 2012.

At the time of the old man's disappearance Agnes had performed a particular *kilo* ritual that was focused on the *khora na'itu* inhabited by her ancestors. Although the man's discovery was, in the end, not attributed to this ritual communication, it is telling that the immediate response to his disappearance – alongside the sending out of search parties to follow his physical trail – was to immediately counter-act the possibility of his abduction by resident ancestral beings who failed to recognise him because he had not “followed the *kastom* of the place”. This illustrates

that only a few hours' walk from 'home,' Gao speakers can find themselves in an unfamiliar place. In cases of ancestral abduction connected to particular ancestral sites (*khora na'itu*) it is the full person rather than some distributed aspect of them that is the target. Furthermore, in cases such as these, only the direct matrilineal descendants of such ancestors who are described as 'owners' of the *khora na'itu* and living in close proximity, are those possessing the correct materials (plant matter and names of the ancestors) to secure the return of the abducted person.

In the first section of this chapter I emphasised a relational distinction between named and unnamed ancestral beings. Knowing the names of differently located ancestors is contingent upon the existence of intra-*kokolo* relationships. Indeed, in the case of Agnes son, sharing a name with his ancestor rendered him so 'familiar' to this non-human relative that he was able to play a joke on his elder sibling. Here it becomes apparent that the existential security secured through being at home is not only important in contradistinction to mobility (which all persons share), but is in fact predicated upon key differences between persons belonging to different matriclans (*kokolo*). This point brings us full circle, for it was intra-*kokolo* relationships that caused and eventually secured the cure of Aesaea's illness with which I introduced this chapter.

All the ritual techniques (*fanitu*) that seek to localise, heal, or protect persons as they move through different places epitomise practices referred to as *kastom* in West Gao. In this section, I have illustrated that different *kastom*[s] are associated with particular persons and places. This supports the argument laid out in the introduction to this thesis, namely, that *kastom* in West Gao is, as in Arosi (Makira) according to Scott (2011: 202), 'fundamentally plural.' White (1978: 113) observed for Maringe District in the 1970s, 'ritual knowledge necessary to influence the various spirits or protect and heal from their attack is private and inherited along clan lines. In this way, specific clans become identified with the actions of particular spirits.' In contemporary West Gao the situation remains much the same. Interacting through ritual means with emplaced ancestors is predicated on one's membership in a matriclan, that is, upon *kokolo* identity. If, as Feuchtwang (2007) argues, territories become places by virtue of an animating centre, West Gao consists of multiple centred territories. We are dealing here with a plural

cosmology in which intra-*kokolo* relationships form the stable centre of places-persons. Furthermore, ritual techniques (*fanitu*, SIP, *kastom*) provide the (equally plural) means through which this lived world, which can be familiar and unfamiliar by turns, is navigated in safety, whilst also equipping Gao speakers to move freely in places far beyond the immediate horizon.

In this chapter I have explored the entanglements between bodies and places in West Gao. Ritual procedures, undertaken at birth, ensure that the new born is recognised by ancestral beings - already present in that locality - as a human person. Human personhood is further consolidated as children repeatedly move through their home places, and when, as adults, they gain knowledge of how to communicate with ancestral beings themselves. However, because adult persons are exceptionally mobile, existential security is never completely guaranteed. Taking up this claim through the analysis of ideas regarding soul loss and sorcery fears, I built upon Alfred Gell's concept of distributed personhood, arguing that in West Gao the extent to which the potential distribution of personhood is existentially threatening is contingent upon a state of being 'familiar' to a particular place.

As persons move through other peoples' places, they are forced to feel an absence of familiarity in their bodies. In order to counteract this threat of illness West Gao persons have two choices. Firstly, they can turn to their own *kokolo* ancestors whose protective presence, secured through a material addition to the body, ensures that they carry a portable aspect of their own place with them. The prophylactic movements of these ancestral guardians instantiates a centrifugal force that operates to reverse the distribution of human personhood. Secondly, Gao persons can seek the ritual aid of persons who have an intimate connection to a given place that is predicated upon intra-*kokolo* relationships that they themselves lack. Certain actions, however, are beyond the control of humans. In the case of Aesaea, it was his *kokolo* ancestors themselves who reinstated, along an intra-*kokolo* axis, Aesaea's relationship to his home hamlet.

In West Gao then, movement is continually balanced against pre-existing places, rather than, as Ingold (2011: 149) argues, giving rise to place. Furthermore, human personhood is contingent less upon the sedimentation of bodily movement (Ingold 2011: 150), than upon controlling the openness, permeability, and density of the body in response to the relative familiarity of the places in which one finds oneself. These particular dynamics of emplaced personhood are predicated upon intrinsic relationships figured along an intra-*kokolo* axis that lock ancestral beings, their living descendants, and particular territories into an existential condition typified by mutual influence or effect. The fact that there exists a plurality of such ‘centred’ relational fields is dictated by the poly-ontological structure of West Gao cosmology. This claim requires an elaboration of, on the one hand, the cosmogonic origins that render each *kokolo* unique, and on the other, how the distinctiveness of intra-*kokolo* relationships are reproduced across generations. These paired issues are the focus of the next two chapters.

Chapter 4 The Origins of Difference: Utopic and Topogonic Primordiality

Introduction

Approximately two months before I was due to leave West Gao I was walking through Poro Village when a middle-aged man, whom I shall name Mola, approached me. Glancing nervously around the hamlet, and speaking in low tones, Mola told me about a particular narrative that was part of the ancestral history (*pagusu*) of his *kokolo*.¹⁴⁴ He explained that the old men who told him the story had emphasised the necessity of keeping it hidden (*t'huturi mala phopol* – a story for hiding). The story documented the unusual birth of a female ancestor in the primordial past and he hinted that he knew the name of the “old man” who had cared for this child. I did not want Mola to proceed further with what was quite obviously an uncomfortable communication.¹⁴⁵ After reassuring him that I had already heard the narrative from another West Gao resident, I told him I did not need to know the exact name of the old man in the story. Mola was visibly relieved, remarking that he and the man from whom I had heard the story belonged to the “same matrilineage” (*kahe t'hi'a lana*).

As we saw in the previous chapter, the existential security of people like Mola is maintained through activating the intra-*kokolo* relationships that animate their home places. That such relationships exist prior to the actions of living human persons and their movements depends upon an underlying and thus far unaddressed condition, namely, the categorical singularity of each matriclan or *kokolo*. In this chapter, I demonstrate that as a result of their independent coming into being in the primordial past, the three *kokolo* correspond to distinct ontological categories. Narratives of the type alluded to by Mola trace the actions of particular ancestors as they gave shape to and became enfolded by different areas of the landscape. When viewed as a corpus, the different origin narratives of the three *kokolo* amount to territorial place-making on a cosmogonic scale (cf. Feuchtwang 2007).

¹⁴⁴ It was approaching midday and most villagers had left for their gardens.

¹⁴⁵ Mola's behaviour was typical of many of my interactions when documenting ancestral histories during fieldwork (see also section 4.4 below).

By enacting what, in the next chapter, is analysed as an unambiguous logic of matrilineal descent, all members of the same clan should be able to ‘match up’ their narratives in order to trace connection to original groups of *kokolo* ancestors. As my interaction with Mola indicates, however, whilst Gao speakers expect persons belonging to the same matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*) to know the same origin narratives and are reassured when this proves to be the case, in many circumstances they will be wary of sharing their narratives with persons outside of their own matrilineage, even if such persons belong to the same *kokolo* as themselves. It is the aim of this chapter to show how such uncertainties, whilst exacerbated by a contemporary climate of competition over land, can also be analysed as an instantiation of longstanding cosmogonic dynamics.

In the first section, I explore the paired themes of ‘isolation’ and ‘encounter’ that can be traced across the ancestral histories (*pagusu*) and other ancestral tales (*t’huturi tifa*) told in West Gao.¹⁴⁶ Whilst cosmogony involves what Michael Scott (2007b: 201) has termed a ‘utopic’ period of primordiality, in West Gao this period is animated by a particular cosmogonic process namely, ‘petrification’ (*juruku*). In succumbing to this process, arriving apical ancestors *became* autochthonous to the island of Santa Isabel in an irreversible way. I analyse these post-*juruku* ancestral beings as ‘indices’ of the West Gao ‘descent-based poly-ontology’ (Scott 2007b: 201). During the utopic mode of cosmogony, the three *kokolo* undergo a transition - via processes of encounter - from an initial potent state as geographically-isolated ‘proto’ matriclans, to a state of inter-category relationship and exchange in which the three matriclans are consolidated as fully human, descent-based categories. The establishment of *kokolo* exogamy, and the environmental changes induced by it, mark the onset of a second mode of primordiality, which, again employing Scott’s (2007b: 201) analytic terminology, I refer to as ‘topogonic.’ In this period, which I explore in the second section, the fully human descendants of the apical *kokolo*

¹⁴⁶ Mirroring a situation described for the western Solomon Islands (Hviding 1996: 82-83; McDougall 2004: 204), the oral traditions of Gao speakers can be divided into particular genres. In contrast to general ‘stories of long ago’ (*t’huturi tifa*), a specific ancestral history (*pagusu*) or genealogy (*susurai*) is secret (cf. McDougall 2004: 205), usually withheld until a key moment of transmission to a chosen person and revealed only reluctantly during land disputes. However, as is the case in Ranongga (western Solomon Islands), in West Gao these genres frequently ‘overlap’ (McDougall 2004: 205). For this reason, I draw eclectically upon a wide corpus of narratives in this section without explicitly stating the context in which they were told.

ancestors give shape to particular territories. The spatio-temporal movements of ‘descent’ (*posa*) and the centrality of naming practices within such ‘movements’ indicate a mode of primordiality in which different matrilineages became inherently connected to particular territories.

In sum, the two modes of primordiality engendered, on the one hand, a dispersed territory held at the encompassing level of a given matriclan, or *kokolo*, and on the other, the existence of smaller territories controlled by particular matrilineages, (sng. *t’hi’ā*). Unlike the Arosi case analysed by Scott (2007b: 74) in which ‘a lineage, its narrative, and its land together form a unique organic unity,’ in West Gao the ultimate boundaries of a categorically distinct ‘organic unity’ correspond not to a given matrilineage, but to the exogamous matriclan or *kokolo*. This is because the separations between members of one *kokolo* into emplaced matrilineages that typify topogonic primordiality in West Gao do not amount to indices of given and essential categorical difference (as is the case for the transformations of apical *kokolo* ancestors during utopic primordiality). Nevertheless, such dispersals and movements through particular territories engender key differentiations that exist internally to a given *kokolo*. This point is clarified in the second half of this chapter when colonial transformations are considered.

In section three, I argue that whilst all members of the same *kokolo* do, in certain contexts, know the origin stories of their original ancestors, connecting up the details of these narratives to particular areas of the landscape is achieved by members of some matrilineages (sng. *t’hi’ā*) and not others. In the fourth section I argue that conversion to Christianity may have encouraged Gao speakers to emphasise pre-existing pan-*kokolo* unity at the expense of attention to emergent differences between matrilineages. However, during my fieldwork, Gao speakers had begun to express uncertainty about the content of narratives told by persons belonging to their own *kokolo*. On the one hand, such uncertainty suggests that pan-*kokolo* unity may be eroding due to increasing competition over land. On the other hand, ambiguities surrounding land-persons relationships continue to tap into, and therefore reinforce, identity at the level of *kokolo*. That events from colonial history are used by Gao speakers to reproduce *kokolo*

identities in the same way that ‘timeless’ origin narratives can be used, leads me to assert that ‘cosmogony’, at least in a topogonic mode, animates historically-situated action in the present.

4.1: Utopic primordiality - from isolation to encounter

When speaking of the ultimate origins of their matriclan ancestors, people belonging to all three *kokolo* in West Gao will all assert that “we all arrived” or “our ancestors all travelled here” (cf. McDougall 2004: 199, n.d.: *chap. 3*). These statements of arrival correlate with ethnographic data from elsewhere in Santa Isabel. Speaking of his home district, Bugotu, George Bogesi (1948: 208) explains, ‘our ancestors came from the west. Some claimed to come via Marovo Lagoon, some via Kia or Choiseul, through Maringe and Nggao [Gao].’¹⁴⁷ In West Gao, most people did not posit any location for their ancestors prior to their arrival on the north western shores of Santa Isabel but concentrate on how these original arriving ancestors travelled either by foot or by sea (upon rafts or in canoes) to different parts of the island. Whilst the order in which the apical ancestors arrived remains unclear, it is certain that different groups of ancestors arrived separately (cf. McWilliam 2011: 72). As suggested by these widely-held narratives of staggered ancestral arrival upon pre-existing landmass, Gao speakers lack any all-encompassing cosmogonic myths.

A lack of concern with the ultimate origins of the elements that make up the universe is reported throughout the Solomon Islands (Coppet 1981: 176; Hvding 1996: 82; Keesing 1982: 58; McDougall 2004: 204, 206, n.d.: *chap. 3*; Scheffler 1965: 9; Scott 2007b: 5, 113). However, a recent trend within the ethnography of matrilineal societies in the Solomon Islands has revealed that the origin myths told by particular matrilineages, when taken together, do in fact point to processes of cosmogony (McDougall 2004, n.d.; Scott 2007b). In this section, I develop such arguments by illustrating how, even when origin narratives point to the processual rather than the absolute nature of autochthony, the cosmogenesis of discrete categories of being can nevertheless be traced. Crucial to this latter point is the realisation that the condition of

¹⁴⁷ Signalling the cosmological significance of this direction of arrival, Bogesi (1948: 208) continues ‘there is also a belief that after death a person’s ghost has “gone west” ... pointing to the fact that the ghost returns to the place where the people originally came from.’

separation that features in the narratives of ancestral arrival was not abolished when these ancestors encountered land. Rather, this condition of original separation was perpetuated as different groups of the apical ancestors existed in isolation in different parts of the landscape.¹⁴⁸ I now explore these various origin myths in more detail.

One group of ancestors, rather than landing on the northern shores, paddled their bamboo raft until they reached an area of West Gao coastline where they disembarked and moved uphill (*haghe holo*) to a place in the forested interior.¹⁴⁹ Significantly, I was repeatedly told by Gao speakers that this group of ancestors “married their sisters” (*toilaghi ka greghadi*), a fact that points clearly to their isolated state. This group of founding ancestors were also accredited with capabilities that surpassed those of human beings. For example, they were said to be able to shed their skins like snakes and become young again, magically regenerate a tree being chopped by an ogre (*na'itu golihe*)¹⁵⁰ simply by singing magical words, and even rise up on the sun to a village located in the middle of the sky.¹⁵¹ These apical beings living in isolation, practising incestuous unions, and undertaking extraordinary feats, were clearly not ‘human’ in the same way people are today. This is ratified by the fact that the inter-*kokolo* unions they undertook resulted in the birth of powerful ancestral beings, some of which we encountered in chapters 1 and 3, known generally as *na'itu*.

Narratives concerning other founding ancestors document similar movement from Ki'a in northern Santa Isabel down toward West Gao - either by sea or across the interior. In one narrative, an old man and woman living alone without children in a named part of the forested interior, struggle to cook some eggs, exclaiming: “I think these are the eggs of a non-human

¹⁴⁸ West Gao origin narratives do not emphasise pan-insular connections (cf. Mondragón 2009: 122-123; Scott 2007b: 203). Indeed, as noted by Bogesi (1948: 208) there is no ‘native name’ for the island of Santa Isabel as a whole.

¹⁴⁹ The location of this original named settlement was known by many West Gao residents, some of the ancestors’ stone artefacts (a stone oven (*biti*) and a stone “altar”) can still be located.

¹⁵⁰ These bush-dwelling ogres, now extinct, are not associated with any *kokolo*, but, as we shall see, participated in the conditions of isolation and processes of encounter that animate the primordial world inhabited and shaped by the apical ancestors (see also McDougall 2004: 210-212, n.d.: *chap.* 3).

¹⁵¹ A remarkably similar Bugotu version of this narrative about a celestial journey but with a different named central character (Kamakajaku) was recorded by R.H.Codrington between 1863 and 1887 (Codrington 1891: 365-366).

being!” (*Jame ki mabe na’itu gua*).¹⁵² After a series of events,¹⁵³ these eggs grow into two girl children, who are later fed on the sap of two trees.¹⁵⁴ In a different narrative, when an old woman goes to collect salt water for cooking, her bamboo container becomes blocked with the egg of a dugong. When she takes the egg home, it hatches into a girl child of extraordinary beauty. The girl is later tricked by her jealous ‘sister’ into discovering the truth about her marine origins and returns to the coast in order to seek out her sea-mammal birth mother with whom she departs into the sea.¹⁵⁵ Another tale relates the travails of an old woman who, after being deserted by her group when they travel on to Nggela, becomes pregnant “by the wind” (*pluka ka naufla*) giving birth to a son who is able to make gardens very quickly, and build a house for his mother located in the ‘air.’¹⁵⁶ Unlike similar stories of primordial events associated with the origins of descent groups elsewhere in the Solomon Islands (see, e.g., Hviding 1996: 132; Scott 2007b: 203), all these events are linked to particular named places in West Gao. For example, in the story of the dugong-born child, the stone upon which she stood in order to locate her mother is named and is still visible off the coast of West Gao.

However, in some cases, stories regarding origins do not seek to connect up events to named areas in West Gao. One case, mirroring a similar lineage narrative reported elsewhere on Santa Isabel (White 1991: 241n6) and throughout the Solomon Islands (Hogbin 1965: 79; Roga 1989: 10-13; Scheffler 1965: 241; Scott 2007b: 288), involves the birth of a girl-child from a snake.¹⁵⁷ In the narrative, ignoring the advice of her snake-mother, the girl goes to swim in the nearby river. Whilst she is swimming a chief spies her and desires her for his wife. After they marry the girl has a daughter who is visited one day by the snake-grandmother at the home of the chief.

¹⁵² The eggs were taken from an animal species which I do not reveal.

¹⁵³ I do not disclose the narrative details of this story out of respect for the confidence in which it was told.

¹⁵⁴ Ian Hogbin (1965: 16) reports similar origin stories related to the birth of the ancestors of two exogamous moieties among the ‘hill people’ of Guadalcanal from the eggs of an eagle and the leaves of a cordyline plant.

¹⁵⁵ My adoptive mother, Ka’aza, linked this story to a particular *t’hi’ā* who, she stated, “*fufunu ka dugong*” – started from the dugong. She told me that in the past persons of this matrilineage did not eat dugong meat. The differences between matrilineages and matriclans are explored further in section 4.3 and 4.4 below.

¹⁵⁶ An island in central the region of the Solomon Islands.

¹⁵⁷ Cato Berg (2008: 119) documents a slightly different version of this myth from Vella Lavella, in which ‘the first woman copulated with a snake and begot two twin daughters.’

The man kills the snake, and in her grief, the snake-born woman takes her daughter and departs to a mythical island on the back of an eagle, whilst the bereft husband crushes his testicles with a stone. In a similar narrative, a woman, born from a river eel (*nadali*), is able to bring her mother back to life, after she is killed and eaten by her husband. She simply lines up the bones and commands them to grow flesh and become ‘alive’ (*kahra*). In this case, much like the dugong-child mentioned above, the woman returns to her eel mother, jumping into her river-home never to return. However, unlike the dugong narrative, in which the events are linked to a specific part of the West Gao landscape, the narrators of both the ‘eel-mother’ and ‘snake-mother’ origin stories did not provide any named location for the events.

In all of these stories regarding the apical ancestors, reproduction occurring by unusual processes goes hand in hand with geographical isolation: the isolated raft-faring ancestors marry their sisters and give birth to non-human offspring; the old woman is isolated before she is impregnated by the wind; the old infertile couple who generate two children from eggs, and the woman who finds the dugong egg, are similarly alone; finally, in the case of the snake and eel children, their animal mothers explicitly seek to ensure the isolation of their offspring by warning them against interaction with others. When interaction does occur it leads, ultimately, to further departures and subsequent isolation.¹⁵⁸ These themes point to a primordial situation in which isolated groups of apical ancestors were not yet fully human: they exist in particular parts of the landscape, and whilst being exceptionally powerful (capable of achieving extraordinary feats, celestial journeys, or possessing exceptional beauty), they remain reproductively static.¹⁵⁹ This condition is reported by other commentators on isolated groups of apical ancestors of matrilineal descent groups in both Ranongga, western Solomon Islands (McDougall 2004: 207-208), and among the Arosi of Makira (Scott 2007b: 140). In West Gao, reproductive stasis is evidenced in the non-human offspring of the incestuous unions, the terminal departures of

¹⁵⁸ Further evidence for this theme of isolation is found in another narrative pertaining to this primordial period in which the main character is called *susuanogho* meaning – ‘to exist alone without kin’.

¹⁵⁹ As stated in the introduction to this thesis, the heightened productive capability of such beings is often described as “possessing efficacy” – *au noilaghi, au kastomu*. These issues will be explored further in the next chapter.

animal-born children, and not least, in the image of the stone-crushed testicles of the husband of the snake-born woman. However, this condition of geographical isolation and reproductive stasis did not amount to the complete demise of such ancestors. Rather, a certain kind of continuity was achieved during this utopic period of primordiality via a process of cosmological transformation.

The following excerpt is taken from an ancestral history (*pagusu*) recorded in an exercise book:

One day, one of the women in the group died. It was believed that while they were preparing a bed to carry her, she rolled over and mysteriously became a stone. That stone is still known today as Stone Z [name removed]. The bed which they prepared to carry the body was thrown away and became a stone and it was then known as Stone Y [name removed] ever since...

As this commentary reveals, the activities of isolated apical ancestors had a direct formative effect upon the landscape. Indeed they ‘became’ aspects of the landscape in the strictest sense of the word. Central to such formative processes was a cosmological phenomenon described in the Gao language as *juruku*. The best approximation in English to this largely untranslatable term is ‘petrification’. This is because ‘petrification’ captures something of what happens - ancestral persons, objects, or animals literally turn into stone.¹⁶⁰ Through their knowledge of the location of these stones, and the narratives associated with them, people in West Gao are able to invoke their connection to the places through which they move (cf. Hvding 1996: 227). In doing so they assert not only a ‘claim’ to the landscape but articulate an inherent connection to the ancestral beings – their matrilineal forebears – who in many cases quite literally ‘are’ the physical features of that place (cf. Allerton 2013: 113; Scott 2007b: 163-164). This contention is further supported as we turn to another aspect of the *juruku* phenomenon.

¹⁶⁰ Similar processes, during which ancestral beings and personal items associated with them undergo petrification, are documented throughout the Solomon Islands (see e.g., Hogbin 1965: 87-88, 94; Hvding 1996: 59; Thomas 2009: 103-104).

Alongside the meaning of *juruku* as appertaining to the transformation of apical ancestral beings and the objects associated with them into stone, there is a second process captured by this term, one in which ancestral beings became ‘petrified’ in time. One research participant expressed the double-edged process of *juruku* in the following terms: “juruku to stone, or, juruku and walk-about here and there in the forest” (*juruku ka t'hina, ba, juruku ni zaozao ka naguta*). Unable to die or grow old, these early ancestors who underwent a *juruku* transformation but did not actually turn to stone, retain anthropomorphic form and are invisible to most people except those with the ability to communicate with them or, occasionally, make them appear momentarily. The ancestral beings formed from *juruku* transformations, like their stone counterparts, remained frozen in time and, although mobile, are forever connected to the places proximate to where the original transformation occurred. Richard Eves’s (1997: 178) discussion of similar ancestral beings connected to matrilineal clans among the Lelet of New Ireland, notes that their mobility is key, because a capacity to ‘migrate’ allows them to appear in different places on clan land that is geographically scattered (see also Eves 2011: 356). This observation certainly holds true for extant ancestral beings in West Gao. However, as suggested in the previous chapter, people in West Gao attributed even greater mobility to these beings. In their role as ‘guardians’, these beings can travel away from matrilineal land to undertake protective functions if necessary.

In the introduction to this thesis and in chapter 1, I asserted that Gao speakers emphasise a condition of processual autochthony. Indeed this must be so if we take seriously Gao speakers’ assertions that all their ancestors ‘arrived’ on Santa Isabel.¹⁶¹ But this claim raises a paradox if I also assert that the three matriclans (*kokolo*) in West Gao correspond to distinct categories of being and therefore, that West Gao cosmology is ‘poly-ontological’ (Scott 2007b). This is

¹⁶¹ Here my position departs significantly from McDougall’s (2004: 255) suggestion that assertions of ancestral arrival in Ranongga, western Solomon Islands, may not correspond to statements of ‘fact’ but rather amount to a ‘principle for instantiating the amicable relationships necessary for a peaceful life.’ In the case of West Gao, the ethical dimensions of claims of ancestral arrival are certainly important. However, in focusing solely on these dimensions, one risks missing the potential importance of a state of ‘processual autochthony’ in the analysis of cosmogony both in the Solomon Islands and, perhaps, elsewhere (see e.g., McWilliam 2007, 2011).

because a notion of processual autochthony is inherently dynamic and there is no static counterpart to the Arosi speaking people's assertion of being *auhenua* or absolutely autochthonous to the island of Makira as a 'given and unalterable matrilineally reproduced condition' (Scott 2007b: 201). I contend that the cosmological process of *juruku* is the processual equivalent of the Arosi concept of absolute autochthony. In undergoing the irreversible, unalterable process of *juruku* during their geographical isolation in different parts of the island the 'arriving' apical ancestors of the three matriclans in West Gao *became* autochthonous.¹⁶² These post-*juruku* beings (either as stones or as 'living ancestral beings', SIP *laef devol*) are the static co-ordinates of discrete categories of being (Scott 2007b: 166), and are therefore the 'indices' (Scott 2007b: 201) of the West Gao poly-ontology.

This latter claim derives further support from ethnographic data on aboriginal Australia - the focus of Descola's (2013) analysis of totemic ontologies, which as discussed in the introduction to this thesis, share many characteristics with poly-ontological cosmologies. *Juruku* as 'process' is comparable to *jukurrpa*, a term used by the Warlpiri, an aboriginal group of central Australia, to describe a Dreaming ancestor and defined by Nancy Munn (1996: 456) as "“being still there” - a kind of intensification of one position through its temporal expansion." In Descola's (2013: 293) analysis, 'Dream-beings/figures' are 'a hypostasis of a process of segmented engendering.' More concretely, they are 'responsible for the distribution of beings and things into different classes' (Descola 2013: 294). The process of *juruku* by which the apical ancestors become irreversibly fused with the landscape in West Gao, is akin to the 'state of being' *jukurrpa*, attributed to agents of the Dreamtime (Munn 1996: 455-456). I contend that in both cases a state of temporal expansion of a position (or a fixed network of positions) in the landscape, form the basis of essential ontological differentiation of classes of beings.

¹⁶² Of course, as suggested above, some ancestral beings were born as non-human beings (*na'itu*) and did not need to undergo the processes of *juruku* in order to achieve 'eternal continuity' and become static, autochthonous elements of the West Gao poly-ontology.

The continued existence of these non-human beings as active inhabitants of the West Gao landscape points to a crucial fact, namely that these isolated ancestors, through the process of *juruku*, achieved a different kind of temporal continuity than that secured through sexual reproduction. Impervious to the temporal flows of degeneration or death, these apical beings are possessed of an eternal continuity. Whilst often attributed with a gender, and undertaking similar activities to humans - living in their cavernous homes, gathering food (in particular seashells), and following particular 'roads' - it is never reported that these differentially located ancestors interact with each other. Their contemporary existence - isolated in particular (if dispersed) environmental locales - recaptures in the present their primordial condition as geographically and socially isolated groups of mobile apical ancestors. By knowing the narratives and names of these beings, and in possessing the ritual means to communicate with them in the manner discussed in the previous chapter, Gao speakers perpetuate the poly-ontological structure of their cosmology as a given and unalterable condition that underpins action in the present. If this latter point goes some way to explaining the connection between primordial condition of original ancestors and their contemporary descendants, it may not have escaped the reader that there remains a missing link. How, given their state of reproductive stasis, did these original ancestors eventually manage to generate fully human offspring such that contemporary West Gao residents can justify their intra-*kokolo* relationship to such beings? As we shall now see, successful reproduction that generated fully human offspring required the seeking out of 'other people'.

In the origin story referred to above, regarding the old woman who becomes pregnant by the wind, the narrative relates how she forbade her son from travelling back round the coast to the place where she was originally deserted by her group. Ignoring this advice, her son does so and meets a stranger - the daughter of a chief - who expresses her wish to marry him because all her own people have been killed by a giant ogre (*na'itu golihe*). Here we see how the hostile nature of the primordial environment inhabited by the original ancestors actively promoted the dispersal of isolated groups. This in turn created a situation in which an encounter with 'others'

was actively sought. When the boy returns to tell his mother of the girl's wishes, the old woman refuses, saying: "You were not born from a human, you are not fit to marry." The boy, however, is adamant and continues: "No mother! My wife has a belly/womb (*t'hi'a*). This means she and I can stay together and then there will be children, and people." This narrative signals how a shift from reproductive stasis (an infertile woman and a boy) to reproductive continuity (a boy married to a fertile young woman) is mediated through an encounter with other people.

Another narrative associated with a group of apical ancestors begins with a fight between two cross-sex siblings. When one of the brother's hunting dogs eats some shellfish being prepared by his sister, she retaliates by killing the animal, an act which enrages her brother. When these ancestors plan to continue their journey down the coast in canoes, the brother refuses to allow his sister to accompany them and banishes her to float out to sea on the back of a turtle. Eventually she is picked up by a stranger who lives on an island located off the coast of West Gao. They marry and she has a child. When her husband sends her back to the West Gao coast to "find her own people", she discovers that they are no longer living, but have succumbed to the transformative process of *juruku* either by 'disappearing' (becoming a non-human ancestral being active in the landscape), or turning into a stone monument. As a result, the woman and her child travel on to a particular location in West Gao that is populated by another group. When her island husband sends a frigate bird (*belama*) as a scout to check upon the well-being of his wife, the bird finds her and her daughter surviving happily. Later he sends a pig (swimming by sea) in order to secure her position on the land. The pig is killed and its stomach buried at a location marked today by a bamboo plant. This narrative again reveals that the successful enactment of reproduction occurs only when a 'sister' is separated from her 'brother' and taken in by a stranger-husband.¹⁶³ Her other relatives who originally banished her are no longer living. Instead, they have succumbed to the transformative conditions that result from their existential isolation. Further, the slaughter of the woman's sea-borne pig signals the onset of exchange relations that typify a condition of exogamy (Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1969).

¹⁶³ The cosmogonic significance of sibling intimacy will be analysed in the next chapter.

In all the narratives given above, reproductive stasis induced by isolation is terminated by encounters with appropriately ‘other’ others to ensure the successful enactment of fully human reproduction (cf. McDougall 2004: 212, n.d.: *chap.* 3). It is by this very process that these different groups became consolidated into the three matriclans that form the ultimate categorical distinctions between human persons as members of different *kokolo*. Here, Michael Scott’s (2007b: 141) analysis of the poly-genesis of Arosi matrilineages on Makira is apposite: ‘exogamous marriage achieves both inter-category connection and proper intra-category differentiation. Cosmogony and anthropogony occur simultaneously.’ As suggested throughout this section, the mirror image of this process is captured narratively by people in West Gao as a transition from geographic isolation to encounter. In the former state of isolation, although able to achieve eternal continuity via the cosmological process of *juruku*, non-human apical ancestors were not possessed of the means to ensure their own reproductive continuity. To borrow once again from Scott, such groups are best termed ‘potential or proto’ (Scott 2007b: 132) matriclans. It is only by way of encounter with ‘other’ apical beings, leading to the birth of fully human offspring (as opposed to *na’itu*), that inter-category differentiation occurs and the matriclans emerge as fully human, descent-based categories (cf. McWilliam 2007: 1120-1121). This contention is further evidenced when consideration is given to the environmental shifts that occurred as a result of exogamy.

4.2 The environmental consequences of exogamy

The achievement of successful sexual reproduction established through encounter with “others” and the concomitant establishment of inter-category exogamy engendered a situation that was possessed of its own existential problem. The apical ancestors explored above are often reported as not only being born from animals, but also as ‘turning into’ (*fifigri ka*) animals, a phenomenon found in indigenous accounts of ancestral beings recorded by ethnographers throughout the Solomon Islands (Berg 2008: 116, 118; Coppet 1985: 80; Hogbin 1965: 74;

Hviding 1996: 125; Monnerie 1995: 107; White 1978: 113). *Na'itu* that assumed animal form and thus resided in the sea, bush, or mangrove swamps as flying foxes, sharks, snakes, or crocodiles, posed little problem for the early, but now fully human, ancestors. However, those ancestral beings who did not assume animal form, or had not transformed into stones, proved uncomfortable companions due to their particularly pungent smell. As a result, they were compelled by their human matrilineal relatives to reside in particular cavernous rock formations (*khora na'itu*). Many, however, were sent to the island of San Jorge that lies to the west of Santa Isabel (see figure 2), which according to one matrilineal history was originally part of the mainland:

The decision was made to separate San Jorge from the mainland in order to keep humans and non-human beings (*na'itu*) separate. Making the passage that separates the two involved *kastom* and a great effort. The two sharks¹⁶⁴ worked with a large ray whose side-fins made the waves. The *tautaru* (sung-story, or spell) that was used is still known and has been written down.

This island - called *Golaha* in Gao and Cheke Holo language - is the home of the dead.¹⁶⁵ In both languages the word *Golaha* is used in contemporary Christian texts as the indigenous term for 'paradise' (White 1978: 117). The dead are said to live there under the care of a particularly powerful *na'itu* (cf. Monnerie 1995: 119). This is the *na'itu bi'o* or 'big ancestral being' who we met in chapter 1 and as will be recalled, was said to have been born from an apical ancestress belonging to one of the three *kokolo*. The creation of a particular place in which non-human ancestors and deceased human-ancestors were said to reside, is a crucial part of the 'firming up' of the boundaries between categories of fully human persons. As sexual reproduction began to occur successfully, physical death and the departure of the intangible aspect of the person to San Jorge became the ultimate cosmological 'destination'. Life and death were no longer entangled as was the case when different isolated groups of apical ancestors remained in isolation and were susceptible to the transformative process of *juruku*. Rather, they

¹⁶⁴ These animals have names that I do not reveal.

¹⁶⁵ Similar 'insular' abodes of the dead are reported across the Solomon Islands (Hogbin 1965: 83; Hviding 1996: 237, 2014: 77-78; Keesing 1982: 110; Monnerie 1995: 119; Scheffler 1965: 248).

became inversions of each other, linked by relations of ‘intense ambivalence’ (White 1991: 249n9).¹⁶⁶ Mortality became the new temporal conundrum faced by these fully human matrilineal ancestors who now sought temporal continuity through reproducing large numbers of offspring. This shift marked the onset of a new period of primordiality as the descendants of the apical *kokolo* ancestors moved, married, and settled in different territories in West Gao.

During a narration of her *susurai* (genealogy) a middle-aged West Gao lady – whom I shall call Sara - explained:

They stayed at that place. Some stayed there, but some of them came down to look for people ... We came down [*posa*] to this place here, we stayed here until those other people came, the section [*kokolo*] of person X [name removed], we married them and then there were lots of us. We stayed here until we came down [*posa*] to those people you have written in your book [her grandmother and mother].

This commentary captures the extent to which early human ancestors actively sought out or “looked for” people, and further, the arrival of people of a different matriclan resulted in the numbers of her deceased ancestors increasing and extending ‘down’ until her close matrilineal relatives were born. This narrative signals the key point that although the establishment of exogamy marked the end of the utopic period discussed above, it did not lead to the establishment of fixed settlements. Rather, mobility and dispersal continued to typify the existence of these early groups of human ancestors as they moved through the landscape forming named places. The practices of moving and naming mark the onset of a new mode of primordiality, which Scott (2007b: 202) has termed topogonic. The following extract, taken from the same narrative quoted above, serves to illustrate this new mode:

They came down [*posa*] to place A. They departed and came to place B where they stayed about one week. They departed from place B and came down [*posa*] to stone C. Some of them said: “We are going to leave.” They departed and went straight uphill. They came, and came, and came, until they saw that area – place D – and said: “We will stay here.” ... The people that stayed at stone C, they went up to place E ... Those

¹⁶⁶ I address the nature of such ambivalence in chapter 7.

people that live at Place E now [list of names of persons removed] ... they are the other side of the belly.

In this description of the movements of the ancestors of a matrilineage – *t'hi'a*, place names form the focal details around which departures and dispersals occur.¹⁶⁷ For example, stone C features as the site at which the *t'hi'a* split up and went to different parts of West Gao. The surviving group of descendants living in a different place from Sara are described as “the other side of the belly,” meaning they are the descendants born of a birth sister of one of the speaker’s female ancestors.

Given the prevalence of the ‘ordered sequencing’ of named places in Sara’s narrative, it certainly comprises a version of what James Fox (1997b: 8), writing of pan-Austronesian forms of place-making, has called ‘topogeny.’ However, Fox’s (1997a: 101) propensity to see genealogy and topogeny as ‘two ways of establishing succession,’ obscures the extent to which indigenous concepts elide such distinctions (cf. Thomas 2009: 93). In both this extract, and the one given above, the speaker employs the word (*posa*) meaning ‘to move downward from a higher elevation’ to describe not only the physical movement of early ancestors between places, but also to capture the process of what anthropologists term genealogical ‘descent’.¹⁶⁸ The concept of *posa* captures the co-emergence of persons and places, occurring simultaneously in time and through space (cf. Allerton 2013: 166; Pannell 1997: 165-167). In my view, Scott’s (2007b: 202, 214-215) term ‘topogonic primordiality’ translates such processes into analytic terminology useful to Austronesian anthropologists. In such a conceptualisation, land is not a substrate over which relationships are traced but in fact is itself constituent of the particular form inter-generational relationships take. This fundamental point will be explored further in the

¹⁶⁷ In some narratives it is emphasised that at the moment of dispersals, these early ancestors “shared the non-human/ancestral beings” - *tufa na'itu* - between the members of the group before separating.

¹⁶⁸ The Kwiao of central Malaita appear to hold a similar concept which collapses physical and genealogical movements of ‘descent’. ‘A person is descended from (*oriolitana*, lit., “returns from”) only his or her *lineal* relatives in ascending generations; and only such a relationship to an ancestor confers rights over land initially cleared by that ancestor’ (Keesing 1982: 109n7). The notion of return here seems to imply both spatial and temporal movements in the same way as the Gao concept of *posa*. That such a concept underpins land-based connections among the Kwiao provides an interesting regional parallel the argument presented here.

next chapter. For the present, I want to direct attention to the role of naming in ‘topogonic’ processes in West Gao.

In a later interview, Sara revealed a further story regarding the secret (*mala phopolo*, literally, for hiding) name of a particular settlement I had originally asked about.¹⁶⁹ She explained how the name was made up of two parts, the first of which was derived from the ancestral inhabitants’ previous place of residence. It was necessary, she explained, to keep this name hidden because it served as a linguistic marker of the *exact* route followed by her ancestors. As will be recalled from chapter 1, this phenomenon of naming parts of the landscape following previous ancestral residence sites is common. Furthermore, as suggested in other parts of the analysis undertaken in that chapter, the phenomena of naming places after people, and vice versa, was also a key feature of ancestral histories (*pagusu*). These naming patterns signal that geographical movement in space and genealogical movement through time are two sides of the same ‘topogonic’ coin. Furthermore, such naming practices are not simply about ‘encoding’ knowledge (J. Fox 1997b: 13). Rather, names ‘contain’ inherent relationships that exist between particular persons and particular localities along an intra-category axis.

A place named in an ancestral history may also be a site where the bones of named ancestors are buried (Scott 2007b: 199; Thomas 2009: 103). The many holy or taboo (*blahi*) ancestral sites found throughout West Gao known as *phadaghi* or *tifuni* often include a grave (*beku*) of named ancestors. Following a logic articulated in the previous chapter, knowing the names of the ancestors buried at such sites is central to the ability to approach them in safety without the risk of becoming ill or ‘disorientated’ (*fa’io’iho*). Alternatively, as analysed in the previous chapter, knowing the names of the ‘living’ ancestors (SIP, *laef devol*) resident in a particular territory is crucial to the successful performance of a *kilo* ritual, undertaken to cure a child or adult of the condition of *glona*. This logic, of names both marking and mediating an inherent relationship between particular persons and particular territories also underpins the ‘recycling’ (Scott 2007b:

¹⁶⁹ As I shall explore in chapter 7, my friend’s gradual revelation of important knowledge is a particular instantiation of a pattern that characterises the transmission of ancestral knowledge in West Gao.

196) of the names of key matrilineal forbears through successive generations. Some examples will serve to illustrate the point.

Upon hearing a narrative regarding an ancestress of one of the matrilineages in West Gao, I learnt that a friend of mine, whom I shall name Rose, actually had another name that I had been unaware of. Like all persons in West Gao Rose had two names - a Christian one and a locally-derived name which Gao speakers refer to as a “home-name.” Rose’s home-name was the same as that of the ancestress mentioned above. The ancestress had arrived in a certain place in West Gao and, due to her repeatedly running away to sit on a stone in a nearby river, had to be captured in a net by the persons residing there. When I asked Rose about her name she was at first unwilling to reveal the story of her ancestress, but when I signalled that I already knew a version of the narrative, she agreed that she did know about the ancestral origins of her name. Rose remarked that although she never used the name in public, she had in the past been surprised when certain chiefs belonging to her own *kokolo* had privately underlined the importance of her name. Rose’s name, the accompanying narrative, and the fact that Rose was a descendant of her ancestral namesake, comprised a set of intrinsic relationships that rendered her matrilineage, and by extension her matriclan, as inextricably connected to a particular territory in West Gao.

In some cases, sharing a name with an ancestral being does not simply signal the existence of intrinsic relationships but also facilitates the activation of such relationships. Recall the case of Agnes’s son, introduced in the last chapter, who was able to uphold close relationships with a ‘living’ ancestral being (SIP, *laef devol*), residing in a cavernous rock formation located in the forest above his home hamlet. This young man was a descendant of this being and was also, crucially, his namesake (*khehngagna*): the ‘home name’ of the man and the name of his ancestor were the same. Such naming practices not only concern distant ancestors but also the more recently deceased. For example, a deceased matrilineal relative of my host family - Tada, introduced in chapter 2 - had directed his ‘daughters’ (women born of his sisters) to make sure they named a child after him in each generation: there were thus three males of the same name

living in my hamlet during fieldwork: a man in his mid-thirties, another in his mid-twenties and a one year old child.

Names in West Gao can index inherent relationships that exist between persons and particular territories. In reciting names in ancestral histories, using names to communicate with extant ancestral beings, and recycling ancestral names in successive generations, Gao speakers enact these relationships in the present. Furthermore, the knowledge and use of these names is restricted to particular collectives – matriclans, or *kokolo*. I discovered this when, on one occasion during fieldwork, I incorrectly labelled a young man called Kokili, as the namesake of a deceased priest – Mama Kokili - whom I had heard a lot about. My friend Leghunau quickly corrected me by explaining a deeper set of connections between the young man's mother and the grandfather of the priest I had mentioned. This more distant ancestor was also named Kokili and, crucially, was related to the younger man via relationships traced through his mother. Leghunau explained that according to *kastom*, names should be transmitted through the matriclan (*kokolo*). Whilst it was acceptable for a man to pass his name on to his children, this should stop after one generation and those children should not in turn pass on their father's name to their own children. Names, Leghunau continued, “follow women and *kokolo*, not men.”¹⁷⁰

This restricted transmission of names and the set of relationships (between persons - both living and dead - and particular territories) contained by such names, indicates that members of one matrilineal unit (*kokolo*) in West Gao ‘embody a given essential oneness’ (Scott 2007b: 196). However, as Scott has also pointed out, names are simultaneously the site of the differentiation of the intrinsic relationships that constitute such ‘oneness’ (Scott 2007b: 196). Scott’s observations are analytical useful to illuminate the significance of the ethnographic examples provided above. In the case of the relationships contained within Agnes’s son’s name, they

¹⁷⁰ I also collected some data regarding the apparently obsolete practice of using shell money to facilitate the circulation of names *between* different matriclans. That inter-*kokolo* circulation of names involved ‘purchase’ suggests that such transfers were actively achieved rather than part of a recycled flow, as appears to be the case for the intra-*kokolo* bestowal of names.

mark a deep connection to an early apical ancestor of Agnes's and her son's *kokolo* who continued to inhabit the territory in which they resided. In the case of Rose's name, the ancestress who originally bore the name was a key ancestress of Rose's matrilineage, whose narrative of arrival into a particular territory was, nevertheless, also known by members of Rose's *kokolo* (the chiefs). Finally, in the case of Tada, the set of relationships contained within his name was temporally and spatially shallower, concerning a more recent ancestor's actions in a particular territory of one matrilineage during the colonial period.

All these examples illustrate how personal names can elicit a particular set of person-territory relationships out of a pre-existing whole (a matriclan, *kokolo*) and become the basis of differentiations between the smaller sets of relationships that constitute that whole - particular matrilineages and particular persons. Michael Scott (2007b: 196) has argued that due to its emphasis upon inherent relationships between parts and wholes, Marilyn Strathern's 'Melanesian model of sociality' is an effective tool for the analysis of naming practices undertaken by Arosi matrilineages on the island of Makira, which are strikingly similar to those I have described for West Gao. In both the Arosi and West Gao case, however, the processes of differentiation instantiated by naming practices are occurring not as the ebb and flow of some amorphous 'sociality', but internally to one matrilineal unit (either a matriclan in West Gao or a matrilineage in Arosi) of a given socio-cosmic reality. In West Gao, the trans-generational 'extension' of the person via the recycling of ancestral names is the temporal equivalent of the 'distribution' of the person in space explored in the previous chapter (see also Keen 2006: 519-520). In both instances, persons are neither infinitely extendable nor infinitely distributable. Rather, *kokolo* identity forms a fixed intra-category axis that anchors both the temporal extension and spatial distribution of persons. Indeed, as we shall explore further in the next chapter, *kokolo* identity comprises the fixed 'centre' of personhood.

The apical ancestors may have been responsible for the physical formation of the landscape, became fused with particular areas of the landscape, and even in some cases became the landscape themselves. In this section I have analysed the manner in which more recent human

forbears, in their movements through, and interactions with, an uncharted landscape (naming sites and burying the dead) transformed space into place. By recalling these movements and sequences of names, the descendants of these ancestors enact their inherent relationship to particular parts of the landscape. As we have seen in the ethnography of contemporary naming practices, in recycling the names of key ancestors, Gao speakers reproduce these spatial and temporal differentiations in the present. When taken together, narratives of isolated apical ancestors discussed in the previous section, those that feature the downward movements of topogony, and ethnography of contemporary naming practices illustrate how inherent relationships to a territory are constitutive of *both* different categories of matrilineal persons (matriclans - *kokolo*), and the matrilineages (*t'hi'a*) that constitute such categories. Where the former constitutive relation pertains to a utopic mode of primordiality that amounted to the poly-genesis of essential difference, the latter pertains to the genealogical and geographical coordinates of emergent and on-going topogonic emplacement. The connections between these two distinct modes of primordiality become clearer as we turn to the contemporary context.

4.3: Getting the details right

In West Gao, as elsewhere in the Solomon Islands (McDougall 2004: 205), discourses surrounding oral history underline that much knowledge has been lost. As explored further in chapter 7, untimely deaths caused by sorcery, or the absence of appropriate receivers of knowledge at the time of death, are two common explanations for such loss. In West Gao ambiguities and confusions exist internally to a given *kokolo* as well as between them. Once, during a conversation regarding the history of his matrilineage, or *t'hi'a*, a young man named Andi communicated the surprise of other West Gao residents that he could actually hold knowledge of such histories: “People think because my hair is not grey, I do not know anything.” My friend’s suspicions were indeed borne out by the reactions of other people in West Gao belonging to his *kokolo* when they discovered that I had been spending time with Andi. On one such occasion, an elderly man ‘tested’ me on an ancestral story linked to his *kokolo* that he knew Andi had narrated to me, asking: “What did the shark say when it arrived at place X?” The old man asserted that the narrative should articulate a particular detail of the

formation of the reef at place X and link it to the movements of the shark. Many of the interviews I undertook regarding ancestral histories involved my having to deflect attempts by my research participants to discover the details of other people's narratives, even when such persons belonged to the same *kokolo*. As the incident concerning the shark suggests, however, these enquires do not involve a dismissal of the story of another, but focused instead on the details (cf. J. Fox 1997a: 16). The case of an ancestral stone landmark linked to the apical ancestors of one *kokolo* provides further evidence for this.

In May 2011 during a trip to collect copra, I ventured away from the workers and asked about a huge stone just visible through the thick forest. When I returned to the work group, one of my companions explained that he knew the story connected to the stone, a narrative that I later came to understand was associated with the raft-faring apical ancestors introduced in section 4.1 above. Before launching into his story, however, he was careful to explain that the narrative did not belong to him (*t'he'ome nogu rei*). Much later, determined to locate these 'true owners' of the story, I spent time in one of the most isolated bush hamlets in West Gao. In this hamlet - close to the original settlement of the apical ancestors of the story I had previously heard - there lived a woman - Sara, introduced above - who could trace, topogonically, her connection to this settlement.¹⁷¹ When Sara narrated the story to me, which did indeed involve an incident with a stone, I explained happily that I had seen this stone in the forest below her hamlet on a previous occasion. Keen to prove my knowledge, I showed her a picture of the stone on my camera. In response to the image, Sara looked indignant and remarked that I had been shown that stone because the people involved "did not narrate the story well" (*t'he'ome t'huturi fakeli*). Sara immediately took me into the forest to locate the right stone, using a particular tree as a marker because the stone had become completely hidden by undergrowth (see figure 13). As she chopped away the creepers with her machete she gently reprimanded me for believing people

¹⁷¹ Sara was in her late fifties and was illiterate. She told me how she had been deliberately prevented from attending school by her parents so that she could receive knowledge of *kastom*. She explained that Sir Dudley Tuti had, in the end, supported her parents' decision. She also remarked that "educated" people became reluctant (*t'ho'a*) to learn about *kastom* (cf. Akin 1996: 164). I return to these issues in the conclusion of this thesis.

who did not possess the knowledge (“*re’e t’he’ome lase*” – they do not know). Sara continued: “This is the right stone. The other one you photographed was far too big. How could anyone roll it down a hill?”

This case provides a clue to the relationship between matriclans and the matrilineages that constitute them. The narrative told to me by both persons recounted the travails of the apical ancestors of their *kokolo*. However, only one of them was able to get the details right. This linking up of pan-*kokolo* narratives to particular aspects of the landscape required a specific combination of physical and genealogical positioning given by the spatio-temporal movements of topogony explored above. The separation between the members of one *kokolo* is given by the logic of a cosmogonic system in which ancestral dispersal was a key feature of the topogonic mode of primordiality. These separations do not amount to indices of essential categorical



Figure 13 'the right stone.' November 2011.

difference in the way that events occurring in the utopic mode of primordiality do. Nevertheless, they engendered key differentiations that exist internally to categories of matrilineal persons. Knowledge regarding the traces of the activities of apical *kokolo* ancestors (the stone),

narratives of the ‘downward’ geographical movements of the descendants of these ancestors, and the ‘downward’ transmission of matrilineal substance, congeal to form the particularity of a person-in-place. The fact that such persons are now understood to be the distinct ‘owners’ of a given territory suggests that these kind of place/knowledge distinctions - internal to a *kokolo* - are being exacerbated in the contemporary context, given the increasing economic importance of land. I return to this point below. It is first necessary to bring the argument of this chapter into dialogue with processes of historical transformation induced by colonialism.

4.4: The power of three - colonial interest in the clan system

Recognition of the three exogamous matriclans is historically traceable across the entire island of Santa Isabel to the early twentieth century. A document sent in 1908 by the resident Anglican missionary Henry Welchman to Dr. W.H.R Rivers lists the ‘various tribes at Kia’ that includes the three matriclans mentioned in the introduction to this thesis and their bird-totems; below each clan are further lists of various ‘subdivisions,’ all of which have a corresponding totemic ‘sign’ taken from plant and animal species, or even, in one case, ‘the sun’ (Welchman 1908; see also Rivers 1914: 351).¹⁷² This document makes it clear that only three overarching clans uphold a rule of exogamy. However, the totemic associations of the so-labelled ‘subdivisions’ nevertheless point to the importance of the distinctions upheld between particular matrilineages. Later archival material also posits the inter-relation between ‘clans’ and ‘subdivisions’. The District Officer for Santa Isabel wrote in 1939 of the same three ‘totemistic’ clans, continuing, ‘each has its subdivisions. Intermarriage of members of the same clan is still forbidden and in all villages there are representatives of at least two clans’ (Brownlees 1939: 3).

Anthropologist Geoffrey White (1978) reports that the same three exogamous matriclans whose origins we have been discussing throughout this chapter were dominant in Maringe District of Santa Isabel in the 1970s. Crucially, however, he adds the following qualification, ‘although a

¹⁷² Kia District is located in northern Santa Isabel. It is interesting that this document recognises the practice of exogamy at the level of only three clans, because in this region the number of recognised ‘matriclans’ is reported to be much greater (Bogesi 1948: 213; White 1978: 59).

few of the same clans were found in many regions, the names of at least ten former clans in the Maringe region are recoverable today' (White 1978: 49). This leads him to assert that during the period of conversion to Christianity efforts were made to 'subsume minor clans on the island under a few dominant clans' (White 1978: 49).¹⁷³ In the case of West Gao I found no genealogical evidence from my research participants for the previous existence of more than three exogamic clans. This also appears to be the case in Bugotu to the southwest (Bogesi 1948). However, during one interview a research participant did express a totally unique opinion to the contrary. This man - Mikaeli, whom we met in chapters 1 and 2 - made the familiar assertion: "no-one was born on this island, we all came." Alluding to some of the narratives of origin told by *kokolo* other than his own, he waved his hand in dismissal exclaiming, "Who could feed a baby on the sap of that tree? After all, it is really sour!" Immediately following this however, perhaps recognising that I was not as convinced by his dismissal of these other stories as he had hoped, he contradicted his previous statement by asserting, "That story about the baby sisters and the two trees, it pertains to the origin of two separate clans, not one." Without waiting for the effect of his statement to take hold, he explained that the first Isabel priest – Hugo Hebala – had used his influence in the early twentieth century to "fix" the number of clans at three in order to correspond to the Holy Trinity. After making this comment, Mikaeli delineated a deep genealogy and an accompanying series of narratives regarding the founding ancestors of his own extant *kokolo* whose descendants, he claimed, dispersed to populate parts of the entire island of Santa Isabel.

When placed alongside White's (1978) comments regarding the Christianity-induced encompassment of minor clans by dominant clans, Mikaeli's claim demands further investigation. The writings of Sir Colin Allan - Special Lands Commissioner for the British government between 1953-54 and District Officer on Santa Isabel between 1948 and 1949 - further illuminate, but do not resolve, these complex issues. According to the testimony of Allan's Kia informants, in both Kia and Bugotu, Missionary Henry Welchman intervened in the

¹⁷³ Unfortunately, White gives no indication as to what constitutes the relationship between 'dominant' and 'minor' clans.

clan system by actively encouraging the rule of exogamy to be upheld only at the level of the three 'primary' matriclans rather than at the level of the totemic subdivisions of these matriclans (Allan 1988: 13). However, Allan's Bugotu informants denied this, asserting that whilst a given subclan (a unit that I have been calling a matrilineage) was always associated with a geographic locale, such a unit 'had never had its own totem and that marriage between ... [such units] of the same primary clan had never been practised' (Allan 1988: 13).

With regard to this issue, Gao people do not appear in Allan's reports. As stated above, I found no evidence - apart from Mikaeli's commentary - to suggest that more than three matriclans had existed in West Gao, and certainly no evidence at all that exogamy had in the past been upheld at the level of matrilineage rather than at the level of matriclan. However, when coupled with Mikaeli's remarks about the Trinity, Geoffrey White's and Sir Colin Allan's observations certainly suggest that Welchman, and by extension the Anglican Church on Santa Isabel, took an interest in the matriclan system. This interest did not amount to its complete abolition, but rather to an agreement with a set number (three) of 'primary' matriclans that were found all over the island. As argued in chapter 2, the forging of inter-*kokolo* relationships amounts to a synthetic practice that actively facilitates the formation of Christian communities. It is almost as if Welchman, seeing this fact, was keen to preserve a certain level of matrilineal difference in the development of the Santa Isabel Church, whilst ensuring that such differences did not proliferate, a situation that would certainly occur if exogamy was upheld at the level of matrilineage rather than matriclan. For all his influence on Santa Isabel, Welchman could not have made such entities (signalled in both White's and Allan's use of the term 'primary clan') appear out of thin air.¹⁷⁴ There had to be some pre-existing unity at the level of matriclan (*kokolo*) that Welchman recognised and chose to emphasise. Such connections are visible, for West Gao at least, when the different origin narratives and ancestral histories of Gao speakers are viewed as a corpus. Furthermore, my data suggests that the matching-up of ancestral

¹⁷⁴In a remark that relates to this issue White (1978: 59) observes, '... the attempt to reduce the number of named clans on the island has resulted in a remarkable rhetoric of unity and a good deal of confusion about clan identities.' Claims to *kokolo* unity are indeed 'remarkable' if they pertain only to rhetoric and have no grounding in 'actual' relationships as White's comment implies. In the case of West Gao, the evidence does not allow me to dismiss pan-*kokolo* unity as a matter of rhetoric alone.

histories highlighted in the first section of this chapter, was in the past, attempted by Gao speakers themselves.

Speaking of a particular ancestral history (*pagusu*) and genealogy (*susurai*) that he had been involved in collating, my adoptive father recalled how, about thirty years before, four men had come together in order to share their knowledge and document the origin narratives and genealogies of one particular *kokolo*. In another interview one old man stated that when he had been younger, certain old men who were members of his *kokolo* had visited him frequently - sometimes coming from other districts of Santa Isabel - to share and consolidate their histories.¹⁷⁵ In recent years, he explained, such visiting had ceased completely. That efforts of this type occurred at all in West Gao suggests that the narratives held by different matrilineages can be, under certain socio-political conditions, linked up. This point is further evidenced by the fact that in the case of at least one *kokolo* in West Gao, narratives told by members of different matrilineages showed a large degree of commonality with reference to their apical ancestors. Between 2010 and 2012, however, whilst such commonalities were visible to me, the opposite scenario held for Gao speakers themselves. As one research participant expressed this with reference to the different matrilineages of his own *kokolo*: "Perhaps before we used to know each other's stories, now we do not." One reason for this situation immediately presents itself. Ancestral histories that trace relationships between land and people lie at the heart of contemporary land claims throughout the Solomon Islands (see e.g., Hvding 1996: 237-238; McDougall 2004: 200). Similarly, West Gao narratives that trace intra-*kokolo* relationships comprise key evidence for the legitimacy of people's claims to landownership. In such a context, every act of narration - as I was continually reminded - marks a dangerous revelation (SIP, *denja tumas fo telemaot*). This posited 'danger' of narrating histories of land-person relationships lies in the claim, commonly heard throughout West Gao communities, that certain people seek to appropriate details of narratives in order to shore up an (inauthentic) claim to

¹⁷⁵ These efforts to consolidate ancestral histories may be linked to similar projects undertaken during the 1970s by the Kwara'ae of Malaita (Burt 1982), which I discussed in the introduction to this thesis. However, the comments of my research participant pointed to isolated acts undertaken independently by different groups of knowledgeable men rather than an organised movement aimed at *kastom* codification.

land (cf. McDougall 2004: 205). Such fears (and the strategic silences they generate) are endemic to a contemporary context where land is the most highly valued economic resource. As suggested by my interaction with Mola in the opening vignette, and reinforced by the comment regarding the ignorance of fellow *kokolo* members' stories, the unity of a *kokolo* appears to be disintegrating in the face of such processes. In short, competition over land is resulting in relations of mutual distrust existing internally to one *kokolo*. I take up these issues in the conclusion to this thesis. For the present I highlight a series of deeper continuities at work beneath these overt ambiguities.

During an interview with Sara regarding the history of her *kokolo*, which as we have seen throughout this chapter is quite extensive, she explained that her brother had once travelled to Australia where he had discovered an archival document that traced the ancient connections between the different matriclans in West Gao. This document, she asserted, held the truth of the history of her *kokolo*. After reading it, her brother memorised the name of the colonial agent who had collated this document - Henry Welchman - and later allocated this name to one of his uterine nephews. The reason for her brother's actions, Sara told me, was to ensure that the knowledge of the document and its author remained accessible to their immediate matrilineal kin alone, concluding: "He did not want anybody else in West Gao to know that he had seen it." Given the centrality of naming to narratives of topogonic emplacement discussed above, I contend that Sara's brother's actions amount to a contemporary instantiation of such practices. Her brother was utilising the knowledge contained within the name of a colonial agent to secure his children's emergent connections to the territory on which they lived and resided.

In chapter 1 I underlined how, in certain circumstances, agents of colonial change can be analysed as literally comparable to 'mythic' or 'primordial' ancestors insofar as their actions are utilised by Gao speakers to enact their inherent relationships to a given territory in the present. Sara's brother's act can be analysed as a further instantiation of this argument. In this case, however, the 'ancestor' is not an indigenous man but a white missionary. Joost Fontein (2011: 721) has recently outlined a mode of anthropological analysis that is sensitive to the 'historical

and material coexistences' of 'shared landscapes.' Welchman's engagement with the matriclan system was, as I have suggested, linked to his personal interest in propagating an island-wide Anglican Church. It is likely that his decision to document the information he collected was rooted in the administrative aspirations of the wider colonial infrastructure in which his missionary work was situated. However, by virtue of his long-term residence on Santa Isabel, he also became 'proximate' - to use Fontein's (2011) term - to the ancestral landscapes that he documented. This proximity renders him an appropriate, and highly valued ancestral namesake, a node in a field of relationships inherent to a *kokolo* territory that now includes a foreign archive in its geographical reach.

Both Sara's missionary-named nephew and Mikaeli's comment about the connection between the three matriclans and the Holy Trinity, point, ultimately, to the creative manipulation of colonial history by the residents of West Gao in a context where knowledge of origins is surrounded by secrecy, ambiguity and discourses of loss. Mikaeli posited colonial transformations of the clan system in order to, somewhat counter-intuitively, underline authenticity of his own *kokolo*. Sara's brother, in appropriating the name of a colonial agent seen to have held knowledge of *kokolo* histories, and placing it upon a living matrilineal descendant, reversed the 'extractive' direction of colonial documentation by re-internalising such knowledge through a 'topogonic' act of naming. In both Mikaeli's and Sara's cases, however, it is ultimately *kokolo* identity, and certainly not the autonomy of their matrilineage, that is emphasised.

In this chapter I have argued that the three *kokolo* in West Gao correspond to ontologically distinct categories of being. Perpetually trapped in a state of spatial and temporal isolation via the transformative process of *juruku* that animated a utopic mode of primordiality, apical ancestral beings remain accessible to their descendants. This renders the poly-ontological structure of Gao speakers' cosmology immanent to the contemporary landscape. However, it was the onset of exogamy that ultimately ensured that the boundaries between the categories

were fully constituted at the very moment when the apical ancestors broke out of their state of isolation and came into contact with each other. Exogamy, whilst radically transforming the physical and cosmological environments of West Gao, marked the beginning of a second mode of ‘topogonic’ primordiality in which the spatio-temporal movements of ‘descent’ (*posa*) and naming practices engendered the further emergence of inherent connections between particular groups of matrilineal persons - matrilineages - and particular places.

During both the utopic and topogenic periods of primordiality, distinctions between groups of matrilineal persons are equally paramount. Where the former corresponds to essential differences (*kokolo*), the latter (*t’hi’ā*) pertains to equally inherent, but nevertheless historically emergent, placements within particular parts of the landscape. In both cases, land and people are intertwined at the most fundamental level. Whilst agents of Christianity may have sought to connect persons according to the most essential level of identity (*kokolo*), increased competition over land in the later part of the twentieth century appears to be eroding pan-*kokolo* unity. This is visible in the fact that Gao speakers assert claims of ‘ownership’ over territories controlled by particular matrilineages, and in the emergence of a knowledge economy built around the maintenance of secrecy.

Both these forms of historical change, however, tap into the pre-existing *kokolo* identities. In the case of both Sara and Mikaeli, it was the integrity of their *kokolo*, not the autonomy of their respective matrilineages that they sought to protect. That knowledge of historical changes is being used to shore up the integrity of particular matriclans by Gao speakers themselves, suggests a process by which more recent histories are being utilised to maintain *kokolo* identities in the same way that ‘timeless’ ancestral narratives and extended genealogies are deployed. This latter point is linked to the argument made by Scott (2007b: 163-164) that topogonic processes are not confined to a lost primordial period, but can be a mode of action in the present (see also Scott 2007b: 218n11). Before exploring some further examples of on-going topogonic processes in chapters 6 and 7, in the next chapter I examine in more detail the trans-generational processes by which *kokolo* identity is perpetuated.

Chapter 5 Matrilineal Continuity: Re-containing Blood and Land

Introduction

In the last chapter I underlined that contemporary trends toward articulating autonomy at the level of matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) notwithstanding, Gao speakers continue to be concerned with the essential aspect of their identity given by membership in one of the three extant matrilineal clans (*kokolo*). This raises the question of how *kokolo* identities remain constant despite the passage of generations and successive exogamous marriages that typify the topogonic mode of primordiality. In this chapter I argue that marriage and procreation perpetuate such identities by maintaining a balance between retention and dispersal at the level of two organic substances - blood and land.

The argument builds over four sections. In the first section I argue that changing patterns of residence after marriage are structured by the necessity to ensure that matrilineal land remains inhabited and used by members of the matrilineage which controls that land. Even when children reside on the land of their father, matrilineal identity remains fixed, ensuring that they may return to the land of their mother upon reaching adulthood. Connection to land via the matrilineage of the mother is, therefore, ultimately mediated by *kokolo* identity. In the second section, I deploy ethnography of a fertility illness to argue that whilst conception depends upon the mixing of bloods from different matrilineal sources, trans-generational continuity of matrilineal identity depends upon a notion of maternal containment. The significance of maternal containment for the continuity of *kokolo* identity is further evidenced in the third section. I argue that cross-cousin marriage operates to re-contain matrilineal blood transmitted by males that would otherwise be lost to the matrilineage and, by extension, the matriclan with the passage of generations. Two case studies of cross-cousin marriage will illustrate how continuity via the process of re-containment is achieved in and through, rather than at a remove from, particular places.

My focus on the notions of relatedness that underlie terminological distinctions and categories of marriageable persons, is closely aligned with Cecilia Busby's (1997) reconceptualization of cross-cousin marriage within the 'Dravidian' kinship systems of South Asia. However, to elucidate the particular value of cross-cousin marriage in West Gao I move beyond what Busby (1997: 33) terms the 'intuitive understandings' held by our interlocutors and explore the cosmogonic dynamics in which, I suggest, the generative processes of kinship in West Gao are ultimately rooted (cf. McKinnon 1991: 36, *chap.* 3; Rutherford 2003: 48-49, 63). Drawing upon comparative data from Oceania and Southeast Asia, I argue that cross-cousin marriage derives its value from the utopic cosmogonic mode in which the denial of exchange underpins the potency of pure matrilineal essence. In the final analysis, cross-cousin marriage mediates a fundamental tension within the poly-ontological system laid out in the previous chapter. It mitigates this tension by re-coupling matrilineal blood, thereby maintaining a state of organic unity between persons and land in a cross-category - rather than intra-category - register. Cross-cousin marriage therefore comprises an example of what Michael Scott (2007b: 19-21) has termed onto-praxis. I conclude with the suggestion that Annette Weiner's (1992) arguments regarding the significance of 'keeping' within analyses of exchange are enriched when articulated with reference to the poly-ontological nature of West Gao cosmology. This observation lays the foundation for my analysis of a key exchange event undertaken in the next chapter.

5. 1: Exogamous marriage and residence patterns

During fieldwork, the principle of exogamous marriage at the level of *kokolo* was strongly upheld. Whilst intra-*kokolo* marriage does not carry the penalty of death or threat of violent conflict as in pre-colonial Isabel (Bogesi 1948: 214; White 1978: 59), in the few cases of which I was aware, the stigma or 'shame' felt by the families involved was an uncomfortable, if infrequently addressed, social reality. According to a report of pre-Christian bride-price in Bugotu, a marriage was made 'binding' by a gift of '10 strings of red shell money or 100 porpoise teeth' presented by the women of the man's village to the father of his prospective

bride (Bogesi 1948: 341).¹⁷⁶ Unlike other areas of the Christian Solomon Islands where bride-price institutions remain intact - albeit in a slightly modified form - (e.g., Burt 1994b: 40-43; Scott 2007b: 155), the paying of bride-price has been completely banned on Santa Isabel, an innovation attributed to Sir Dudley Tuti. Marriages that took place during fieldwork involved a formal Christian ceremony in church, followed by community-wide feasting and a ritual called *nahma*, involving the presentation of small gifts to the married couple by all attendees.¹⁷⁷ As indicated in chapter 2, *nahma* can mean love, free-gift or tame. The replacement of bride-price with *nahma* presentations has operated to transform the marriage ceremony into an event based on 'harmonious' relationships. Consequently, tension-filled, affine-centred exchanges are restricted solely to the 'feeding the care-giver feast' (*fangamu taego*). I shall explore these issues further in the next chapter. In this section, I emphasise that matrilineal identity remains central to contemporary marriages because post-marital residence patterns are structured by the necessity to ensure that matrilineal land remains inhabited and used by members of the matrilineage which controls that land. I turn first to narratives surrounding post-marital residence collected during fieldwork.

According to Bogesi's (1948: 341) reports, even when bride-price was paid, the husband moved to his wife's household in order to 'work for' his wife's father. In contrast to this, narratives of bride-price I collected suggest that 'payments' pushed post-marital resident patterns in the opposite direction. The last West Gao woman to be 'paid for' (*fofoli*) was the (now deceased) elder sister of my adoptive classificatory grandmother - Rachel, a woman in her eighties - sometime in the 1950s. The payment, made with red shell money, which Rachel said was similar to that manufactured in Malaita Province (Guo 2006; Kwa'ioloa 2014), was undertaken

¹⁷⁶ Later, this gift was returned to the man's people *unless* no children resulted from the union, in which case the payment remained with the woman's father (Bogesi 1948: 342).

¹⁷⁷ *Nahma* rituals were also undertaken to mark the visit of an important guest to the community. The ritual of presentation invariably followed the same format: a pandanus mat (*gnagru*) was laid at the feet of the seated recipients and a series of hymns, and occasionally Christian chorus dances, were undertaken by the 'hosting' community. These performances were followed by speeches from both sides (host/guest) and finally, accompanied by the singing of Gao language hymn, also called '*Nahma*'. The hosts then lined up to shake hands with the guests whilst dropping a small gift on the mat such as: small monies; household necessities; and token food items – particularly oranges (*moli*) and sweet potatoes (*kumara*). Exactly the same structure was employed at weddings. However, the 'guests' were the newly married couple to which the whole community sang and presented gifts. In the case of weddings, some of the gifts from close family and friends would be larger (such as saucepans or larger amounts of money).

to: “Keep them at that place [that they married into], on that ground/earth (*glose*). They paid so the woman and her children would not be able to leave again.” Although this marriage happened two generations ago, the descendants of this woman had indeed remained at the village of their grandfather. One of the grandchildren explained: “We stay here now, we do not go back. This is our place.” This implies that in the absence of such payments women would remain in the place where they grew up. Indeed, in West Gao, as in other parts of Santa Isabel, there is a matriuxori-local tendency within post-marital residence patterns, at least immediately following marriage (see also Bogesi 1948: 341; White 1978: 56).

During fieldwork I was told that it was not advisable for a woman to “follow” her husband to his home place (*nau*) permanently, for fear that his sisters would later drive the in-married woman and her children off the land. However, the absence of sisters on matrilineal land can move residence patterns in the opposite direction. When my adoptive brother Maedi’ā married a woman from a nearby hamlet he initially went to live with her, her mother and her sisters. After a few years Maedi’ā’s elder sister requested that he move back to the hamlet in which he had grown up because both she and her sisters had married men who came from different provinces or worked away from home. His return was required because there was no married sibling remaining with their mother and father to ‘look after the place’ (SIP, *kipim hom*). This case indicates that post-marital residence patterns are contextual rather than absolute, driven by the necessity to ensure that land remains inhabited by persons - male or female - belonging to the owning matrilineage. A further exploration of Maedi’ā’s marriage will confirm that this is indeed the case.

Maedi’ā’s wife - Arelana - once explained to me how her mother - Meroni - was putting pressure upon her to come and clear a new garden on their own matrilineal land, but Arelana resisted. She explained to me that she had responded to her mother in the following words:

Go ahead and garden there. I stay with the people of my husband at the moment and garden on their land. That place that is mine, leave it for my children. When they are older they will go and clear the place and make a garden there.

This commentary illustrates that the matrilineal identity of children of a marital union, derived solely from their mother, counter-balances any disjunction in matrilineal relationships caused by shifting residence after marriage. However, Meroni's insistence that her daughter should begin to clear the garden land immediately indicates that land left fallow for extended periods of time - in this case a generation - can create anxiety. Such anxieties underpinned Maedi'a's sister's request that her brother brought his wife to reside at his own home in order to correct an absence created by her own post-marital movements away from her land. As we saw in the previous chapter, land/person connectivity that underpins ideas of 'ownership' is based in linking up the activities of apical *kokolo* ancestors to the actions of more recent ancestors of a given matrilineage in and through the landscape. Both Meroni's and Maedi'a's sister's concerns are an index of these emergent logics of topogonic emplacement. Neglecting to interact with a given territory raises the spectre that such land may revert to a previous condition as an uninhabited territory, which in turn could become the focus of the transformative activities of other persons (see also Scott 2007b: 227). As we shall see in section 5.3, cross-cousin marriage also operates to ensure such permanent occupation of land by members of the matrilineage to which it corresponds. However, it is first necessary to address why Arelana was so certain her children would take up their rights in her land as they grew up, even as they resided upon and ate from the land of their father - a man of a different matriclan and, therefore, different *kokolo* identity. In other words, we must explore how continuity of matrilineal identity (and the rights to land that it ensures) is maintained in the face of exogamous marriage and shifting residence at marriage.

5.2: Continuity through 'growth' and the mixing of bloods

A West Gao person inherits his or her *kokolo* identity at birth from the mother, or to use a West Gao turn of phrase, he or she "follows" the mother (see also McDougall 2004: 95). Corresponding to Sir Colin Allan's (1988: 13) report on land tenure for Santa Isabel as a whole, a West Gao child belongs to the matriclan (*kokolo*) of his or her mother and inherits rights in the

land belonging to his or her mother's matrilineage – *t'hi'a*.¹⁷⁸ In this section I argue that *kokolo* identity is based in consubstantial similarity between persons belonging to the same matriclan. This consubstantiality remains undisturbed by the emergent, territory-based differentiations drawn between persons belonging to different land-holding matrilineages. In doing so, I take up the analysis initiated in the previous chapter of the particular spatio-temporal configurations that underpin a local idiom of 'descent,' with specific attention to bodily capacities and substances.

The description of a man as a "dead tree/branch" (*gazu leme*) is widely heard throughout West Gao, and Santa Isabel as a whole. Just like a dead branch falls off the body of a living tree, so too do the children of brothers become detached from the body of extending connections traced through their sisters (White 1991: 33). Sure enough, as I began to draw charts from the oral accounts of 'genealogical' connections, or studied 'genealogies' occasionally recorded in exercise books, in a given sibling group, the offspring of males are frequently excluded. Genealogies in diagrammatic form were usually collated by chiefs schooled in the court-system, which as I observed in the introduction to this thesis, were established during the colonial period. In local courts, genealogical charts comprise crucial evidence during land disputes on Santa Isabel (White 1993: 485) and throughout the Solomon Islands (Tiffany 1983: 285).

Bamford and Leach (2009: 14) have argued that genealogical diagrams are undergirded by Euro-American ontological assumptions regarding the 'physicality' of kinship relations and the 'subject/object distinction.' From such a perspective, these diagrams necessarily obscure the multifarious ways in which 'relatedness' is articulated in non-Western kinship systems, in particular the manner in which both human and non-human aspects of a given lived world are combined to reproduce particular kinds of 'kin' (Bamford 2009; see also Ingold 2007: 114-115, 2009). However, Tim Thomas (2009) has observed that the propensity for anthropologists concerned with unilineal identities in the Solomon Islands to approach genealogically-based thinking as an index of contact with the 'West' and therefore as somehow inauthentic, introduces its own analytical blind-spots (see also Scott 2007a). As an alternative, Thomas

¹⁷⁸ As mentioned previously, Allan uses the term 'sub-clan' to refer to matrilineages.

(2009: 100) advocates analytical sensitivity towards the ‘long term salience’ of ‘local figurative concepts’ that are deployed whilst tracing such identities. Gao speakers’ description of a man as a “dead tree” (*gazu leme*), understood as just such a ‘local figurative concept,’ highlights a key difference between the spatio-temporal ‘expansiveness’ of relatedness traced through females and males. This was expressed by one research participant in the following way: “If a man dies nothing changes, if a woman dies the matriclan dies too.”

In theory, all members of a *kokolo* can trace connection back to a set of founding apical ancestors that arrived on the shores of Santa Isabel in the distant past. The temporal stability of these substantial connections rests upon the shared origin in a particular belly/womb of a founding ancestress. This is reflected in the Gao term for matrilineage - *t'hi'a* - literally meaning ‘belly,’ but ‘connoting shared uterine origins’ (White 1991: 33; see also Eves 1998: 123-124, 2011: 353; Macintyre 1987: 210). To describe the connection between persons belonging to the same matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) and matriclan (*kokolo*) Gao speakers use the phrase “*gheati kaheni lana*” - we are simply one. Scott (2014b: 45), writing of the same phrase used by the Arosi of Makira explains that this description captures a unified mode of relationality - based on ontological similarity - between members of one matrilineage that is different from the kind of relationships achieved by marriage between two different matrilineages.¹⁷⁹ Among the Arosi, this ontological unity of a matrilineage is expressed primarily through recourse to the image of the umbilical cord (2007b: 141, 143, 194). In West Gao by contrast, ontological unity at the level of matrilineage (*t'hi'a*), is encompassed by a further level of ontological unity at the level of matriclan (*kokolo*). This is expressed through assertions that point to the shared uterine origins of a group of ancestral sisters - each sister is the origin of a given matrilineage but nevertheless herself originates, along with her sisters, in the womb of their mother.

Persons of the same *kokolo*, but belonging to different matrilineages, will often highlight their condition of ‘oneness’ prior to tracing the particular relationships that constitute their different

¹⁷⁹ Scott’s arguments regarding the relational ‘oneness’ of an Arosi matrilineage echoes Descola’s (2013: 398) observation that ‘no veritable relations can exist *between* members of a totemic group ...’ (emphasis added).

matrilineages. Furthermore, when persons belonging to the same matrilineage seek to differentiate from each other, they do so by marking distinction within an already existing whole. For example, descendants of two ancestral sisters will refer to each other as *keha phile t'hi'a* - 'one side of the belly' (see figure 14). Within one *kokolo* distinctions between different matrilineages, and two 'sides' of a matrilineage, are context based, elicited or elided according to circumstance. Ultimately, members of a given *kokolo* are 'simply one.' This principle of

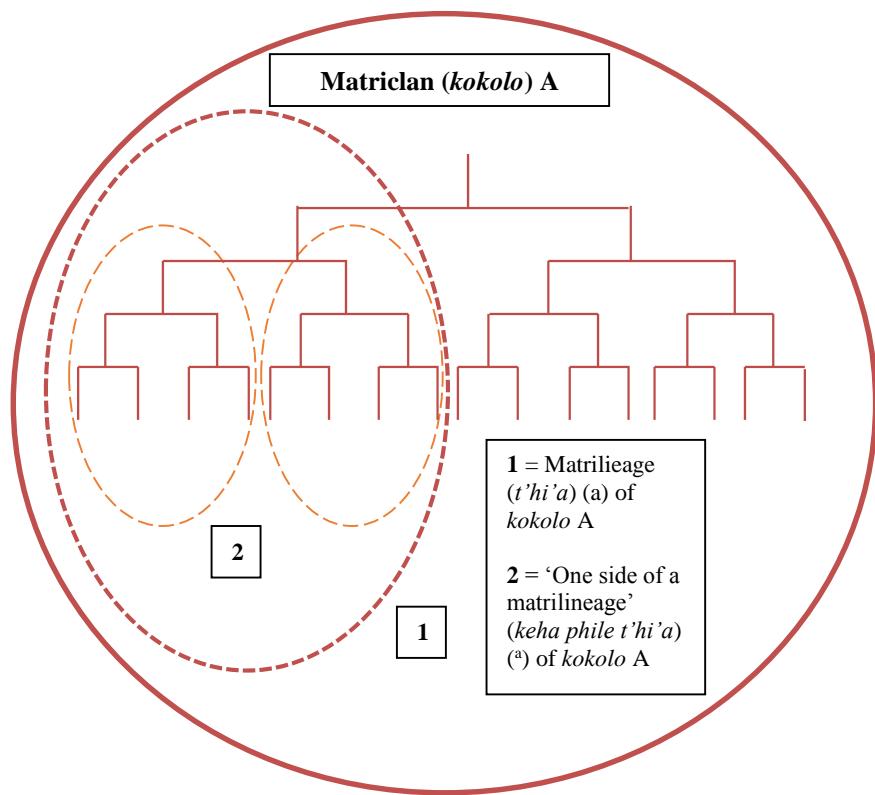


Figure 14 matrilineal descent-based differentiations internal to one *kokolo*.

siblings as being of 'one belly' works up the generations in a manner that recalls the cumulative containment of a Russian wooden doll, but inverted, with the smallest being the one that 'contains' the largest. Whilst this is my own image, in conjuring a notion of successive containments, it captures the fractal play of plurality and singularity that is at work when Gao

speakers describe the members of a *kokolo* as “simply one” by virtue of shared uterine origins.¹⁸⁰

As noted in the previous chapter, contemporary movements towards land disputes are mitigating against collation narratives and genealogies at a pan-*kokolo* level. Nevertheless, Gao speakers are keen to emphasise similarity or “oneness” between members of the same *kokolo* even when such persons do not belong to the same matrilineage. Differentiations within one *kokolo* are undertaken, as one research participant expressed this, in order to establish “exactly who you are” (SIP, *hu nao iu*). An example of such a context was the raising of the court case in response to the hosting of the Peace Corps in Poro village discussed in chapter 2. I shall return to these complexities in the conclusion of this thesis. Crucial to the present argument is that differences between the type of substantial connections that exist between parents and their offspring are articulated with reference to *kokolo* identity. This can be illustrated with reference to ethnography of a fertility illness.

The children of my adoptive brother - Maedi'a - suffered from an illness inherited from their mother, and she, from her mother, and so on. He did not suffer from the disease and neither did the children of his sisters - who often stayed in our household with his own children. The disease is called *fapulonoho*, roughly translated as ‘rope comes back.’ The symptoms, involving itchy white sores on the skin, must be immediately treated by a woman who “has the ritual techniques to heal [the illness],” - *au fanitu fapulonoho*. The problems associated with *fapulonoho* start at pregnancy. If a West Gao woman suffers repeated miscarriage or stillbirths she would be recognised as suffering from *fapulonoho*.¹⁸¹ About two weeks into her next pregnancy, a woman possessing the capacity to heal *fapulonoho* would roll together (*glaja*) strings from the material of a particular plant. These strings would then be passed around and

¹⁸⁰ Alfred Gell (1998: 139) employs the image of a Russian doll in his discussion of the fractal qualities of a Rurutu (Cook Islands) carving called A'a. For Gell (1998: 140) the A'a expresses a ‘notion of genealogy’ in which the plural is rendered singular and the singular rendered plural.

¹⁸¹ A new born whose body is covered in sores also indicates the mother suffers from *fapulonoho*.

ties at the patient's waist, wrists, and ankles.¹⁸² According to one woman - Daena - who possessed these ritual techniques, this treatment was undertaken in order to make the baby become strong inside the belly/womb: “*sosolo mala maku sua ka t'hi'a*” and once administered, the pregnancy would proceed smoothly.¹⁸³ However, the resulting child and every child born subsequently would be subject to a series of food taboos.

It was clearly recognised throughout West Gao that the father contributes directly to the formation of the foetus in the belly/womb (*t'hi'a*) of the mother. As one West Gao resident explained in the 1970s to Geoffrey White (1991: 34), ‘the man puts the seed in the woman in order to make a person.’ Between 2010 and 2012, Gao speakers repeatedly emphasised to me that the connection between father and child, like that between mother and child, is one of “blood” (*dadara*). In the case of *fapulonoho* however, I was told that it “follows the blood of the mother.” Maedi’*a*’s wife Arelana once explained how her mother had warned her that disregard for the food taboos instituted when *fapulonoho* is diagnosed could be fatal for her and her children. It is in such a context that we should understand the following interchange reported by

Arelana:

My husband tried to tell me that he would allow our children to eat the foods because he would pray first. He said if he did so then there was no chance that the illness [*fapulonoho*] would afflict our children. But I would not allow it. I told him my children follow me, they are my section [*kokolo*]. They will not eat the foods. [My son] Steven can eat the foods because he is a *gazu leme* [dead tree]. Sometimes Steven eats the foods along with his father even now, but usually boys eat the tabooed foods only after Holy Communion [being confirmed].

Here we have an example of the veritable politics of substantial connection internal to a family (*tabutua*) in West Gao. It is significant that Maedi’*a*, rather than denying the existence of the illness, suggests that prayer may counteract its effects upon his children. In turn, Arelana, rather than denying the efficacy of prayer as such, appeals instead to the notion of difference at the level of *kokolo* identity in her response: she stresses her connection to her children stating, “they

¹⁸² This treatment was called *sosolo*. Similar ritual techniques of ‘tying’ (*sosolo*), which I analysed in chapter 3 as reducing the permeability of bodies, are protective measures applied to all persons in West Gao. Here however, the processes of ‘making tight’ through tying pertains to a particular treatment for a condition of repeated detachment internal to female bodies that engenders miscarriage.

follow me, they are my section/*kokolo*.” In shifting the emphasis in this manner, she highlights a substantial connection to her children (*kokolo* identity) that her husband lacks - a matter apparently not open for dispute - and thus the matter was closed. However, the question of the son’s ability to eat the foods remains unanswered. Daena, whom I introduced above, confirmed that boys of a certain age - around the time of confirmation - can begin to eat the tabooed foods because a man was a *gazu leme* - a ‘dead tree.’ My friend Robert subsequently elaborated upon Daena’s remark. He explained that because such boys “do not generate new *kokolo* members” it was acceptable for them to eat the foods. This is crucial because it indicates that *fapulonoho* is an illness wherein the regeneration of the matrilineal identity is at stake. Comments regarding blood aside, in the case of *fapulonoho* it is a woman’s possession of a ‘belly’, from which future matrilineal descendants are generated, that makes the difference. This is why male children suffering from *fapulonoho* can eat the tabooed foods *despite* the fact that they pass on blood to their children.

In the case of *fapulonoho*, the image of a ‘rope’ coming back on itself to describe the condition of infertility in women, and, crucially, transmitted only by women, suggests the opposite condition of fertility as a rope stretching onward (rather than back) through time and space.¹⁸⁴ Indeed one of the taboos associated with this illness involves a prohibition on eating food that a *fapulonoho* sufferer has prepared for a person making ready to undertake a journey (*naoso*). If such food fails to reach the person before s/he departs, the food must not be eaten by any *fapulonoho* sufferer. I suggest this is because the ‘journey food’ has been ‘turned back’ from its intended onward and outward trajectory. Therefore, like the image of the ‘rope turned back’ it is a spatio-temporal icon of the *fapulonoho* illness itself. *Fapulonoho* suggests an implicit connection between outward-extending unbroken connection (the rope not turned back) and matrilineal fertility. This echoes Scott’s (2007b: 135) analysis of Arosi matrilineal continuity on Makira, where apparently infinite matrilineal connections quite literally run along the umbilical cord or *waipo*. In the words of one Arosi speaker:

¹⁸⁴ A condition of repeated infant mortality also exists in the ethnographic record for Bugotu district. The cure for this illness is called *kulo havi* which Bogesi (1948: 339) translates as ‘vital fibre,’ during which ‘fibres of a certain ginger plant are tied around the loins.’

The children's umbilical cords are joined with those of their mothers and their mothers' umbilical cords join with those of their grandmothers ... and so it goes back. And the daughters are the young shoots of the runner; they are forever joined together like that too, and the runner or umbilical cord gets longer without end. (Scott 2007b: 135)

In a later analysis Scott (2008: 158) argues that this 'primary image' of the umbilical cord 'conveys this [Arosi] understanding of matrilineal continuity stemming from a unitary autochthonous source.' Ethnography of *fapulonoho* - an illness concerning matrilineal regeneration through the 'belly' (*t'hi'a*) of women - employs an analogous image of a 'rope' (*noho*), which ideally extends infinitely in time and space and does not 'turn back' on itself. This raises the question of exactly how such spatio-temporal 'extension' is achieved.

Gao speakers do not describe a matriclan or matrilineage as 'growing', rather, it becomes "wide" (*behra*). This emphasis on increasing 'width' implies that the reproduction of 'lineal' units over time cannot be imaged as separate from the occupation of increasingly larger areas of space or land. As we saw in the previous chapter, when reciting genealogies Gao speakers use the term '*posa*' or 'downward movement from the interior' to capture both the physical movements of their ancestors through the landscape and the birth of successive generations of persons. This again suggests that trans-generational processes occur simultaneously *in time* and *through space*. Such processes belong to the topogonic period of primordiality that began with the consolidation of exogamy. During the utopic period isolated groups of apical ancestors reproduced either asexually or incestuously. Although the offspring of such unions possessed extraordinary capacities, these modes of reproduction were typified by spatio-temporal stasis: the offspring were born as non-human ancestral beings (*na'itu*), or were transformed into non-human aspects of the landscape (stone monuments or 'living' ancestral beings – SIP, *laef devol*) via the process of *juruku*. Therefore, separate groups of apical ancestors of proto-matriclans existing in isolation were trapped within a condition of discontinuity. Only after the institution of exogamy were the boundaries of these categories firmly established and their trans-generational continuity assured.

In light of the above, it is unsurprising that whilst Gao speakers may not describe a matriclan or matrilineage as growing, the context in which the word for botanical growth (*khotu*) could be used was to ascertain if a successful delivery of a new-born had occurred. One could ask the father: “Has your family grown yet or not?” - “*tabutua ghoe khotu hui, ba te’o?*”¹⁸⁵ Birth is a moment of ‘growth’ that is imagined in contra-distinction to the dormant potency of pure matrilineal essence. Further support for this can be gleaned from ethnographic data concerning ancestral sites and beings, both of which are nodes of ancestral potency that animate the contemporary environment. Describing the trees and cordyline plants around important ancestral sites (*phadaghi*), Gao speakers would emphasise their lack of growth, remarking that the trees/plants had “stayed the same size” for decades. Similarly, the apical ancestors that underwent the process of *juruku* but did not turn to stone (SIP, *laef devol*) neither grow nor die. They quite simply *remain* active in particular areas of the landscape. Pure matrilineal potency, then, is constituted as such due to its separation from spatio-temporal processes. Paradoxically, however, the widening of the clan or lineage (the continuity of matrilineal potency) is in fact contingent upon growth at the level of the families (see section 5.4 below).

Ethnography of the fertility illness *fapulonoho* evidences that the mixing of the blood of the mother and the blood of the father that occurs in pregnancy does nothing to undercut the fundamental point that only women regenerate *kokolo* identity by way of their possession of a womb (*au t’hi’ā*). The importance of maternal containment was signalled by one of White’s (1978: 62; emphasis removed) interlocutors in the 1970s who explained, ‘the father is the blood of the son while the mother is the house.’ I argue that this statement seeks to highlight the ‘containing’ capacities of mothers due to their possession of a womb, rather than the lack of a substance-based connection between mothers and their offspring.¹⁸⁶ As we saw above, the connection between the mother and child is certainly recognised by Gao speakers as one of blood. Marilyn Strathern (1991: 66), drawing from Nancy Munn’s study of Gawa, a matrilineal

¹⁸⁵ I owe this discovery to Alexis Tucker who advised me to pursue the topic of growth with people in West Gao.

¹⁸⁶ Allerton (2013: 26) observes similar conceptual and substance-based relationships between rooms, houses, wombs and childbirth in southern Manggarai, Eastern Indonesia (see also Allerton 2013: 188n6).

society in the Massim region of PNG, conjures an image in which maternal ‘blood’ appears ‘in the form of the interior maternal body itself, its cavity filled by the as-yet unborn children of the descent group.’ In Strathern’s image, blood is at once a substance, and a capacity. It is reproductive potential, enclosed by the maternal body, yet promising (spatio-temporal) extension beyond itself in the form of multiple offspring in the future. This, I believe, is very close to what Gao speakers mean when they talk about “the blood of the mother.”

At the same time, however, the blood of the father, who belongs to a different *kokolo* to that of his wife, is necessary for the ‘growth’ of the family and the ‘widening’ of the matrilineal clan. ‘Descending matrilineal continuity’ (Scott 2008: 156) is therefore achieved through the mixing of the blood of both the mother and the father that occurs during the ‘containment’ of the child in the mother’s belly/womb. This observation leaves the question of blood transmitted by fathers in West Gao unanswered. What happens to the blood of the father, so necessary for growth, but not - apparently - a substantial conduit of matrilineal connection in the same way that containment in the womb of the mother is? In order to answer this question, I now explore ethnography concerning cross-cousin marriage in West Gao by which blood is ‘brought back’, or perhaps, ‘re-contained’ in a womb of a later generation.

5.3. On the dispersal and re-containment of blood

Outside of the context of formal recital or recording of a *susurai*, West Gao residents are able to recall bilateral connections in detail up to three generations, and frequently emphasised the importance of recognising the matrilineal relatives of their fathers. Speaking of the chief of a nearby village, my friend Au Ani emphasised that she called him “*magu*” (my father) and always helped out when there was work to do in his village (about 40 minutes’ walk from her own hamlet). This was due to his being born from her father’s mother’s sister: the man was Au Ani’s father’s parallel cousin (FMZS), his classificatory brother and, therefore, a man of the same *kokolo* as her father. More generally, cross-sex siblings will, without fail, refer to each-others’ children as “my child” (*tugu rei*). Similarly, children are reminded to refer to *both* their mother’s *and* father’s siblings with the terms for ‘mother’ (*doghe*) and ‘father’ (*maghe*). In sum,

in an inter-generational register, Gao speakers are careful to emphasise the consanguinal nature of relationships traced through males. Ethnography concerning cross-cousin marriage (*toilaghi fakahrai*) will illustrate that this relation of ‘sameness’ is not simply upheld at the level of terminology, but also at the level of bodily substance.

The term for cross-cousin in West Gao is *fakahrai*. Its root, *kahra*, means ‘alive’, therefore *fakahrai* is literally translated as ‘to bring to life.’ Bogesi (1948: 215) reports for Bugotu District that cross-cousin marriage was desirable, explicitly linking this practice to a propensity to ‘marry into the clan of the father.’ Over thirty years ago, in the adjacent District of Maringe, White (1978: 59) reports that ‘matrilateral cross-cousin marriage (MBD-FZS)’ was recognised by some informants as ‘the traditional ideal,’ adding that ‘numerous such marriages are in evidence today [1970s].’ Between 2010 and 2012 I found one example of same-generation *fakahrai* marriage suggesting, as White’s data indicates, that this type of marriage was not forbidden by the Anglican Church on Santa Isabel.¹⁸⁷ Even so, for the majority of my research participants - like some of White’s research participants in the 1970s (1978: 59) - such a union was deemed “too close”. Third and fourth generation *fakahrai* marriages were, on the other hand, relatively common and one such marriage occurred during my time in the field.¹⁸⁸

Mature cross-cousins were proud to point out the marked nature of their *fakahrai* relationship and explain the connections between their ascending relatives. In terms of the younger generations, among whom pre-marital sex is quite common, I was told that it was absolutely taboo (*blahi*) to enter into such relations with one’s *fakahrai*. I heard of no instances of this happening during fieldwork. Furthermore, the man who told me of this rule, whilst happy to speak with me about his promiscuous youth before his marriage, underlined its importance, even as, in the next breath, he explained his own refusal twenty years ago to marry his *fakahrai*

¹⁸⁷ I have found no references in missionary publications to cross-cousin marriage on Santa Isabel, further suggesting that the Anglican Church on Santa Isabel did not enforce an outright ban on this type of marriage.

¹⁸⁸ Interestingly, in Ranongga (McDougall 2004: 101) and Marovo (Hviding 1996: 153), both located in the western Solomon Islands, sexual relations between first, second and third generation descendants of siblings are forbidden.

- much to the anger of his family who had arranged the union. I was repeatedly told by persons of all ages that to argue with or speak out against one's *fakahrai* was forbidden – to do so is to break *kastom* (*bresi mate'i*). Therefore, young people reach adulthood with an awareness of the marked nature of their relationship to their cross-cousins (*fakahrai*) in contrast to the unmarked nature of the relationship to their parallel cousins (Mzs/D or Fbs/D) who are referred to using the terminology for 'siblings' (cf. Rutherford 2003: 50).¹⁸⁹

As described by White (1978: 59-60) and borne out in the testimony of some of my older research participants, in the past marriages between cross-cousins occurred repeatedly over generations tying together two matrilineages (*t'hi'a*) belonging to two different matriclans (*kokolo*). White (1978: 60) analyses such inter-generational marriage patterns as an example of 'dual organisation.' The reported existence of this kind of structure, coupled with a pattern observed by Bogesi (1948: 215) of marrying into the clan of the father, suggests that cross-cousin marriage in this case is, as Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1969: 131) argued, expressing the more 'elementary' fact that marriage is a matter of reciprocal giving. Furthermore, the preference for matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, coupled with a lack of proscription of marriage with FZD, or the patrilateral cross-cousin point to a system of 'restricted' rather than 'generalised' exchange (R. Fox 1967: 210; Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1969: 178, 234, 363).

During fieldwork, however, 'dual' relationships between two matriclans were no longer emphasised. Moreover, whilst people in West Gao always spoke positively of cross-cousin marriage as achieving a kind of 'return,' such notions corresponded less to a reciprocal logic of 'debt' (Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1969: 131; see also Foster 1995: 78-79), but, rather, to the counter-acting of the dispersal of matrilineal blood. The emphasis placed by my research participants upon specific processes and actual substances calls for an approach to *fakahrai* marriage that resists the received typologies of classical kinship studies and attends instead to indigenous understandings of gender, personhood, and relatedness (Busby 1997; Leach 2003). In what

¹⁸⁹ Matrilateral parallel cousins are not potential spouses by virtue of belonging to the same *kokolo* as 'ego'. Patrilateral parallel cousins who do not belong to 'ego's' *kokolo* do not marry due to the fact that they are related to ego as siblings (cf. Lévi-Strauss ([1949] 1969: 141).

follows I adopt such an approach by drawing together the observations made in the previous section on the gendered nature of ‘blood’ and the significance of the ‘containing’ capacities of wombs with the central argument of chapter 3 regarding ‘distributed’ nature of personhood.

Despite repeated efforts to generate a detailed description of *fakahrai* marriage, most of my research participants, after stating that such a marriage was ‘*kastom*’, simply said, “one must be born from a woman, the other from a man.” This is not simply any man or woman but rather the children or grandchildren of real or classificatory cross-sex siblings. Crucially for the argument attempted here, the *fakahrai* relationship can always be traced back to an original brother and sister pair, and thus by extension, a single ancestral womb. Furthermore, when mentioning the restriction on speaking against one’s *fakahrai* mentioned above, one research participant explained how it was impossible for a man to “chase away” (SIP, *raosim*) his *fakahrai* from her placement on an area of land because they are “*kahe dadara lana*” - one blood. This leads us to the crux of the matter. *Fakahrai* marriage is based on ‘substantial’ inter-connectivity on two levels - the entanglement of bodily blood from different gendered sources on the one hand, and the organic unity of matrilineal persons and matrilineal land on the other.¹⁹⁰ In what follows, I shall deploy two case studies of cross-cousin marriage to illustrate the interplay between these two forms of inter-connectivity.

Mary was in her mid-twenties and had two children to her husband. This happily married couple were also *fakahrai*.¹⁹¹ It was Mary’s grandfather, and her husband’s father - Lau - who was the main operator behind their union (see figure 15). Lau found himself without sisters on the land owned by his matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*). Worried that his *t’hi’ā* might lose control over a small block of land on which he lived, he arranged a *fakahrai* marriage between his sister’s daughter’s daughter (ZDD) and his birth son. The single ancestral womb is located in Mary’s

¹⁹⁰ Hviding (1996: 147) observes similar overlap between the organic substances of blood and land in his discussion of the bush people of Marovo who display a ‘matrilineal bias.’ He points to the importance of the term *vuluvulu* that he translates as a ““woman-blood-*puava* [territory]” complex of shared substance through six nonlocalized [sic.] matriclans’ in the formation of descent categories (*butubutu*) among the bush people (Hviding 1996: 148).

¹⁹¹ All names employed throughout the remainder of this chapter are pseudonyms.

grandmother's mother and this union was described as a *fakahrai* marriage despite the generational skewing. Unfortunately, the *kokolo* of Mary's father is unknown, but in contrast to Bogesi's (1948) ethnography from Bugotu, none of my research participants linked the practice of *fakahrai* marriage to a preference for marrying into the clan of the father.¹⁹² Rather, my research participants described this processes interchangeably as "bringing blood back", "bringing people back to the land", or "keeping families together".

I have argued that only women can ensure the (re)generation of matrilineal identity in their children, and yet the fact that cross-cousins - belonging to different *kokolo* - are in fact 'one blood' enables us to see that men, whilst matrilineally sterile (*gazu leme*), nevertheless must transmit matrilineal blood to their own children. This explains why sisters refer to their brothers' children as "my child" (*tugu rei*): such persons are consanguines through the virtue of sharing blood transmitted by the father. The emphasis placed on cross-cousin marriage as 'life-

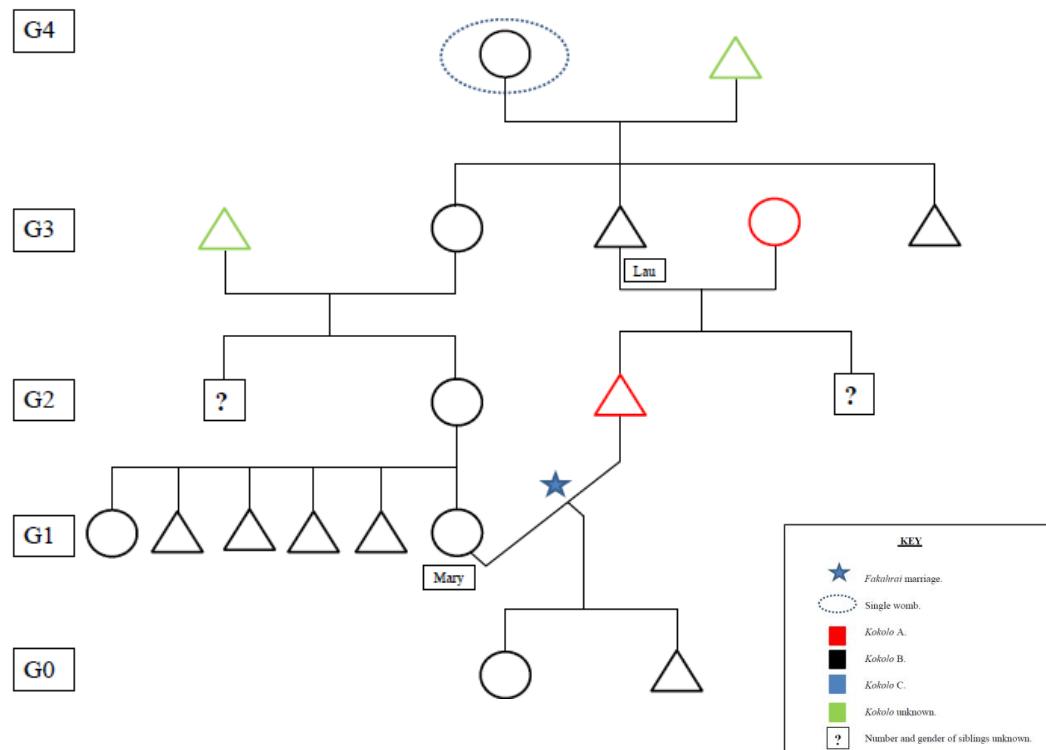


Figure 15 different generation *fakahrai* marriage

¹⁹² The only context where this propensity seemed apparent was a convention that dictated how an in-marrying individual from a different island (with no birth *kokolo* affiliation) would be allocated the *kokolo* of the father of his or her spouse.

giving' suggests an opposite death-dealing process where matrilineal blood embodied in males is lost to the matrilineage. As we have seen, according to local exegesis, *fakahrai* marriage ensures that blood "comes back." From the perspective of either the matriclan (*kokolo*) or matrilineage (*t'hi'a*), without the life-giving institution of cross-cousin marriage (*toilaghi fakahrai*) the matrilineal substance (blood received from their mother) embodied in males and transmitted to their children would become increasingly dispersed with the passage of each generation.¹⁹³ As suggested by the narrative of my research participant who refused to marry his cross-cousin, by no means everybody in West Gao undertakes this kind of marriage. McKinnon (1991: 26-27) argues that rather than explaining away such ethnographic diversity in marriage patterns by underlining a discrepancy between an ideal structure and actual practice, the analyst should focus instead upon the differential value attributed to contrasting marriage types within one society. Indeed, somewhat counter-intuitively, cross-cousin marriage as it is performed in contemporary West Gao, depends upon previous exogamic unions of a different type, which it then 'works' to counteract. In Lau's case, the union of his son (and the matrilineal blood of *kokolo* B he received from his father Lau) with his ZDD (also embodying matrilineal blood of *kokolo* B) counter-balanced the dispersal of this blood that occurred as a result of Lau's separation from his sister due to his exogamous marriage.

The *fakahrai* relationship thus operates as a centripetal mechanism that counteracts the spatio-temporal dispersal of matrilineal blood transmitted by males by a process of re-containment. Same-sex cross-cousins may employ the terms for 'older' (*tigha*) or 'younger' (*tahi*) sibling, and like birth siblings, *fakahrai*, whilst being different 'kinds' of person (belonging to different *kokolo*), are nevertheless described as being 'substantially' equivalent – they are "one blood". As such, *fakahrai* constitute 'marriageable' siblings: persons that can be traced to the same ancestral womb (and therefore are of 'one blood'), yet nevertheless belong to two different *kokolo*. In such a union we have a wife who is also a sister and a husband who is also a

¹⁹³ This potential for dispersal with regard to the blood of the father again evokes parallels with the matrilineal Arosi of Makira who describe the father's blood as 'short' (Scott 2007b: 142). McDougall (2004: 94) also points to a spatio-temporal notion of 'distancing' with regard to the generations born of men in a given matrilineage in Ranongga, western Solomon Islands.

brother.¹⁹⁴ By reunifying descendants of cross-sex siblings born of a single womb who are successively separated by the exogamous marriage rule as ‘parents’ in the descending generations, blood is “brought back” and the cycle of successive womb-to-womb containments begins anew.¹⁹⁵

I have analysed ideas surrounding conception and the institution of cross-cousin marriage as pivoting around notions of maternal containment. In a context of otherwise ‘distributable’ personhood, it is not surprising that containment becomes the process by which the core, or immutable, aspect of personhood (*kokolo* identity) is maintained. The concern with counteracting the dispersal of matrilineal identity through intergenerational re-containment of blood achieved in cross-cousin marriage therefore obtains heightened significance when viewed alongside the argument presented in chapter 3. On the general level, spatial and temporal distancing from one’s home place underpins the potential distribution of personhood. The contrasting spatio-temporal image of successive containments and re-containments captures the immobile matrilineal ‘centre’ of personhood that is, simultaneously, the source of essential difference between ‘kinds’ of persons - *kokolo* identity. This immutable core forms the basis of being connected to a particular locality through vertical connections - mediated through shared blood and, as we saw in the last chapter, ‘home-names’, to one’s matrilineal ancestors. To repeat the argument made in chapter 3, being ‘familiar’ or ‘unfamiliar’ to particular places is predicated on a given person’s *kokolo* identity. The interconnections between these two strands of my argument will become apparent through a further case study of cross-cousin marriage.

¹⁹⁴ The centrality of notions of siblingship within *fakahrai* relationships in West Gao appears to contrast significantly with the cross-cousin relationship (*fat kinaf*) among the matrilineal Tanga described by Foster (1995: 78), for Tangans, the cross-cousin relationship ‘connotes … paternity’ (Foster 1995: 81).

¹⁹⁵ This argument recalls Sandra Bamford’s (2004) analysis of cross-cousin marriage among the patrilineal Kamea of the New Guinea Highlands wherein spatial metaphors of containment replace notions of shared substance within local idioms of the parent-child tie. However, in West Gao notions of ‘containment’ - tied up as they are with the controlled dispersal of blood - must be seen as the basis of, rather than in contra-distinction to, substantial connectivity between persons. Furthermore, first cross-cousins do not instigate gender differentiation upon which marriage between their children is based, as is the case among the Kamea (Bamford 2004: 297). Rather they are desired marriage partners because of pre-existing gender distinctions that dictate their reproductive positions: “one from a man, one from a woman.”

Hviding (1996: 153) reports that in Marovo (western Solomon Islands) it is widely held that children, grandchildren and great grandchildren of siblings and classificatory siblings should not marry. However, an ‘ancient custom’ practised by ‘a few groups in northern Marovo’ involved cross-cousin marriage that was undertaken in order to ‘keep the *puava* [territory/land] inside’ (Hviding 1996: 153). This is an interesting regional correlate of the explanations given to me by Gao speakers for the practice of cross-cousin marriage. A further case study will illustrate the significance of land to understanding *fakahrai* marriage. In section 5.1 above, I described a situation in which a man reversed the matri uxori-local pattern of post-marital residence by ‘paying for’ a wife. The payment was one of ‘re-emplacement’ because it ensured his wife and her children would remain on his land and did not ‘return’ to their own place. This payment was described as being made in order for the man to “have relatives” (*mala au kheradi*). Crucially, however, despite their re-emplacement on his land, his wife and her children remained a different matrilineal ‘kind’ to himself - their *kokolo* identity was unaltered by their permanent relocation in a new place. Whilst he remained alive, this was not a problem because, as we saw in the opening section, his continued physical placement on the land counteracted the possible impingement by others on that land. After his death, however, the land was in jeopardy of being co-opted by his wife’s matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*). To remove this uncertainty surrounding the future position of his own *t’hi’ā* on the land the man - Pikhu - arranged a *kastom* cross-cousin marriage (*toilaghi fakahrai*) between his descendants.

The two people (Jason and his wife Rita) selected for this marriage by Pikhu (their grandfather - *ku’ē*) became my close friends during fieldwork. Both in their mid-thirties, they were happily married with three children and narrated the ‘*kastom*’ nature of their marriage with pride. The genealogical map of this marriage is provided in figure 16. Pikhu turned to a parallel first cousin’s (Mel) daughter’s son (MZDDS) as the desired spouse for his granddaughter (DD). Here we see the original, first cross-cousin, same-sex *fakahrai* relationship between his daughter and his mother’s sister’s daughter (MZD) translated down into the next generation into a cross-sex *fakahrai* relationship that became the site of my two friends’ *kastom* marriage. The distant origin (given the four generational remove) in one ‘ancestral’ womb is located in Pikhu’s

and Mel's (his parallel cousin and classificatory sister) grandmother. In terms of the land question, this marriage brought a full matrilineal relative of the land owning *t'hi'a* 'back' to the land, whilst simultaneously tying him in exogamous marriage to a close relative who had been emplaced on land of which she was not an owner due to the payment involved in the marriage of her grandmother.

This *fakahrai* marriage achieved two things. Firstly, it eliminated the chances of the owning *t’hi’i* losing control of their land: by bringing his MZDDS (a person of the same matrilineal kind as himself and a close lineage relative) ‘back’, the original landowner quite literally ‘replaced’ himself, ensuring his lineage’s continued physical placement on the land. Given the

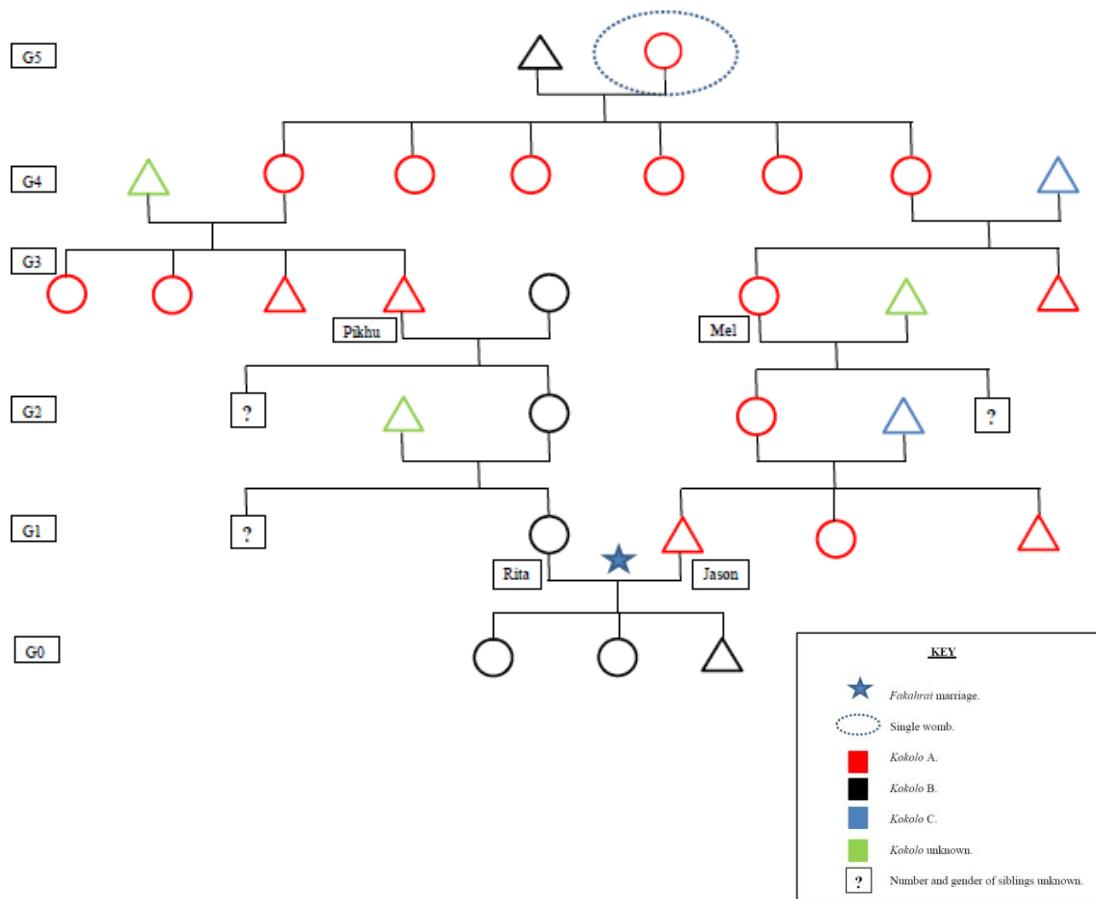


Figure 16 fakahrai marriage same generation.

fact that the married couple's house was built only yards from their grandfather's grave, this aesthetic of replacement was quite tangible. Secondly, the marriage ensured that the original

able to continue to use the land upon which they had become thoroughly emplaced, without conflict with his full matrilineal descendants. To elaborate, Pikhu's birth children had made a *fangamu taego* presentation of food to their father and thus secured usufruct rights upon the land in question (see chapter 6). This had been translated into the next generation by way of verbal agreement. The marriage of a physical replacement of Pikhu (his MZDDS Jason) into this group of usufruct-holding grandchildren brought these two groups of descendants (his birth-children and the children of his siblings) back together as one family (*kahe tabutua*).

The husband of this *fakahrai* union, Jason, was a quiet, self-reflective man who would often tell me tales of his youth and pre-marital exploits. Like many younger men in West Gao, he reflected upon his reluctance (*t'ho'a*, SIP, *les*) to receive knowledge of the place in which he was a land owner. More concerned with attending village dances in other parts of Santa Isabel, and later, preoccupied with his work on an inter-island Japanese fishing vessel, Jason repeatedly rejected his grandfather's efforts to 'educate' him in the knowledge of the ancestors (*kastom*). However, after agreeing to the *fakahrai* union Jason did receive some of this knowledge. During fieldwork he escorted me around a series of extant ancestral shrines (*phadaghi*), two of which - close to contemporary residences - were associated with the activities of his matrilineal ancestors, and a third - located deep in the bush at the site of an ancient ancestral settlement - that consisted of the stony resting place of their bones.¹⁹⁶ Finally, he explained that he possessed the ability to perform *kilo*, the ritualised form of interaction which we encountered in chapter 3, associated with the named matrilineal ancestors that resided in a *khora na'itu* on the periphery of his land. To perform this ritual, he would stand on the cemented grave of his maternal grandfather - Pikhu (see also chapter 7). Jason's case reveals how the institution of *fakahrai* marriage operated to counteract not only the spatio-temporal dispersal of matrilineal blood, but also the threat to knowledge of particular places posed by the spatio-temporal 'distancing' that results from the heightened mobility of the twentieth century that has, and continues to, facilitate desirable trajectories away from 'home' (*nau*).

¹⁹⁶ Speaking of the confidence he felt in sharing this secret *kastom* knowledge with me, my host signalled the birth of many children by his sisters; his direct matrilineal descendants whose existence ensured that the numbers of his matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) would increase.

This rather complex situation was described jokingly by Jason in the following way, “Me and my wife, it is like we are king and queen of this place,” a statement which captures - in a modern idiom - the potency of such marriages. By ‘bringing back’ a matrilineal descendant to the ancestral land of his matrilineage, *fakahrai* marriage performed a recouping of the potency of lineage-land unity. As we shall now see, even though the examples I have used here pertain to the level of matrilineage, the potent unity of lineage and land achieved through cross-cousin marriage is in fact predicated upon, and therefore draws value from, a mythic form of potency associated with the original condition of proto-matriclans during the utopic period of primordiality.

5.4 Incest and the denial of exchange

I stated above that *fakahrai* marriage depends on the logics of exogamy for its effects. In its most simple reading, the consolidation of exogamy - the necessity of encountering ‘others’ to produce fully-human offspring that we saw in the previous chapter - could be equally read as the establishment of the incest prohibition. I do not take issue with this fact. Gao speakers are fully aware of the ‘incestuous’ dispositions of their apical ancestors. Nor do I dispute that such a prohibition marks the necessity to ‘give away’, that is, to enter into relationships of exchange (Lévi-Strauss [1949] 1969: 481). Scholars of Oceania have highlighted how the reuniting of the descendants of brothers and sisters can be fruitfully analysed in terms of alliance (Valeri [1972] 2014b) and reciprocal exchange (McKinnon 1990: 260). However, in both these works, the prohibition on the marriage of first-cousins is a key feature of the systems analysed. By contrast, in West Gao it is only recently that *fakahrai* marriage between first cross-cousins has been deemed ‘too close.’ In this section, I argue that cross-cousin marriage cannot be analysed as the structural opposite of incest but rather as its logical extension over the categorical divides established by exogamy. In short, cross-cousin marriage draws its value as a particular kind of exchange from a primordial condition typified by the denial of exchange.

The cosmogonic significance of incest has been addressed throughout Oceania and Southeast Asia. In Valeri's (1985) analysis of Hawaiian kingship, the act of incest by Wākea in the cosmogonic chant the *Kumulipo*, instantiates both the separation of the sexes (a separation upon which the entire sacrificial system rests) and the separation of the king from other men (Valeri 1985: 170; Sahlins 1987: 14). Crucially, Wākea's incest achieves the latter separation because it 'violates the fundamental rule of society as a system of reciprocity (exogamy)' (Valeri 1985: 171; Sahlins 1987: 80). Susan McKinnon (1990: 239-240, 245, 263n13) draws upon Valeri's insights in her analysis of the mythic origins of the most powerful clan on Tikopea, arguing that the matrilateral usurpation of power through endogamous and incestuous unions amounts to a denial of exchange that lies at the basis of hierarchical order (see also Sahlins 2012: 138-139). In a similar vein, Southeast Asian scholars have signalled that it is the *act* of incest rather than its negation, and further, a denial of, rather than the establishment of, exchange, which may lie at the (potent) centre of certain societies (Boon 1990; Errington 1989: 271-272, 1990: 51; McKinnon 1991: 279). Building upon this established association between incest - understood as the antithesis of reciprocal exchange - and cosmogony, in the remainder of this chapter I locate the ultimate significance of cross-cousin marriage in West Gao as a form of what Weiner (1992) has termed 'keeping while giving'. However, the full significance of this privileging of retention over distribution must be analysed in terms of the deepest level of ontology relevant to a given cosmology. To this end, I argue that cross-cousin marriage (and the keeping-whilst-giving that it instantiates) is a quintessential example of what Michael Scott (2007b: 21) has termed 'ontopraxis.'

Weeks before I left the field I became engaged in a discussion regarding cross-cousin marriage with a respected senior male member of my host family named Barageu. After stating that *fakahrai* marriage was absolutely central to *kastom*, he explained that he had successfully arranged a *fakahrai* marriage between his daughter and nephew (*nebu*) (ZS).¹⁹⁷ He quickly turned the conversation to the distant ancestral past when only one matriclan existed in West Gao – the others (including his own) had arrived on Santa Isabel but were still journeying down

¹⁹⁷ Unfortunately I left the field before I could investigate this first cross-cousin marriage.

the island. He stated that this *kokolo* had employed *fakahrai* marriage when they had remained in isolation before any other *kokolo* had arrived. As explored in the previous chapter, I had already been told by different interlocutors that the origin of this *kokolo* involved endogamous (probably incestuous) unions: “They married their sisters” - “*Re'e toilaghi ka gregħadi*.” This man appeared to be telling me that *fakahrai* marriage was analogous to the unions between siblings that had occurred in the distant ancestral past. To explore these connections, I turn to a well-known origin myth associated with the ‘isolated’ matriclan that was the focus of Barageu’s commentary.

The story concerns the tale of the onset of attempted fratricide, instigated by an adulterous act by the younger brother (*tigha*) upon the ‘wife’ of his older brother (*tahi*). The following is a direct translation from Gao of the opening of the story:

There once lived two brothers. One day the chief blew a conch shell. “We are going to go and make a garden for me,” said the chief.

“Yes!” agreed the people, and off they went ... On the day for planting the garden, the older brother went to help but his wife stayed behind and swept outside the house. The younger brother took his bow and went hunting white cockatoo. One of his arrows missed its target and fell down in front of his older brother’s wife. He searched for his arrow everywhere until he came upon his brother’s wife who had already picked up his arrow and was hiding it.

“What are you looking for?” she asked her in-law.

“I am looking for my arrow.” replied the younger brother.

“Your arrow is here.” his elder brother’s wife replied. And the younger brother asked for it back.

“No!” said his elder brother’s wife, “you must tattoo my thighs/genitals with the bird design that is on the base of your arrow before you can have it back!”

“No! You are my in-law. It is not possible according to *kastom* to do that, it is taboo,” replied the younger brother. But the women spoke forcefully to him and finally he agreed and departed, leaving her to return to her house.

Some days passed by until the chief blew the conch shell again. “We are going to go and make a garden for me.” So off they all went, but the elder brother’s wife was sick. The tattoo had become a painful sore and that day, and the next, and the next, she was sick.

“Why is my wife so sick?” mused the older brother to himself.

“You wait here,” said his wife. “I am going to heat some hot water.” And off she went to wash her sore behind the kitchen house.

Then the elder brother told his wife he was going to the bush, but in reality he hid himself inland of the kitchen house and spied. Eventually his wife came and removed her clothes to wash her sore, and her husband saw why she was so ill. He also recognised the bird design as being that inscribed upon his younger brother’s arrow. He was very angry and confronted his wife.

“No!” the wife implored her husband, “It was my doing, I did the wrong thing, his arrow fell in front of me and I told him to write like that on me.” But the elder brother

did not blame or strike his wife. Instead he searched for a way to kill his younger brother...”

The story continues with a series of failed attempts by the older brother to murder his sibling, until finally the younger brother is forced to paddle to the end of the world and then rises up with the sun to a village in the sky.

In a seminal contribution to debates surrounding gender, kinship, and exchange, Annette Weiner (1992) has highlighted the cosmological and political significance of sibling intimacy in Melanesian and Polynesian societies. Errington (1990: 47) has also observed that throughout Southeast Asia the ‘icon and paradigm of sex difference is not husband and wife but brother and sister’ (see also Carsten 1997: 24; Rutherford 2003: 50-51). It is in such a context that the Gao narrative assumes significance. Many West Gao residents emphasised that the story was taken from a time when men were “marrying their sisters.” Therefore, the affinal relations that the narrative imposes on the characters do not correspond to the ‘mythic’ conditions, which are instead accessible through a ‘non-genealogical’ and ‘ahistoric’ reading (Boon 1990: 226-227).¹⁹⁸ Such a reading of the Gao narrative would consider the brother-brother-sister triad as corresponding to what (Boon 1990: 226) describes as a ‘model of social totality constricted into a bundle of cross/parallel-sex possibilities.’ This condition is confirmed by Leach’s (2003: 82) analysis of a remarkably similar myth told by the Nekgini people of coastal Madang (PNG) in which the absence of any children render the female protagonist’s gender identity ambiguous. Crucially, in both the Nekgini and the Gao narratives, it is the act of tattooing that differentiates the cross-sex relationships existing between the two ‘brothers’ and their ‘sister’: the act marks the younger brother’s cross-sex relationship to the sibling woman as a ‘spouse’ relationship (Leach 2003: 83; see also Macintyre 1987: 215). Leach (2003: 82-83) locates the ultimate significance of the Nekgini myth as a commentary upon gender differentiation (see also K. Schneider 2012: 46). Indeed, the brother-brother-sister/spouse triad in the Gao narrative

¹⁹⁸ However, as noted by Sahlins (1987: 89), attention to ‘time and sequence’ in mythical narratives is also important for capturing the ‘generative development of the categories and their relationships’, which constitute the structure in question. Sahlins’s observations pertain to a later part of my analysis in which I elucidate a temporal pattern of ‘departure and return’ that occurs at the climax of the Gao narrative (see below).

corresponds, prior to the moment of tattooing, to an androgynous, incestuous, self-contained unity. To appropriate an argument made by Susan McKinnon (1991: 279) in her commentary on the 'Great Row' that stands at the apex of the Tanimbar inter-island exchange system, I suggest that the Gao story is indeed a commentary upon the breaking apart of 'androgynous and incestuous unity ... that stands at the very centre of society and is the condition for both hierarchy and exchange.'

At this stage a crucial caveat is necessary. Because we are speaking here only of the origin of one particular *kokolo*, the androgynous and incestuous unity is not the centre of 'society' as is the case in McKinnon's analysis of the Tanimbar exchange system.¹⁹⁹ The significant totality that is being broken apart in our analysis is a self-contained proto-matrilineal category. Indeed some informants pointed out that after the argument between the two brothers the *kokolo* began to separate out and inhabit different parts of Santa Isabel, initiating exogamic unions with other *kokolo*. If each *kokolo* corresponds to a self-contained potent unity, each *kokolo* is - at least during utopic primordiality - equal. Hierarchy is not absolute in West Gao, but always articulated with reference to temporal precedence with regard to a particular area of the landscape. As we saw in chapter 2, this relation of precedence is maintained by a distinction between those who, by virtue of their established or 'prior' presence in a given territory, can then 'invite' others on to their land. Because any *kokolo* can act as 'invitee' to another as long as they have established a longstanding, ancestrally mediated, relationship to a given territory, at an abstract level all categories are equally potent. The narrative is therefore not about the origin of hierarchy *per se*, but rather a commentary upon the ultimate discontinuity of pure matrilineal potency during a 'utopic' primordial state of categorical isolation. This state - like the primordial states analysed by Valeri (1985: 170-171), McKinnon (1990: 245), and Weiner (1992: 76) - is maintained by incestuous marriages and the denial of exchange. The ending of the Gao narrative provides further evidence for this contention.

¹⁹⁹ Attention to the cosmogonic origin myths depicted by McKinnon (1991: *Chap. 3*) reveals that Tanimbar society does indeed correspond to what Michael Scott (2007b: 10-12) would term a 'mono-ontology.'

At the end of the narrative, the younger brother effects a dramatic return from his (three year) exile in the sky. Going against his celestial benefactor's advice, he ventures behind her house and, lifting a stone, looks down upon his home village. This recognition of an origin point demands a return. Descending from the village of the sun via a rope made from lawyer cane (*nabetaghi*), the younger brother surprises his elder sibling by walking into the village space and announcing his plan to execute a large feast to celebrate his return. The villagers hurry to construct a large stone oven in which to cook their taro, but as the leaves are folded over, the younger brother jumps inside and orders that further leaves be weighted down (*buburuku*) on top of his body. The next morning the younger brother walks back into the village unscathed and when the oven is opened it reveals a multitude of luxury foods, hitherto unseen by the villagers (pigs, turtle, and dugong).²⁰⁰ In an attempt to mimic this productive feat, his older brother comes to a gruesome end by being cooked alive.²⁰¹ Recall that the elder brother/husband remains in the same place throughout the narrative; his enclosure in the stone oven replicates this spatial stasis with fatal consequences. This incident of doubled enclosure is therefore an apt image for the ultimately catastrophic consequences of seeking to remain in a state of complete containment, or to borrow a term from Descola (2013: 399), 'ontological enclosure.' In contrast, illustrating the productivity of counter-balancing a departure with a timely return, the younger brother's enclosure in the oven is transformed into exchange items and thus the possibility of further spatio-temporal expansion. I contend that this generative dynamic of 'departure and return' is re-enacted in the institution of cross-cousin marriage.

Ultimately, the 'life-giving' figure of the cross-cousin in West Gao points to the mitigation of an ontological impasse.²⁰² This impasse is linked to certain conditions - discussed in the introduction to this thesis - that have been highlighted by Descola (2013: 398-399) in his

²⁰⁰ There is another interesting comparison here with myths of fratricide in Melanesia where the murdered younger sibling grows into a taro plant (Jolly 2001: 190), or is associated with the growth of taro (Crook 2007: 172).

²⁰¹ Narrators take great pleasure in uttering the onomatopoeic sound "Pho" when describing how each of his body parts (nose, eyes, back) burst as he cooks.

²⁰²The Gao word for Jesus Christ, our saviour – *fakahrada* – is also derived from this root 'fakahra' or 'to make alive' (see also White, Kokhonigita, and Pulomana 1988: 84). I did not pursue this semantic correspondence with my research participants and thus do not explore its potential significance any further here.

discussion of ‘totemic collectives’, and by Scott (2007b: 20-21) in his discussion of ‘poly-ontological’ cosmologies. As we saw in the previous chapter, *kokolo* identity in its purest form - as an isolated ontological category - amounts to a locus of potency typified by the extraordinary capacities of the apical ancestors, namely, their possession of immortality, exceptional beauty, and extraordinary productivity. As mentioned above in section 5.2, this potent state was locked within a condition of discontinuity: continuity was achievable only through establishing connections with an ‘other’ through marriage, and, therefore, exchange (cf. Descola 2013, 399). However, this extension of matrilineal potency in time and space engenders the dilution of that potency, hence the impasse, or ‘paradox’ (Descola 2013: 399). Consequently, cross-cousin marriage mitigates this tension internal to matrilineal continuity in West Gao by ensuring that matrilineal potency is recouped as land, blood and persons are brought back together (cf. Scott 2008: 160).

To summarise, cross-cousin marriage operates to *partially* reverse the mixing of bloods that occurs during exogamic marriage. This reversal derives its value from the extent to which it recalls the potency of a lost era of utopic primordiality whereby sexual relations between ancestral brothers and sisters maintained matrilineal identity in its purest, albeit discontinuous, form. Thus, becoming ‘king and queen’ of a place (to return to an earlier statement made by Jason), means enacting the cross-category (and therefore continuity-producing) equivalent of potent and discontinuous intra-category ancestral unions between siblings. In the final analysis, cross-cousin marriage provides a clear example of what Michael Scott (2007b: 20-21) has termed ‘onto-praxis.’ According to Scott (2007b: 13) ontology is ‘stratified.’ Certain practices either ‘give expression’ to, or ‘impinge upon’ different levels of ontology (Scott 2007b: 21). In a poly-ontological cosmology, the *a priori* existence of two or more (in our case, three) discrete categories, the first order burden on praxis is to generate relations between such categories, whilst the second order burden is to ensure that such ‘connecting-up’ does not result in the disintegration of the integrity of the original categories (Scott 2007b, 18, 21-22). It is only when cross-cousin marriage is analysed as part of a poly-ontological cosmology that its complete significance is realised. As a form of exogamous marriage it satisfies the first-order burden

placed on praxis to generate cross-category relationships. As a kind of marriage between ‘siblings’ that operates to bring blood and land back together, it answers the second-order burden on praxis, that is to ensure that the ‘unique identity’ of a given category (*kokolo* identity) is maintained in the face of cross-category relationships.

In this chapter I began by illustrating how contemporary marriages in West Gao have issues of land/person connectivity at their centre. Connection to land is mediated by *kokolo* identity which is given at birth through the mixing of blood from different matrilineal sources (mothers and fathers) that takes place in the maternal belly – *t'hi'a*. Ethnography of cross-cousin, (*fakahrai*) marriage was then provided in order to address the question of the spatial and temporal trajectory of blood transmitted by males. In counteracting the separations involved in exogamous marriage and shifting patterns of post-marital residence, *fakahrai* marriage reverses the spatio-temporal distance introduced by previous exogamic unions by drawing blood transmitted by males that would be otherwise lost over generations back together with particular tracts of land.

In the final section I drew upon an ancestral narrative associated with one of the three matriclans to illustrate the complex dynamics between matrilineal potency, incest, and the onset of exchange. Cross-cousin marriage draws its value from the extent to which exchange is enacted in order to, ultimately, retain that which is given away. Annette Weiner (1992: 6) observes that to render, as Lévi-Strauss did, the idea of a world without exchange as a mythical fantasy, ‘undercuts the very precept by which exchange value is determined.’ I contend that this observation is enriched when coupled with the ontological particularities of a given cosmological system, rather than, as is the case in Weiner’s (1992) formulation, with cosmology in general.

For Gao speakers, the self-contained, incestuous ‘world without exchange’ inhabited by the apical ancestors is an alternative reality (cf. Macintyre 1987: 211). As Scott (2007b: 28)

observes, ‘... representations of alternative realities ... may entail indigenous assumptions about the necessary and ongoing premises on which lived reality depends.’ This is exactly what Barageu, introduced in the last section, was attempting to point out to me. In the poly-ontological system under consideration throughout this thesis, cross-cousin marriage comprises a case study of onto-praxis where the first and second-order burdens dictated by the poly-ontological system are simultaneously mitigated. Here, ‘keeping whilst giving’ takes on a particular ontological valance. The fact that cross-category exchanges are in fact structured by their antithesis - intra-category closure - should be born in mind as we turn now to the central exchange event in West Gao - the ‘to feed the caregiver’ feast.

Chapter 6 *Fangamu Taego – ‘to Feed the Caregiver’*

Introduction

The week before Christmas 2012 I received some devastating news. My friend Joselin was in mourning for her husband who had died in a canoe accident. The tragedy surrounding the death of this healthy middle-aged father was rendered more acute because six months earlier Joselin had revealed to me that she and her children were planning to present her husband with a *fangamu taego* feast. The feast was particularly significant for this family because Joselin was not originally from Poro. She had been ‘brought’ from Kia District (see figure 2) as a young girl by her grandfather (MMB) who sought to situate one of his matrilineal relatives in Poro so as to ‘replace’ (SIP, *senisim*) him upon his death. Her grandfather had arranged Joselin’s marriage - to a prominent member of a landholding *kokolo* in Poro - to consolidate her position. As I sat in her house on the day after her husband’s burial Joselin had looked at me tearfully. She commented that perhaps she should go “home” to her matrilineal relatives in Kia because it was only through her husband that she had the “right” to stay in Poro. However, during a memorial feast for Joselin’s husband, one of their neighbours made another tearful speech. She began by denying her own status as a landowner in Poro, but explained that in the past she had responded to a request Joselin had made regarding an area of land behind Poro village by encouraging her to “go ahead and plant there.” She ended by reminding the audience that Joselin was, “a woman of this place [Poro].”

Beneath this tragedy is a dual logic of place-person relationships, which, as we saw in chapter 2, underpin the formation of community. The neighbour’s tearful assertion exemplifies the extent to which incoming persons can become part of a place under the auspices of invitation by landowners.²⁰³ Nevertheless, Joselin’s private anxieties indicate that the performance of *fangamu taego* provides a mechanism by which rights to live and garden in a territory can be consolidated. Although Joselin’s own status on the land seemed secure during fieldwork that of her children may not be so certain. This is because the tragic death of their father meant that

²⁰³ The neighbour’s assertion also exemplifies an ethical orientation explored in chapter 2 in which ‘rightful’ ownership of land is signalled through the public denial of such status.

performing *fangamu taego* was no longer a possibility. Consequently, Joselin's children's rights to their father's territory might have been contested at a later stage by persons who held inalienable rights in that territory (i.e. the children of his sisters). Such fears lay behind Joselin raising the possibility of returning with her children to Kia, her original birthplace where she and her children held inalienable rights in a territory. Joselin's case reveals that *fangamu taego* throws into relief key differences between the participants, differences that are based on the intra-category relationships that constitute *kokolo* identity. However, it also illustrates the close association between *fangamu taego* and marriage, indicating that this feast is a key life-cycle event that marks the necessity of forging inter-*kokolo* relationships

This chapter addresses these complexities. In the first section I explore the history of feasting practices in West Gao to illustrate that *fangamu taego*, whilst undeniably a longstanding institution, is also a site of innovation and contestation. Drawing from oral histories and ethnographic data from other parts of Santa Isabel I argue that the contemporary form of *fangamu taego* derives from the collapsing of different elements, taken from what were historically distinct feasts, into a single exchange event. In the second section, I analyse the different transactional moments of the feast as instantiating relational flow along two different axes - horizontal (inter-*kokolo*) and vertical (intra-*kokolo*).²⁰⁴ Ultimately, the feast reproduces the distinction between these two forms of relationality whilst simultaneously extending their inter-connection within a given family through time. However, the feast also provides a context in which the very substrate of this opposition is perpetuated in the present. During *fangamu taego* certain participants enact and reinforce their relationship of precedence with regard to a given territory.

This aspect of *fangamu taego*, explored in the third section, involves a transfer of property by the father to his children. However, rather than adopting a conceptual distinction between land and property, *fangamu taego* achieves the encompassment of this distinction by indigenous

²⁰⁴ This can be read as an exchange-based instantiation of Scott's (2007b: 218-219) analysis of the cosmogonic interplay between 'the production of emplaced matrilineages - the vertical axis - and the formation of social polities - the horizontal axis ...' in Arosi, Makira.

conceptions that posit the organic unity of persons, property, and land. It does so by transforming a distinction between primary and secondary ‘rights’ into a temporally-bound relational state upheld between two *kokolo*. I argue that the property transfers during *fangamu taego* are an example of the kind of exchange in West Gao (epitomised in the institution of cross-cousin marriage explored in the previous chapter) that derives its value from the antithetical condition of ‘keeping’ or - in our particular case - retaining the organic unity of persons and territories. In this sense, *fangamu taego* provides a public forum in which topogonic emplacement can be performed and evaluated in the contemporary context. In the final section, I offer a case study in which a ‘property-less’ father undertakes an unconventional purchase of an area of property during the lead up to his *fangamu taego* that I suggest amounts to a ‘neo-topogonic’ act. In conclusion I argue that when viewed in its entirety, *fanagmu taego* allows the participants to enact the vertical intra-*kokolo* relationships in an event whose overt function is to celebrate the role of inter-*kokolo* relationships in the attainment of social harmony.

6.1: Historical transformations of feasting

As we saw in the previous chapter, a father belongs to a different *kokolo* from his wife and children. Much of his time and labour is therefore expended in providing for these persons who are, on a certain level, ‘other’ to himself. It is in this context that the ‘feeding the care-giver’ feast (*fangamu taego*) assumes its importance for families in West Gao. The literal translation of *fangamu taego* is ‘feeding the adopter’, or to use White’s (1991: 173) terminology, ‘the caregiver’ (see also Bogesi 1948: 219). As reported for similar feasts documented elsewhere in Santa Isabel (Allan 1988: 20; Bogesi 1948: 219; White 1991: 173), during *fangamu taego* the mother and children offer money, food, and other gifts to their father in return for the care he has provided throughout their lives. However, as argued in the previous chapter, West Gao fathers share a substance-based relationship to their children: even though fathers and children do not share *kokolo* identity, they do share ‘blood’. During the feast the father, with the support of members of his *kokolo*, takes the opportunity to publicly transfer usufruct rights in certain

planted properties such as coconuts, or old gardening land (*phegra*) to his children.²⁰⁵ This transfer extends the blood-based connection of the father-child relation through a different organic register (planted properties), adding a spatial, land-based element to their inter-generational relationship.

Oral histories of *fangamu taego* collected during fieldwork point to significant changes in the structure of the event. I was told that in the past, in response to the presentation of gifts by his wife and children, the father, with the aid of his siblings and (if living) mother, prepared a simple counter-presentation of a small amount of cooked food. During the twentieth century, however, *fangamu taego* had become increasingly elaborate with both the *kokolo* of the mother and the *kokolo* of the father amassing large amounts of products to exchange and distribute during the event. This novel development was described by one research participant as signalling a “competitive” element to the feast that was lacking in the past. With regard to the final ‘property transfer’ element of the feast, ethnographic data from elsewhere in Santa Isabel suggests that this was a central aspect of similar feasts undertaken in the early part of the twentieth century (Bogesi 1948: 219) and in the 1970s (White 1991: 45). During my fieldwork in West Gao, however, father-child transfers of property during *fangamu taego* engendered controversy among chiefs. To understand these complications, as well as the marked inflation in feasting goods exchanged by the two participating *kokolo*, it is crucial to realise that *fangamu taego* and the feasts surrounding death discussed in the next chapter, are the only large-scale feasts that continue to be performed with absolute consistency in West Gao. I recorded as many as ten feasts said to have been performed, for a variety of purposes, in the past (cf. Scott 2007b: 82).²⁰⁶ Three of these obsolete feasts are of particular relevance to the present argument; two - named *doklu* and *faphegra* - involve transfers in land and property rights respectively, whilst the third - known either as *fatakle* or *fatoro* - involves a cycle of antagonistic reciprocal feasting between affines. I now explore each of these feasts in turn.

²⁰⁵ In contrast to Bogesi’s (1948: 219) claim for Bugotu that the father could transfer complete tracts of land during *fangamu taego* feasts, my research participants denied this, a point also underscored by White (1991: 173) for equivalent feasts in Maringe.

²⁰⁶ Space restrictions dictate that I cannot cover all the feasts in detail here.

With regard to *doklu* feasts, my research participants explained that these were equivalent to feasts performed in adjacent Maringe District known as *diklo*. White (1991: 40-42) provides a detailed analysis of the relationship between *diklo* feasting and chieftainship in Maringe, with particular attention to the transformation of this feasting institution as a result of conversion to Christianity (see also White 1991: 72-77, 121-125). To summarise only part of White's argument, *diklo* feasts involved a reciprocal cycle in which influential big men in a given region took turns to host large scale feasts in exchange for shell valuables. Successful participation in this cycle 'constructed and validated' the hosts' 'leadership status' (White 1991: 72). Speaking of similar but differently named '*doklu*' feasts performed in the past, my research participants emphasised the huge scale of these feasts in terms of attendance (by both chiefs and senior matriclan members) and volumes of wealth (both food and shell valuables). However, they asserted that the ultimate purpose of these feasts was to achieve a transfer of ownership rights in land.²⁰⁷ White's (1991) analysis mentions nothing of the *diklo* feasting cycle involving transfers of land rights. On the other hand, Allan (1988: 18) writes of feasts named '*doklu huia*' occurring in Kia, Bugotu and Maringe District, which involved the 'customary sale' of land through the presentation of 'pigs, puddings, cooked taro and fish ... [and] indigenous money' (see also Bogesi 1948: 219).²⁰⁸ I contend that such paired aspects of the *diklo/doklu* institution are co-constitutive. In amassing wealth, influential big men certainly illustrated their power and influence as a form of display. However, they might also have sought to expand the geographical scope of their influence by permanently acquiring ultimate ownership rights in areas of land, which prior to the feast, had belonged to other matriclans.

²⁰⁷ Some West Gao residents alluded to the fact that *doklu* involved the provision of prostitutes by those seeking to gain ownership of a block of land, a fact that they explicitly linked to white missionary Henry Welchman's disapproval and ultimate banning of the institution.

²⁰⁸ In the next chapter I discuss an incident of land purchase using modern currency by a West Gao Big Man that occurred in Bugotu District in the 1960s. Gia Liligeto (2006: 22, 28) writes of similar land purchasing rituals with shell money in the Marovo area of western Solomon Islands. See also Hviding (1996: 126-127) on 'purchasing' land from spirits using shell money in Marovo Lagoon. For a contemporary example of payments for 'primary rights' in land and sea using food and money in West Ngela (central Solomon Islands) see Foale and Macintyre (2000: 33-34). Burt (1994a: 323) discusses controversies surrounding the 'ancient' or 'new' status of land purchase using shell money among the Kwara'ae of Malaita.

According to oral histories in West Gao, missionary Henry Welchman banned the institution of *doklu/diklo* in the early part of the twentieth century, an intervention that was linked to the huge quantity of resources required to undertake the feast (see also White 1991: 121).²⁰⁹ As a result, there remained one other feast whose essential purpose was to transform land-person relations namely, the *faphegra* feast encountered in chapter 2. As will be recalled, in presenting senior members of the matriclan who had ownership rights in a given area, incoming migrants onto that land could secure and consolidate use-rights in garden land, secure house-sites, and gain use-rights in certain properties such as coconuts (see also White 1978: 100). My research participants insisted that *faphegra* feasts involved the transfer of use-rights only. Ultimate ownership of the corresponding territory remained in the hands of the original owners rather than being transferred to the feast-givers as was the case with *doklu* transactions. I was told that *faphegra* feasts took place in West Gao throughout the twentieth century. The last one occurred approximately a decade before I arrived in the field, just over the southern border of West Gao District in a place called Rasa. However, given the large amounts of wealth required to make these feasts (one witness of a *faphegra* feast said five pigs were presented), I was told that they were in decline. This may be linked to the rise of property transfers occurring during *fangamu taego*, a hypothesis which finds support in the discourses of chiefs - actors who are directly concerned with the 'correct' format of *fangamu taego*.²¹⁰

My discussions with chiefs about *fangamu taego* engendered contradictory responses. Two chiefs upheld that a second feast - *faphegra* - should be undertaken in order to secure the transfer in property rights that were instigated during *fangamu taego*.²¹¹ Some chiefs countered

²⁰⁹White's (1991: 121) analysis details how the pattern of the *diklo* institution survived in a different form after the consolidation of Christianity, for example, indigenous priests Hebala and Gnokro initiated large-scale church feasts that recaptured the regional pattern of reciprocity that was the hallmark of *diklo*. Space restrictions dictate that I cannot address the vibrant district-wide and even inter-regional reciprocal cycles of 'church day' feasting that tie together different communities in West Gao.

²¹⁰See McDougall (2004: 444, n.d.: *chap. 5*) for a discussion of the local controversies surrounding property-transfer feasts, linked to the father-child relationship, known as *pajuku*, in matrilineal Ranongga, western Solomon Islands.

²¹¹One of these chiefs had a personal interest in disputing a particularly large transfer of property that had occurred during a *fangamu taego* feast that I attended in January 2011. His disputing of the correct format of *fangamu taego* is an example of Foale and Macintyre's (2000: 42) observation that 'modern Big Men' throughout Melanesia may attempt to manipulate ideas of customary tenure or *kastom* for their own financial gain (see also Foale and Macintyre 2000: 39-40).

this by underlining that a second feast could generate confusion with regard to the status of the land/properties concerned. A second feast might cause the feast-givers to claim complete ownership over the properties and even the land on which they grew, causing a proliferation in land disputes (cf. Foale and Macintyre 2000: 41). In the same vein they stated that it is the speech of the father that switches the register of the feast: if property rights are mentioned the feast becomes *faphegra* and the transfers are then recorded by the chiefs. Finally, yet another chief asserted that children never make *faphegra* to ensure transfers in their father's property. *Faphegra* was only undertaken in cases that involved an absence of 'blood' relations between the transacting parties. Indeed, narratives of the performance of *faphegra* by persons who witnessed the event in the past, clearly illustrate that this feast was performed both across *kokolo* lines and between different families - families not joined by a tie of marriage. This renders *faphegra* different from *fangaumu taego* because in the latter case, although the feast involves transfers and exchanges between two different *kokolo*, they occur within one family unit (*tabutua*). This last point raises the issue of another feasting cycle that my research participants described as occurring in the past in West Gao. This feast is relevant to *fanganu taego* because it was solely concerned with the marriage relationship.

I was told that in the past, a marriage could be jeopardised by the onset of a cycle of reciprocal inter-*kokolo* feasting (known as *fatakle* – to reveal, or *fatoro* – to demand) between affines. A *fatakle* feast would be instigated by a voiced complaint of either spouse regarding provisioning: a man might complain that his wife consistently failed to provide him with satisfactory meals, or a wife might claim that her husband did not provide for household necessities. Such complaints would be relayed to members of the accused spouse's *kokolo* who would then amass resources (food and purchased items) in response. On an appointed day these persons would arrive unannounced at the household of the spurned spouse and surprise their complaining affine with a huge presentation of gifts (hence the importance of a notion of 'revelation' in these feasts). Given that the volume of gifts presented far surpassed the original 'demands' (*fatoro* – to demand), the recipient would suffer immense shame. Members of the admonished affine's own *kokolo* responded by collecting equal or more resources to undertake a matching 'surprise'

presentation at the same household. This could mark the onset of a competitive cycle of antagonistic feasting between two groups of people from different *kokolo* that had the married household as the centre of the drama. If not terminated, escalating tensions would very likely lead to divorce. For this reason *fatakle* feasting was discouraged by the Anglican Church, although middle-aged research participants recalled one such feast occurring about three decades previously and emphasised that it was a *possibility* that such feasting could happen again. The decline of *fatakle* feasting is, I suggest, linked to fact that *fangamu taego* continues to flourish. *Fangamu taego* is a feast centred on exchanges between affines where both sides illustrate their respective wealth and capability of provisioning, whilst at the same time consolidating the cooperative nature of their inter-*kokolo* relations.

The argument developed in this section can be summarised in three points. Firstly, the historical decline of feasting practices focused on land-person relationships (*doklu* and *faphegra*) has rendered *fangamu taego* the only surviving ritual context in which such relationships are given public recognition. Secondly, the decline of feasts - such as *doklu* and *fatakle* - that had competitive displays of wealth as their central feature - has in turn engendered a competitive element within *fangamu taego* as it is currently performed. Thirdly, *fangamu taego* comprises a public event in which affines can come together and exchange goods as affines, a situation which, due to the abolition of bride price discussed in the previous chapter, is elaborated in no other ritual context. In short, what I believe to have occurred in West Gao is the collapsing of elements of these different feasting practices into one event (*fangamu taego*). With this observation in mind, it is now possible to analyse the architecture of the feast in more detail.²¹²

6.2: The performance of opposed forms of relationality

Plans to undertake a *fangamu taego* begin approximately seven months prior to the event. At this stage only the closest *kokolo* relatives of the wife and children are notified. Some of these persons begin to sell copra and timber to purchase trade-store goods, whilst others instigate the

²¹² A detailed, stage-by-stage, description of the feast is provided in appendix B

planting of large sweet potato, and occasionally, taro gardens.²¹³ Once these preparations are underway, the husband is informed and his close relatives belonging to his *kokolo* will begin similar preparations. As the months pass, more and more members of the two *kokolo* are informed and the weaving of pandanus mats (*gnagru*) and umbrellas (*taringo*) will be undertaken. In the days leading up to *fangamu taego* any member of either *kokolo* who chooses to “help” (*thotogho*), bring (relatively) last-minute contributions of store-bought food.²¹⁴ These products are amassed in the family house and another dwelling belonging to one of the father’s close matrilineal relatives. As the goods arrive, the names of the contributors and the items brought are recorded.

The division between husband and wife that emerges as the organising household prepares for the feast is replicated in other households throughout the community. In terms of my own household, whenever a *fangamu taego* feast occurred, my sister in-law would always amass her own contribution for her *kokolo* whilst her husband and his mother organised their own contributions for helping their *kokolo*.²¹⁵ As different people move to carry their contributions to either the mother’s or the father’s stockpile of goods, the underlying *kokolo*-based dimension of the community becomes increasingly visible. This gradual emergence of descent categories from the mesh of cross-matriclan relationships that, as we saw in chapter 2, form the matrix of community life, is fully realised on the day of the feast. The two participating *kokolo* quite literally appear as two distinct unities through the construction of two symmetrical piles of food (see figures 17 and 18; see also appendix B).²¹⁶

²¹³ It is necessary that the *kokolo* of the wife and children begin their preparations first because on the day of the feast their presentation of objects must be larger than that presented by the *kokolo* of the husband (see below).

²¹⁴ Such contributions are never asked for, but freely given as “help.”

²¹⁵ As noted in the prologue to this thesis, my attendance at the first *fangamu taego* feast to be performed during fieldwork, led to me being allocated a *kokolo* identity that was different to that of my adoptive mother. This act caused some controversy and the tension that resulted continued to operate throughout my fieldwork. At every subsequent *fangamu taego* I went to ‘help’ the people of my allocated *kokolo*. This separated me from my mother and siblings who would ‘help’ their own *kokolo*. The (mis)allocation of my *kokolo*, therefore, introduced difference to those very parts of our household that should have been predicated on essential similarity.

²¹⁶ The items carried home after the feast (see below) were compared and evaluated separately (for the amount received relative to that which was contributed), even if they were combined for household provision after the event.



Figure 17 constructing piles of food and kastom objects at fangamu taego. Lagheba, January 2011.



Figure 18 Pigs at Fangamu taego. Heuheu. July 2012.

As discussed above, this symmetry belies what people say used to occur during the feast - an opposition that continues to be alluded to in the labels given to the two piles of food and objects. One is labelled as 'waiting' (*t'hutuku*) the other as 'descending' (*posa*). The *posa* status is always allocated to the matriclan of the mother and children - the people who have instigated the feast. Despite recent historical trends that have seen the two matriclans amassing equivalent amounts of uncooked food, the distinction between the *kokolo* of the mother and that of the father is in fact realised during the feast beyond the allocation of labels.²¹⁷ As the piles are constructed, by-standing chiefs carefully monitor the amounts of produce. If the *t'hutuku* pile is larger than the *posa* pile some items are immediately transferred from the former to the latter. This ensures that after the two piles have been exchanged between the two *kokolo* at the climax of the event (see below), the *kokolo* of the father receive more goods to distribute than the mother's *kokolo*. This is a feature of the event which, as suggested above, was central to *fangamu taego* as it was performed in the past.

The father now assumes his seat in a decorated chair placed at the centre of the feasting area. His birth and classificatory sisters take up the chairs ranged to one side of him. The echoing cry of a conch shell (*kufli*) is heard as a further food structure called *siakakae* is placed in front of the father by members of the *kokolo* of the mother and children. Unlike the static towers of food that are constructed from the ground up during the feast, this food structure is always built upon a wooden and bamboo stretcher that renders it portable. As the *siakakae* is moved into position, the wife, children, and members of their *kokolo* move towards the father in a solemn procession, placing further items in front of him. The first of these is always the *kastom* pudding *malahu* (see section 6.3 below), usually carried by the wife, and the children then follow on in birth order. Often the eldest child will dress their father in new clothes and shoes procured from Chinese stores in Honiara. Other gifts often include new mattresses, money, axes or bush knives and in one case a mobile phone. As the children finish their tearful presentations they join their mother in assuming seats alongside their father. As he sits in his central position his family

²¹⁷ The 'waiting' *t'hutuku* side will also prepare cooked food that is eaten during the event (see appendix B).

members radiate out on either side according to their distinct matrilineal affiliation: sisters on one side, wife and children on the other (see figure 19).

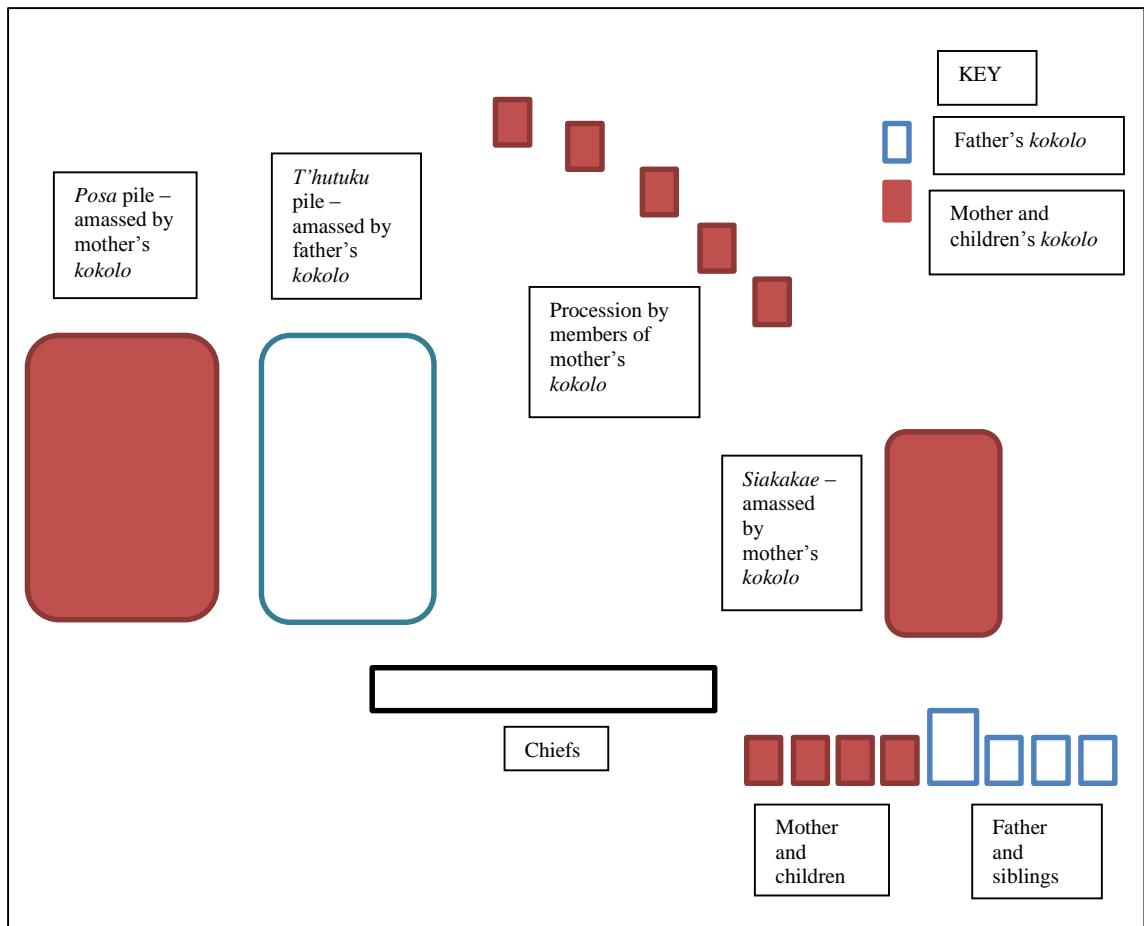


Figure 19 spatial layout of participants and exchange goods during *fangamu taego*.

Usually it is the eldest child (male or female) who delivers the opening speech.²¹⁸ Addressed to the father who sits between his wife and sisters, this speech is highly stylised and is usually delivered in Gao language. The following translation is a common feature of all speeches given by the representative of the sibling group to his/her father:

[You have been] tired, wet and dry. Building a house, clearing and making gardens ... all this hard work you have done for us. I am an only child, but I have been lucky to have many children, all of whom have grown big at your hands, your legs ... Thank you. Thank you. Thank you...

²¹⁸ In Maringe District *fangamu taego* transactions occur only between fathers and sons (White 1991: 35, 174). In West Gao this is not the case (see also Bogesi 1948: 218). It is the eldest child, male or female, who speaks first representing the entire sibling group. After this younger siblings may also speak if they so desire.

The oratory emphasises that the items are given to “thank” the father for his “hard work” in caring for his children and grandchildren throughout his life.²¹⁹ Because the feast can only happen when the children are all old enough to orchestrate the huge amount of labour and financial resources necessary to undertake the presentation, the father has usually reached the later years of his life by the time of its performance. The emotional nature of *fangamu taego* is therefore, as White (1991: 174) suggests, triggered by the loss felt at the ‘termination’ of paternal nurture. The reference to the father’s body parts (hands and legs) locates the cause of his bodily frailty in the labour he has expended in rearing the children and grandchildren (see also McDougall 2004: 447). His age appears as a consequence of his children’s prosperity, indexed in the variety and richness of gifts they adorn him with. As McDougall (n.d.: *chap. 5*) has argued for similar transactions undertaken in matrilineal Ranongga (western Solomon Islands), although male and female nurture are in many ways viewed as parallel, the work of the father is explicitly connected to the transformations in the landscape associated with the creation of property. This observation is recognisable in the excerpt above that equates the father’s labour with cultivated land (gardens) and socialised spaces (houses). However, the transformative work that the father undertakes in caring for his children is not distinct from the more general transformative actions with regard to land that underpin claims to precedence in, and control over, an area of land undertaken by matrilineal ancestors and by current generations in West Gao outside of any specific domain of ‘fatherhood’. Before developing this contention further in Section 6.3 below, it is first necessary to compare the transactional moment of *siakakae* with the exchange and distribution of the almost-symmetrical matrilineal food structures that occurs at the climax of the feast.

The decorated portable food structure (*siakakae*) is removed from the feast intact. Like the gifts from his children, the food included in the *siakakae* is the sole property of the father for his own consumption and use. For example, in the case of pigs, those included in the *kokolo* structures are killed and distributed immediately following the feast. In contrast, those included in the

²¹⁹ As there is no word in Gao language for the English expression ‘thank you’, this aspect of the oratory is undoubtedly a post-colonial innovation. The Christian connotations of ‘giving thanks’ were most likely noted by Gao speakers but were not elaborated upon.

siakakae presentation can, if the father so desires, be kept alive and utilised for his own purposes. The importance of the trajectory of the *siakakae* was emphasised during one *fangamu taego* feast that included an innovative ‘extra’ presentation to the mother of the family by the *kokolo* of the father. The reason for this innovation, explained those responsible, was that the father shared his *siakakae* gifts with his wife and children after the feast, an act that reversed the direction of the initial transaction. If the mother had her own pool of gifts, the father would not feel the need to enact this reversal. Although highlighting and maintaining the central opposition of *fangamu taego* - that between the mother/children and their father - this innovation was heavily criticised. In the speeches that accompanied the presentation to the mother, the ‘hard work’ of the mother in raising the children was emphasised. Critics complained that the presentation was therefore ‘not *kastom*’ because it deviated from the established purpose of the feast, that is, to acknowledge the care delivered solely by the father.

Although it was not recognised as such by the persons who initiated this controversial ‘extra’ presentation, it could be analysed as the most recent elaboration of the ‘competitive’ trend within *fangamu taego*. In presenting the mother with a pool of gifts equivalent to the *siakakae* presentation, the *kokolo* of the father are balancing out the ‘surplus’ of goods given by the *kokolo* of the mother and children with a presentation that moves in the opposite direction. In compensating the mother for her care, the *kokolo* of the father indexed both their willingness and, more crucially, their capability to do so. Albeit without the antagonistic element, this innovation in *fangamu taego*, is structurally analogous to the reciprocal and competitive cycle of affinal presentations in the *fatakle* feasting institution discussed in Section 6.1 above. At the end of this particular *fangamu taego* both *kokolo* provided for their affinal relatives in general (constructing the two *kokolo* piles) and in particular (the *siakakae* and the extra presentation to the mother) in equal capacity. That *fangamu taego* appears to have become a context for illustrating the capability of a given *kokolo* to amass wealth vis-à-vis their immediate affinal relatives is further evidenced in the ‘competitive’ trend that had become a conventional aspect of the feast during fieldwork - the equal amassing of raw produce for the paired *posa* and *t’hutuku* piles. As we shall now see, through the exchange and distribution of these piles, the

two participating matriclans (*kokolo*) perform their independence and inter-dependence simultaneously. This simultaneity turns upon the axis of the father-child relation that lies at the centre of the feast.

The portability of the *siakakae*, which engenders its arrival and removal during the feast, secures a private trajectory that stands in opposition to the very public construction and redistribution of the immobile matriclan presentations. At the end of the feast the ‘*posa*’ pile amassed by the mother’s *kokolo* - is distributed to the members of the father’s *kokolo*, whilst the *t’hutuku* pile - amassed by the father’s *kokolo* - is distributed to the members of the mother’s *kokolo*. This distribution is a carefully orchestrated affair. All the contributors receive back from the opposing pile the equivalent (and hopefully more) to that which they contributed during the pre-feast amassing of goods by their own *kokolo*.²²⁰ At the climax of the feast the two large piles are deconstructed into smaller piles in a manner that replicates exactly the ‘layering’ of the original structure. This deconstruction into smaller piles which recapture the layered structure of the original ‘whole’ is facilitated by the ‘partibility’ (M. Strathern 1988: 185) of the exchange items themselves. Baskets of sweet potato are broken apart and divided to form the new smaller base, whilst individual packets of noodles, biscuits and cans of tuna are extracted from boxes and arrayed to ‘decorate’ the cultigen base (see figure 20).²²¹

The smaller piles are labelled with nametags written on pieces of bamboo. When the large pile has been fully ‘deconstructed’ into the multiple smaller, yet equivalent, piles, these names are called out by the leading men of the *kokolo* and their recipients come forward to collect their

²²⁰ This balancing is facilitated by the recording of the names as people made their respective contributions to help their own *kokolo* in the days leading up to the feast.

²²¹ Rice sacks made up of individual smaller sealed packs can be divided up in a similar manner. Loose rice sacks are either given in full, according to the original contribution made by the recipient, or occasionally, to more senior members of the clan. Alternatively, they can be poured into smaller plastic bags or containers. Pigs are slaughtered and divided according to similar criterion of rank or initial contribution. This ‘partibility’ of both locally sourced and imported products illustrates the extent to which Gao speakers have incorporated foreign items into the pre-existing logic of their exchanges. However a hierarchical distinction is maintained between these two forms of edible objects. I was told that foods ‘grown by the ancestors’ have more transactional value in this feast than store-bought items, which were repeatedly referred to merely as ‘decoration’ despite their monetary value (cf. Bashkow 2007: 189-193). By far the most crucial of these ‘ancestral foods’ are pigs and *malahu*. I was told that if these items were not included the presentation would be described as “lacking foundation” (*te’o nauguna*).

goods. The quantity of the piles received will seek to match, and if possible outdo, the original contribution of the participant. However, rank is also an issue. More senior members of the *kokolo* will receive a larger quantity of goods and those of more value such as rice and pieces of pig. This internal differentiation of the *kokolo* into its constituent persons - registered in the particular constellation of goods they receive (see also Foster 1995: 216) - is possible at this moment of the feast because the cross-category relation between the two participating *kokolo* is rendered momentarily invisible. Both *kokolo* orchestrate their respective distributions in isolation from each other, limiting their activities to particular areas of the feasting ground.



Figure 20 the distribution of the *kokolo* structures into smaller layered piles. Poro, February 2011.

Therefore, just as the 'analytical' division of a *kokolo* into its constitutive matrilineages (explored in chapter 2) required that the two other *kokolo* exited the courtroom, the internal differentiation of a *kokolo* during *fangamu taego* also requires the spatial separation of the two participating *kokolo*. This transactional moment thus appears in stark contrast to the spatial 'overlapping' that is visible in figure 19 above. Due to the seating arrangements during the presentation of the *siakakae*, the centrally-located father sits as an axis of connection between his siblings and his wife and children - persons belonging to the two different participating *kokolo*.

Because the pigs are always slaughtered after the main distribution (see appendix B), during the distribution of the two piles of *kokolo* exchange items, differentiation between members of the *kokolo* according to rank is eclipsed by the overwhelming image of similarity between the smaller food structures. The construction of the pile and its deconstruction into smaller fractal units that replicate the original whole, captures the nature of the *kokolo* as a unitary entity of the type that Robert Foster (1995: 216) has termed - following Dumont - a 'collective individual' (see also M. Strathern 1988: 14). The static pile of *kokolo* goods and their visible deconstruction during this stage of *fangamu taego* realise materially the fundamental point that the relationships that constitute this 'composite' entity are of the same essential substrate. As argued in the previous chapter, whilst a *kokolo* is described as 'simply one', this whole can, in certain contexts, be differentiated into increasingly smaller units (matrilineage, side of a matrilineage, and here, particular persons). The distribution of exchange items during *fangamu taego* reveals how the 'whole' (a given *kokolo*) can be broken down into its particular elements without disrupting its essential identity as the same kind of unit. That the distributional activities of the two participating *kokolo* occur in different areas of the feasting ground captures - in a spatial register - the difference between the two units and their categorical independence from each other.

In exchanging their goods before distributing them it could equally be argued that the two participating *kokolo* are enacting their dependence rather than independence. However, this is indeed the case given the emphasis on the inter-*kokolo* connections embodied in the relationship between the father and children that lies at the centre of the feast. Because birth is only possible due to the mixing of blood from both the mother and the father (persons of different *kokolo* identity) living persons are themselves the embodiment of inter-*kokolo* relationships. The motivating condition for the inter-*kokolo* exchanges occurring during *fangamu taego* - the presentation of extra gifts to the father in acknowledgement for his nurturing input – is to render this dependence explicit. There is, therefore, no privileging of intra-*kokolo* relationality over and above inter-*kokolo* relationality in *fangamu taego*. This recalls M. Strathern's (1988: 189)

argument that, according to the logics of ‘Melanesian’ gift exchange, a matrilineally composed unit ‘appears either collectively as “one breast”, “one womb”, with its own land, its own magic, or else as a matrix of particular exchanges that unite and divide brothers and sisters, husbands and wives.’ In the case of *fangamu taego* it is certainly a matter of eliminating one of the forms to make the other present. Crucially however, this kind of figure/ground reversal occurs at different transactional moments within the same exchange event.

The feast is therefore a commentary upon the necessary relation between matrilineality and affinity (see also Weiner 1988: 161), rather than, as in the case of feasting complexes in other matrilineal societies in Melanesia, their ‘dramatic juxtaposition’ (Thune 1989: 158). These dynamics, well established in the existing literature on matrilineality in the Massim region of PNG (Battaglia 1985; Fortune 1963; Foster 1995; Macintyre 1989; Munn 1986; Weiner 1978, 1979, 1988) can be transposed onto the ontological dynamics that are the central concern of this thesis. In tracing the necessary relations between affinity and consanguinity in the particular manner that it does, *fangamu taego* provides a ritual context in which the cosmological predicament dictated by the poly-ontological structure of the West Gao lived world is momentarily ‘solved’. As stated in the introduction to this thesis, and reiterated in the last chapter, this predicament involves forging inter-category connections whilst maintaining intra-category integrity or coherence. During *fangamu taego* both sides of the ‘problem’ are satisfied through exchanges that occur in distinct transactional moments.

However, the feast does more than provide a commentary upon the extent to which two ontologically opposed forms of relationality can be successfully balanced. It also provides an exchange-based mechanism by which the substrate of the opposition is perpetuated in the present. This occurs during the element of the feast not yet considered - the transfer of property rights from the father to his children. During this part of *fangamu taego*, members of the father’s *kokolo* enact their relationship of precedence with regard to a particular territory. When viewed from this angle, *fangamu taego* constitutes an act of topogonic emplacement by the father’s *kokolo*. Crucially for the argument presented in this chapter, the property transfer

depends upon intra-category relationships that pre-exist the exchanges undertaken during *fangamu taego*.²²²

6.3 Relational rights, essential unities

After the oratory by the children and their close matrilineal relatives, the father makes a speech during which any properties that he is choosing to transfer to his children are demarcated. Consider the following excerpt taken from the speech of an ageing father during a *fangamu taego* event:

You all know the things that I have put down before you all today, a small area of coconut palms and other food trees. Work! Brush and clean them so they remain alive. Do not let go of them, leaving them to sickness and death. You all know I have suffered in the past to work [tend] them [coconut palms and food trees] that is why you have come to work this feast today ... [addressing his only child, his daughter]: You yourself look at these properties, hold them. Who is going to work [tend] them? I am going to die. This is the story that I am telling right now. Care for things! The food [properties] I have laid down before you all today, you will all know today, my daughter will work [tend] them.

This complex passage was explored one Sunday afternoon with some of my female research participants. The women explained that the old man was using his own frailty and ill-health to emphasise the importance of looking after the properties that he has cared for his whole life. He implies that if this work is not undertaken the trees will, like his own body, become sick. The trees that the daughter cares for become an extension of the organic nature of her relationship with her father, which as we have seen is based in blood. The property transfer ensures the extension of this inter-generational relationship through a further organic medium (planted properties) beyond the interior spaces of their bodies and into the landscape. The food trees, although at risk of entropy that is not held at bay by hard work and care, have an existential resilience unachievable by humans. In transferring these properties (planted and tended by his

²²² Here my argument most clearly departs from Foster's (1995). His claim that the 'autonomy' of a Tangan matrilineage emerges only through the cycles of reciprocal exchanges that tie different matrilineages together as they 'alternately act towards each other as consumers and non-consumers' during the performance of discrete mortuary events (Foster 1995: 218; see also Crook 2007: 83; M. Starthern 1988: 256-256), contrasts completely with my assertion that the specific format of *fangamu taego* depends upon the 'autonomous' existence of discrete categories (*kokolo*) outside of any performance of the event itself.

hands) to his child, the father ensures a continuing connection to his children after his death (see also Weiner 1988: 94).

The mnemonic function of planted properties with regard to deceased persons was not unique to the ‘property transfers’ occurring within *fangamu taego*. As documented elsewhere in the Solomon Islands (Hviding 1996: 262; Scott 2007b: 224), in West Gao, comments about who planted certain properties in a cultivated area of the forest, or a particular food tree in the centre of a village, would frequently elicit narratives about the deceased person who planted them. This was so regardless of the gender of the planter, or their exact kinship relationship with the person who told the narrative. For example, when staying with an elderly lady - Agnes - in Bobosu (see figure 3), she commented sadly on the overgrown state of a plot of coconut palms growing in the forest above her house. “My [now deceased] mother planted these palms” she explained, “and now there is no one here capable of caring for them.”²²³ On another occasion, my friend Au Ani pointed to a large mango tree that towered over her house, calling it “*saeko Maenase*”, mango *Maenase* [the name of the man who had planted it]. She went on to explain that he (a now deceased member of her own *kokolo* but of a different matrilineage) had spent some time living in her hamlet in the past.

Transforming the landscape by processes of cultivation and planting is therefore not restricted to ‘fathers’, or for that matter, even males. Rather, such transformations are part of a repertoire of topogonic practices, such as those discussed in chapter 4, performed by matrilineal ancestors (male and female) in order to consolidate their inherent relationships to a given locality. In certain contexts, planted properties, far from being simply an aid to memory, become loci of on-going connection with the agency of deceased persons. As explored in the next chapter, planted properties remain a locus of connectivity with ancestors in general rather than with fathers in

²²³ Agnes’s sons had moved away from their home hamlet at marriage. However, hope remains for the unkept palms. Agnes’s daughter was in the process of moving back to her mother’s village as I left the field.

particular. Thus, the particular relationships to property articulated by the father during *fangamu taego* are encompassed by a larger territorial system that posits persons (both living and dead) and particular territories as an organic unity. It is only within this encompassing conception of land-person relations that ideas concerning ‘property’ circulated in father-child transactions can be understood (cf. McDougall n.d.: *chap. 5*).

The property transactions undertaken during *fangamu taego*, such as the one quoted above, are in no way seen as reciprocation for the gifts given by his children during the *siakakae* presentation (see also Allan 1988: 20; Bogesi 1948: 219). Rather, the father, with the support of members of his matrilineage (*t’hi’ā*) and matriclan (*kokolo*), takes the opportunity of the feast to make his transaction public: the transaction is officially documented by the chiefs and witnessed by the community at large. Despite being an independently asserted and ‘altruistic’ act (Macintyre 1989: 189), the property transfer nevertheless has the effect of inducing an ethic of cooperation between the two participating *kokolo*. This ethic of on-going inter-relationship was expressed clearly by one chief in his opening speech during one *fangamu taego* that occurred in February 2012:

... Today is not about one side being happy whilst the other side is sad... Like you both [addresses married couple], mother and father, who got married in Church, today your children, through the *kastom* of this feast are doing a similar thing. It is like the marriage of two tribes, *Namerufunei* and *Post’havea* ... we are marrying each other, all of us. Live together in harmony.

This commentary indicates that *fangamu taego* induces an ethic of cooperation between the two *kokolo* involved – *Namerufunei* and *Post’havea*. More strikingly, however, are the connections made between *fangamu taego* and the Christian marriage ceremony. The manner in which the chief connects up these two institutions was particular to this speech rather than a conventional aspect of *fangamu taego* oratory. Yet, in the aftermath of this feast, many of my research participants expressed positive evaluations of the chief’s choice of words. This indicates the point discussed in section 6.1 above, that marriage and *fangamu taego* are intimately linked

because both rituals are based on the interactions between affinal relatives. My friends found this particular speech so compelling because the chief managed to extend an ethic of ‘harmony’, so consonant with Christian marriage, to encompass the ‘economic’ exchanges undertaken during *fangamu taego* between affines belonging to different *kokolo*. In doing so he successfully navigated what Macintyre (1989: 149), writing of similar property transfers occurring among the matrilineal Tubetube islanders, has described as the ‘tensions inherent in affinal relationships.’

The appeal to ‘harmony’ between the two participating *kokolo* may well have been an example of (well-received) rhetorical flair on the part of a particular chief. However, practical mechanisms also exist to ensure that it can become a reality. Speaking of this during one *fangamu taego*, a chief exhorted the children making the presentation to their father “not to forget” their father’s *kokolo*. On the one hand, the necessity to ‘not forget’ the father’s *kokolo* lies in the fact that the land (on which the trees grow or garden sites are located) remains securely in the hands of the father’s *kokolo* (cf. Macintyre 1989: 149). On the other hand, after the transfer in property rights to his children these landowners must ask the permission (*tore*) of the children before they can use the stated properties/sites. Throughout the Solomon Islands, asking permission to use certain properties is a prime expression of the hierarchical relations that obtain between different persons with regard to a given area of land. Those who ask permission recognise and therefore subordinate themselves to the ultimate ownership status of those persons or groups asked (Gia Liligeto 2006: 31; Hvding 1996: 297; McDougall 2004: 460, n.d.: *chap* 5). As a result of *fangamu taego* this relation is turned on its head. The owners of the land rhetorically subordinate their ultimate ownership status to their affinal relatives whom have been granted use rights.²²⁴

²²⁴ This ‘asking permission’ (*tore*) is a legitimate form of making demands on one’s affines (as opposed to the illegitimate demands (*fatoro*) made by a husband or wife that gave rise to the antagonistic cycle of inter-*kokolo* feasting during the *fatoro* feasting complex). This is because the very moment of asking permission (as opposed to making demands) renders those being asked superior to those making the request.

During one *fangamu taego* one chief linked up this aspect of the feast with what he termed “primary and secondary right,” concepts that were introduced by the colonial legal system (Burt 1994a: 331; McDougall n.d.: *chap. 5*). Colonial documents compiled by Colin Allan (1957: 84) reveal that primary interests are defined as control over an area of land in which cultivation can be carried out ‘without seeking anyone’s permission,’ whilst secondary interests are ‘usually no more than rights of usage.’ As a result of *fangamu taego*, however, those actually controlling the land (the father’s *kokolo* who hold ‘primary interests’ in Allan’s terminology) must ask the permission of those persons with only rights of use (the children, who in Allan’s terminology hold ‘secondary interests’). The necessity for the father’s *kokolo* to “ask permission” of their affines to use their ‘own’ properties thus inverts the primary/secondary interest distinction without transforming ownership status: the children must not ‘forget’ that ultimate ownership lies with the *kokolo* of the father. This state of affairs usually lasts only for a generation: the *fangamu taego* feast must be repeated by the father’s grandchildren if the use rights are to remain intact, otherwise the father’s *kokolo* regain full control of the properties.²²⁵

Unlike in Ranongga (western Solomon Islands), where similar transactions are based on an indigenous distinction between land and property (McDougall n.d.: *chap. 5*), there is no such conception operating in *fangamu taego*. Rather, the apparent separation between land and property corresponds to a temporally-bound relational state (asking permission) established between a landholding matrilineal unit and a particular group of their affinal relatives (the children of the father) over the course of a generation. Furthermore, during *fangamu taego* the father and his matrilineal relatives give away rights in the planted properties in a manner that reinforces their inalienable relationship to the territory in question. Recall the *faphegra* feast discussed in chapter 2 that consolidated relations of invitation and arrival onto land by persons belonging to different matrilineal units (matriclans and matrilineages). The positive act of invitation and incorporation - allowing others to reside on an area of land - was the ultimate

²²⁵ See Codrington (1891: 62-63) for a discussion of the importance of ‘memory’ in transfers of property between fathers and children occurring across the central Solomon Islands in the late nineteenth century.

expression of a relation of precedence with regard to that land. ‘Giving up’ rights in property to one’s affinal relatives is structurally and ethically analogous (albeit on a more micro-scale) to this dynamic of invitation and incorporation.²²⁶

Memories of the transfers occurring during *fangamu taego* certainly reinforce the children’s rights in those properties. However, they also involve the recognition of the ability of the father’s *kokolo* to transfer those rights in the first place. These property transfers are an instantiation of the kind of exchange in West Gao (epitomised in the institution of cross-cousin marriage explored in the previous chapter) that derives its value from the antithetical condition of ‘keeping’ or - in our particular case - retaining the organic unity of persons-land upon which *kokolo* identity is predicated. This is true on two levels. Firstly the *fangamu taego* presentation must be repeated if the use rights are to be maintained beyond one generation: without further exchanges the properties return to the father’s *kokolo*. Secondly, in transferring use rights the father’s matrilineage and *kokolo* gain the public recognition of their ability to do so and thus reinforce their status as having ultimate precedence over the area of land in question. This latter point renders the property transfer element of *fangamu taego* as a form of emplacement. To evidence this claim, I now consider the mechanics by which the ‘memory’ of the transaction is consolidated.

After the speech has been made and the transfer *verbally* secured, it is recorded on the paper documents by the chiefs.²²⁷ However, this formal documentation is reinforced by a communal and much less bureaucratic process of recognition. Once the various speakers have resumed their seats, the spectators prepare for a second climax: the cutting and communal consumption of the *kastom* pudding *malahu* (see figure 21; see also appendix B). The pudding *malahu* is one of the most highly valued foods a family can produce. Although a favourite choice of previous

²²⁶ This point also provides a further explanation as to why West Gao chiefs have become confused over the relationship between *fangamu taego* and *faphegra* feasting complexes.

²²⁷ Copies of these documents are given to the father, kept by the chiefs, and sent to the Provincial Government offices in Buala for storage in the ‘Community Affairs’ archive.

generations, lack of the appropriate expertise and time-constraints that contemporary existence places upon families has ensured that this elaborate pudding is now reserved for *kastom* events such as *fangamu taego* or for compensation ceremonies (*polouru*). As far as I could discern *malahu* is now rarely encountered in other parts of Santa Isabel and its revelation is a highlight of *fangamu taego* in West Gao. This is accentuated by the ear-splitting shout of “*CASTOM*”, issued by the chief chosen to cut the *malahu* during the event. I was told that the shout comprises an implementation of one of the roles allocated to the island-wide Isabel Council of Chiefs by the main orchestrator of this institution - Sir Dudley Tuti - namely, that chiefs should “educate” younger generations about tradition. Once the pudding has been cut, everybody in attendance must come forward and eat a piece (see appendix B). The consumption of *malahu* was described as a process of “witnessing.” I was told that the *malahu* was consumed because “hearing stories about an event was not enough”. In contrast to hearing stories, seeing, holding, and tasting are actions that cannot be altered over time.



Figure 21 Chief Boni cuts *malahu* as the father (garlanded) looks on from a distance. Heuheu, May 2012.

I was struck by the importance of this observation during a land dispute case held in Poro in the first months of fieldwork. The disputing party - Agnes - sought to undercut her opponent's claim of ownership in the contested territory by underlining her lack of attendance at a *fangamu taego* feast. She had been advised by a relative not to go to the feast because eating at the event would have signalled her agreement with the property transactions undertaken during the feast and, more importantly, literally 'silence' her by removing her capacity to "talk about" those transactions in the future (See also McDougall 2004: 447, n.d.: *chap. 5*). Agnes's refusal reveals that in witnessing the transfer by eating during the feast, participants recognise two kinds of land-person relationships simultaneously: the emergent and temporally bound rights of use; and the relationship of precedence to the land that makes possible the granting of use rights in the first place. When viewed from this angle *fangamu taego* must be understood as a contemporary topogonic act by which inherent relationships to a territory are enacted, perpetuated, and publicly validated. However, as Agnes's case illustrates, public validation does not always occur. This provides further evidence in support of my contention that whilst *fangamu taego* is ostensibly a celebration of co-operative relationships between members of different *kokolo*, it is equally about the underlying differences between participants that are based in intra-*kokolo* relationships. In the final section, I further illustrate this contention with reference to a case study involving a particular problem that interfered with the performance of the event.

6.4 A property-less father

Despite the differences of opinion between chiefs about the relationship between *faphegra* and *fangamu taego*, discussed in Section 6.1 above, all agreed that *fangamu taego* did not need to involve any transfer of property by the father. Tellingly, however, in every *fangamu taego* feast I witnessed, the father chose to include a transfer of property to his children during his oratory. Yet, as I have argued throughout this chapter, the property transfer element of the feast provides the only public context in which transformations in land-person relations, which are ultimately predicated on the ancestrally mediated land-person unities that constitute *kokolo* identity, can be

achieved. *Fangamu taego* provides a public forum in which participants assert their inherent, inalienable relationships to a given territory. The case of one West Gao father will illustrate this point.

Towards the end of my fieldwork, it came to my attention that a man, whom I shall name Huigna, had approached the chiefs in a state of severe distress. Huigna's wife and children were planning to present *fangamu taego* to him, but he was unable to undertake the property transfer element of the feast. Although Huigna was born in West Gao he did not have any land. My host family provided a complex explanation for this. Since the remarriage of his father, Huigna had not upheld relationships of care and attention (sharing food, visiting) with his birth mother and her relatives. Rather, he had turned such attentions toward his step-mother. This redirection of care away from his matrilineal relatives prevented him from requesting the release of any properties growing upon their land for him to transfer to his own children. My adoptive father explained: "SIP, *sapos iu nating luk long famili blong iu, bae hem i had fo olketa luk long iu*" - if you do not attend the needs of your own people, they will not attend to your needs. It appeared the man had alienated himself from his matrilineal relatives, and therefore robbed himself of any stake in their land.²²⁸ To remove himself from this predicament, Huigna - a relatively wealthy man who spent much of his time away from West Gao working and residing with his wife in Honiara - had a plan. He persuaded the chiefs to allow him and his family (wife and children) to formally 'purchase' an area of swamp taro (*khaekake*) belonging to his step-mother.²²⁹ So secured, this property could be formally transferred to his children on the day of the feast. Indeed, this is exactly what happened. The purchase went ahead before the *fangamu taego*, and during the event the patch of swamp taro was transferred to his children 'as if' it had been his to give all along.

²²⁸ In an intriguing aside, it was speculated that the man's father had, at the time of his second marriage, used 'kastom' (ancestrally-derived ritual techniques) to ensure that his son no longer upheld relations with his birth mother and her matrilineal relatives. This illustrates the 'unnaturalness' of a situation in which ties between a child, his birth mother and her siblings are severed.

²²⁹ It is unlikely that the chiefs would have allowed this unusual 'purchase' to occur if the plot had been anything other than swamp taro. This crop grows in waterlogged ground, unsuitable for gardening, house building, or planting food crops. The material value of the plot was therefore low and worth only a relatively small presentation of food and money.

Despite assertions by certain chiefs that *fangamu taego* was not ‘about’ transfers in property, Huigna’s case illustrates that as far as the people actually undertaking *fangamu taego* were concerned, the transference of property by the father to his children was an integral element of the event. This is so much the case that Huigna redirected his monetary wealth back into the land at home in order to transfer an area of property (the swamp taro plot) to his children. One might say he was buying back his family’s ‘presence’ on the land. According to the logics of ‘permission’ instigated by *fangamu taego* property transfers discussed in the previous section, if others wanted to use the swamp taro plot they would have had to secure the permission of his daughter or her siblings. In expanding the territorial scope of his children’s relationship to a particular locality Huigna compensated for his own lost connection to his birth mother’s land and reinstated his identity as a father ‘with-property-to-give.’ Failure to do so would have caused him, at least as he expressed this to the chiefs who heard his concerns, “shame” (*mamaza*). Huigna had no reason to feel shame in terms of his provision for his children. As previously stated, he was a wealthy man, and his daughter was a well-respected and affluent member of the community. I contend that Huigna’s potential shame points to the fact that property transfers that occur during *fangamu taego* actually reveal the status of the father’s (and his matrilineal relatives’) inherent relationships to a locality. It is because this latter element was so disrupted in Huigna’s unusual life history that he went to such efforts to find an unconventional route in order to, if not perpetuate such longstanding connections, then to restart them in a new register.

Huigna appears compelled to act in a neo-topogonic manner during the feast. In purchasing the plot of swamp taro he forged a new, inalienable connection to a territory that his children could then pass on to their children, and so on. Michael Scott (2011: 198) has argued in the case of Makira/Ulawa Province, that *kastom* can exist in a ‘non-dual’ relationship with personal agency. This non-dual relationship depends on an understanding of *kastom* as ‘an essential quality intrinsic to a ... category of being’ (Scott 2011: 197). As stated in the introduction to this thesis and discussed in chapter 3, *kastom* in West Gao can be analysed as intrinsic to the relationships that animate a single category of being – a matriclan or *kokolo*. However, this does not mean

that *kastom* cannot be viewed as an object of knowledge to which persons stand in external relationship (they can lose it, or educate others about it). *Fangamu taego* is the quintessential *kastom* event in West Gao in which both kinds of relationships between personal agency and *kastom* can be recognised. In critically assessing the feast, establishing its correct format, and objectifying it as an external body of knowledge in which persons can become ‘educated’, the chiefs stand in an external relationship to *kastom*. Huigna, however, finds an unconventional route to act as a man belonging to a *kokolo* with inherent relationships to a territory. His unusual case - redirecting monetary wealth back into a low-value territory in order to protect his integrity - suggests that his personal agency is operating in a non-dual relationship to *kastom*. Scott’s observations on Makiran *kastom* are therefore apposite for West Gao, ‘even efforts at *kastom* recovery and codification cannot wholly capture it, and it is never alienable. Makirans may lose *kastom* but *kastom* cannot lose them. It enfolds them and calls them back’ (Scott 2011: 199).

In this chapter I have argued that the contemporary form of *fangamu taego* is derived from the collapsing of elements derived from what were originally distinct feasting complexes into a single event. This facilitated an analysis of the feast as comprising two distinct transactional moments in which two opposed forms of relationality (vertical intra-*kokolo* self-similarity and horizontal inter-*kokolo* dependence across a divide of pre-existing difference) are enacted. I then suggested that *fangamu taego* provides a context in which the very substrate of that opposition is perpetuated. To substantiate this claim I analysed the property transfer element of the feast as an assertion of independent, intra-*kokolo* relationships that constitute the three *kokolo* in West Gao as distinct categories with inherent relationships to a particular territory. A final case study involving an unusual case of a ‘property-less’ father sought to further underline, albeit via a rather unconventional example, the topogonic significance of *fangamu taego*.

However, it must be recognised that the independently instituted topogonic acts undertaken during *fangamu taego* are nested within an exchange event that overtly celebrates the necessity

of ‘horizontal’ exchange relationships with significant others in order to maintain social ‘harmony’, or in Scott’s (2007b: 218) words, ‘a viable social polity.’ This suggests that the overall importance of the feast lies in the extent to which it illustrates that these two forms of relationality are continually balanced against each other in West Gao. This is a phenomenon which, in various forms, we have encountered throughout this thesis. In the next chapter, I seek to consolidate this argument. It is in the transformation of living persons into matrilineal ancestors that the categorical independence of the different *kokolo* is most fully realised in West Gao (cf. Scott 2007b: 16, 27-28, 195, 2014b: 44). In order to counter-balance this potential return to absolute categorical independence, the mortuary sequence in West Gao operates to re-assert inter-category relationships at the moment when they are most threatened, that is, at death.

Chapter 7

Mortality, Memorial and Cementing: Inter and Intra-kokolo Relationships in the Balance

Introduction

In chapter 2 I described the formation of Poro Village as an amalgamation of several West Gao villages and hamlets into one coastal site. One of the ‘Big Men’ involved in facilitating this process had married a woman from another island of the Solomon Islands and feared for his children’s future placement on his land after his death. Consequently, the Big Man purchased land with money and exchange of food (*neigano*) in Bugotu.²³⁰ This man had established a village by bringing with him not only his immediate family but also his siblings and their families. Therefore, like all villages in West Gao, the new settlement was based upon relationships between people belonging to different matriclans. Before I arrived in West Gao the Big Man had died and was buried in the centre of the village, the magnificent cemented grave testament to his central role in the establishment of the community.

When I visited the village in August 2011, I found the community plagued by a longstanding dispute. In the past, a son of the deceased Big Man (who had also become recognised as chief of the current community) had called into question some of his father’s matrilineal relatives’ placement on the village land, demanding that they return to their own land in West Gao. This had incited the anger of members of the deceased Big Man’s *kokolo* who had remained in West Gao when the new community was started. One of these *kokolo* members came to the aid of his relatives who were caught up in the Bugotu dispute. This man, I was told, said to the disputing chief: “If you send us away from here [Bugotu], we will dig up the body of your father, our matrilineal relative, and return with him to our place in West Gao.” After this threat, the dispute died away, only to resurface years later in 2011 when the Big Man’s son began to act in a “selfish” way for the second time in the village’s history.

²³⁰ In the previous chapter I discussed transformations in feasting institutions that involve the purchasing of land throughout Santa Isabel. My research participants explained that Bugotu landowners allowed this transaction (which included payment in the national currency) according to their own *kastom*, implying such a transaction would not have occurred in West Gao.

As this dispute shows, *kokolo* identity is carried forward into post-mortem existence. This reduction to core identity at death stands in direct contrast to the tangle of relationships in which living persons are enmeshed. As we have seen throughout this thesis, West Gao persons, and the wider sociality in which they are imbricated, exist because of inter-category entanglements. However, in numerous contexts, for example: the telling of ancestral histories; the performance of ritual techniques (*fanitu*); naming practices; and the property exchanges that occur during *fangamu taego* feasts - Gao speakers enact and perpetuate the ancestrally mediated intra-category relationships that constitute their respective matriclans as distinct *a priori* entities with an inherent relationship to a territory. The tension between asserting the categorical integrity of a *kokolo* and maintaining cross-categorical entanglement between different *kokolo* is brought into stark relief by the threat to remove the body of the deceased Big Man described in the vignette above. The wider dispute caused by the Big Man's son, in marking the categorical differences between people of the new community, dishonoured the lifelong project of the deceased to foster productive interrelations between such persons. It is for this reason that threat to remove the body was made. In capitalising on the intra-category relation (*kokolo* identity) that the son lacked both before and after his father's death, the threat presented the cosmological extreme of the son's own 'differentiating' actions, namely, the essential categorical isolation that results from the death of the physical body. That this act was triggered by a dispute points to the fact that emphasising singular categorical identity of deceased persons is an unusual occurrence. Indeed, Gao speakers reinforce the necessity of maintaining cross-category entanglements in the face of death.

In the first section of this chapter I illustrate the extent to which certain Gao speakers attempt to attain some measure of control over their own deaths by monitoring the release of ancestral knowledge. I argue that as elderly persons near the end of life they forsake their human existence and become constituted solely by the core aspect of personhood, namely, *kokolo* identity. In the second section I analyse the responses and exegesis triggered by two separate confrontations with life after death. I suggest that Gao speakers posit the dead as (potentially) existing in multiple locations: as a *kokolo* ancestor present in a particular locality and as a

Christian soul present in heaven or hell. Developing this possibility, I turn to contemporary interactions with deceased Christian persons in different areas of the West Gao landscape, arguing that these ancestors, like more ancient ancestral beings, can become a node within the enactment of intra-*kokolo* relationships. Despite the ‘departure’ of an aspect of the soul to a Christian cosmological destination, the deceased can retain ‘this worldly’ influence as an ancestral being reduced to a singular identity – an emplaced *kokolo* ancestor.

The reduction of the deceased’s identity that occurs at death entails a severance of the deceased from his or her non-*kokolo* relatives. Thus, whilst the transformation of a deceased person into an ancestor is necessarily one of distancing (Hertz [1960] 2004: 82), in West Gao, the nature of this ‘distance’ is of a different kind for those among the living who do not belong to the *kokolo* of the deceased. There are, therefore, a particular set of transformations that must be secured in the mortuary sequence in West Gao. In the third section I discuss how the first stages of the ‘work of mourning’ transform the nature of relationships in which the deceased was enmeshed during life. Central to the analysis is a distinction between timely and untimely deaths (cf. Bloch and Parry: 15-18). In the case of the former, this part of the mortuary sequence is under-elaborated when compared to deaths of the latter type. The difference hinges, I argue, on the extent to which persons that die a natural death have accepted their transformation into ancestorhood in a way that victims of sudden death have not.

In the fourth section, I argue that the final stage of mortuary sequence in West Gao operates to counter-balance the return to categorical isolation of the deceased by extending cross-category entanglements among their living descendants and emphasising the necessity of such entanglements within the community at large. Finally, I analyse the Christian grave as a ‘dual-axis’ monument that allows Gao speakers to activate relations with the deceased in *both* an inter and intra-category register without undercutting the more fundamental fact that the deceased possesses a singular identity that can, and in certain circumstances, must, be activated. In conclusion, I argue that the balance between intra and inter-*kokolo* relationships, whilst central

to socio-cosmic renewal in West Gao, is in no way fixed, but, rather, shifts in response to particular historical conditions.

7.1: Confronting mortality

In the final weeks of fieldwork a new house was being constructed in my hamlet for an elderly man - Richard - who had spent his life residing with his wife and children in a village at the far end of West Gao. I was told that because Richard's health was failing, the new house would allow easy access to the medical care available at Poro clinic. However, Richard was also a member of the house-builders' matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) and, by extension, matriclan (*kokolo*). When I pressed the house-builders on this point it was acknowledged that upon his death, the man would be buried in the nearby graveyard located on the land controlled by his *t'hi'a*. Throughout fieldwork, whilst I was told that people were usually buried on the land of their matrilineage, it was equally emphasised that the deceased's children and spouse (if surviving) also had a say in where the body was to be buried. Although I did not ask if Richard's children had resisted the planned burial site, the clinic story suggests that members of Richard's *kokolo* were pre-empting any move his children might make to insist on his burial elsewhere. Indeed it was in their interest to do so because, as we saw in chapter 4, tracing a relationship to a matrilineal ancestor (male or female) buried on an area of land is evidence of one's inherent relationship to a given territory. Moreover, the old man's relocation would put him in close proximity to his matrilineal nephews and nieces, who could listen to his stories as his death drew nearer.

As argued by John Middleton (1982: 142-143) for the Lugbara of Uganda, the uttering of the deceased's 'last words' to his kin and - most importantly - patrilineal successor, are central to the definition of a 'good death' that engenders a relatively immediate and smooth transition into ancestorhood. The Lugbara are concerned that death should occur in the right place, at the right time (Bloch and Parry 1982: 16). This ideal spatio-temporal alignment of the event of death is also the preferred situation for Gao speakers in order to ensure that a person dies after transmitting his or her knowledge of the ancestors to his or her matrilineal descendants.

Unfortunately, more often than not in West Gao, death occurs before ‘timely’ acts of intergenerational transmission occur (see section 7.3 below). We saw in chapter 3 that Gao speakers are well-schooled in the dangers of sorcery. Given that disrupting the continuity of inter-*kokolo* relationships maintained by knowledgeable descendants who reside upon an ancestral territory is one of the main purposes of sorcery attack (cf. Berg 2008: 121, 165-166), it is unsurprising that this eventuality was pre-empted. My friend Clara once explained to me that knowledge regarding a given matrilineage’s and, by extension, a matriclan’s ancestrally mediated connection to an area of land, could be told to one’s *fakahrai* - cross-cousin. Such closely related non-*kokolo* relatives could be trusted to hold the knowledge without seeking to appropriate it for their own ends. Clara described this type of transmission as a kind of “life insurance,” an analogy which captures exactly what is at stake for Gao speakers in such processes namely, existence itself. This becomes clearer in the following example.

My adoptive ‘mother’ (MZ) Ka’aza possessed a ritual technique (*fanitu*) that involved the ability to heal children and adults of the condition *glona*, which as we saw in chapter 3, was a result of human encounter with emplaced matrilineal ancestors of whom she was a descendant. During the course of my research it became increasingly apparent that Ka’aza felt she was nearing the end of her life. The desired recipient of her techniques was her birth sister’s last born daughter - Maria - to whom she had transmitted most of her *fanitu* already. Ka’aza had, however, withheld the secret words that accompanied the healing ritual, the problem being that her niece was married to a man from Guadalcanal and they both lived far way in the national capital Honiara. I once heard Ka’aza enlisting her classificatory son (ZS) to write down the words of her *fanitu* and keep the paper secretly stored “in his box”. This was a closed container located within the sleeping room of a house. Storing the written words in such a ‘box’ achieved a condition of containment that replicated, in an external space, the containment of the knowledge within her living body until such time as it could be given to, and memorised, or re-internalised, by Maria.²³¹ During a visit to Honiara I told Maria about the conversation I had

²³¹ Throughout West Gao, notebooks containing genealogies and other important *kastom* objects will be stored within a sleeping room, the most interior and private space of a house.

overheard, and she agreed that Ka'aza must be “ready for death” (SIP, *redi fo dae*). Thus it appears that knowledge of certain ritual techniques is ultimately tied up with the mortality of the holder of such knowledge. A further example will reinforce the point.

During an interview regarding an ancestral ‘war dance’ that was associated with a particular matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) of one of the three *kokolo* in West Gao, Puni, who currently possessed the knowledge of the dance in its entirety, explained that the shouts that lead the individual patterns of the dance must not be “inappropriately transmitted” (*fifi fakakhasa*).²³² The exact words of these chants included the names of the four brothers of this clan, the ancestors who had originally innovated the dance formation. Puni explained how his own father received knowledge of the dance because of a strange incident. During the ordination of Anglican Bishop Sir Dudley Tuti in Sepi, an old man (Puni’s grandfather) who possessed the knowledge of the shouts led the performance. However, during the performance the glare of the sun made him fall down. At this moment Puni’s father intervened. Taking up his own father’s shout, he moved forward to the front and led the dancers in order to complete the patterns.

Puni’s father completed the dance successfully despite not having received the required knowledge as part of a formal transmission. The implication here is that it was the four ancestral brothers who acted ‘through’ Puni’s father to ensure the dance was completed (cf. M. Strathern 1999: 39). This encouraged Puni’s grandfather to transmit (*fakakhasa*) all six patterns to his son despite him being a member of a different *kokolo*. The old man died soon after making this transmission - according to Puni, the elderly man was not sick, rather, “he just fell down and died”. Puni’s own father was already close to death before he passed the last pattern (*nasnaghe*) to Puni and he also died not long after he transmitted his knowledge. Puni’s father told him that the dance patterns/shouts must go back to the owning *kokolo*. As the interview continued Puni explained that he would indeed pass the full dance on to the matrilineal descendants of his grandfather. Although he had passed some patterns to members of his own *kokolo*, he would not

²³²In Cheke Holo language of adjacent Maringe District, *fifi* can mean ‘without forethought or regard to social norms’ (White, Kokhonigita, and Pulomana 1988: 37), a definition which captures succinctly Puni’s use of the adverb here.

pass on every pattern. He stated that he had no intention of passing the last pattern to anyone yet because he was afraid of dying.

In all these cases of *fanitu* transmission, release is a gradual process, one that I became familiar with as I recorded other genres of ancestral knowledge. As will be recalled from chapter 3, each meeting I had with Sara disclosed a further ‘hidden’ detail of her ancestral history (*pagusu*). In the most extreme example of this, one of my key interlocutors waited until the afternoon before I left West Gao to reveal some of the most closely guarded details of the *pagusu* which he knew well, explaining “I am going right down, digging all the way down.”²³³ Even in this case, I am certain that he did not tell me *everything* he knew, because in revealing such knowledge, as in the cases discussed above, one’s mortality hangs in the balance. Indeed, during one of my first interviews with Mikaeli (a man whom we have met in chapters 1, 2 and 4), he explained that his elderly maternal uncle had revealed most of the details of his ancestral histories, and had agreed to his nephew share that knowledge with me. At this moment a woman in the room interjected, saying that the elderly man had not transmitted (*fakhakasa*) everything to Mikaeli because “he did not want to die yet”.²³⁴

Genres of ancestral knowledge such as *fanitu* and *pagusu* do not simply describe intra-*kokolo* relationships, they *activate* them. In releasing the means by which this ‘activation’ is achieved, one gives up the very mechanisms by which one is differentiated from the ancestors. Moreover, to succumb to this undifferentiated state is simultaneously to release one’s temporally bound human existence (cf. Munn 1970: 150). To elaborate, as will be recalled from chapter 3, the human personhood of babies is consolidated by means of ritual ‘introductions’ that ensure they are recognised as *human* by the ancestors that inhabit their home place. As they grow up they become increasingly differentiated from their ancestors by gaining knowledge of their activities and perfecting certain ritual techniques by which to harness their agency. At the opposite end of the life cycle this differentiating process is reversed. In giving up their ‘active’ ancestral

²³³ Learning ancestral knowledge in West Gao involves a movement from the surface appearance to the underlying foundation or source, literally, ‘the base of a tree’ (*nafunga*).

²³⁴ Sadly, I later learnt that the chief’s uncle did indeed die, after I had left West Gao, in 2013.

knowledge, elderly persons revert to a passive, infant-like liminal state, poised on the threshold between human and ancestral existence. Both infants and those who chose death by releasing the entirety of their ancestral knowledge instantiate a particular form of what M. Strathern (1988: 292) has described as 'relationships reduced to a single strand.' Both are 'persons' who - in either making an initial entrance into, or final exit from, the relational entanglements that constitute the world of living humans - are constituted solely by the core aspect of personhood, *kokolo* identity.

In light of the above, Rita Astuti's (1995) analysis of the progression toward ancestorhood among the Austronesian speaking Vezo of Madagascar is apposite. As ritual mediators between the dead and the living, certain elderly men known as *hazomanga* capture the momentary co-presence of two different ways of figuring the spatio-temporal connections between people (Astuti 1995: 103, 156). For the Vezo, to die is to undergo a transformation from one form of spatio-temporal existence to another (Astuti 1995, 2000). The curtailing of vision experienced by the Vezo dead - from the far reaching cognatic and horizontal connections of plural *raza*, to membership within a single *raza* as they enter their tomb is, according to Astuti (2000: 99), tantamount to a transition between 'two incommensurable domains of existence.' In West Gao the equivalent transformation is from a composite state of inter-category entanglement to a form of ancestral existence as pure matrilineal essence that stands outside the spatio-temporal constraints of human existence. However, although we may speak of two domains of existence as Astuti does, there remains a crucial difference between the Vezo and the West Gao case, one that pertains to the kind of relations that exist between the living and the dead.

Like elsewhere in Madagascar (Bloch 1995: 72, 1998: 95), among the Vezo the blessings of the ancestral dead ensure the well-being of their living descendants (Astuti 1995: 123). Crucially however, this blessing is achieved only insofar as the living and the dead are successfully separated during the 'work' undertaken in the mortuary sequence (Astuti 1994: 121, 1995: 106, 123). Whilst the dead may desire the sociality of the living, the living work hard to secure a condition of asociality in their dead: secure and comfortable behind the fence that surrounds the

ancestral tomb, for the Vezo, the happy dead are, quite simply, dead (Astuti 1994: 120-1). In West Gao, by contrast, burial activates a condition best captured by Nancy Munn's (1970: 150) discussion of the inheritance of ancestral knowledge in central Australia, in which she describes how a 'vital social relation' between the living and the dead remain central features of a given locality. This claim relates to Gao speakers' theories about the nature of existence after death, a point to which I now turn.

7.2: The multiplicity of post-mortem existence

In chapter 3 I argued that in West Gao the soul is broken down into two components: an 'image' component of the soul (*naunga*) and the Christian soul (*tarunga*). This ethnographic observation has direct bearing on the argument pursued in this section. The dual-quality of the soul facilitates a variety of speculations regarding the nature of post-mortem existence: ultimately it engenders a situation in which deceased persons can be posited to exist in multiple locations without contradiction. In this section I explore two cases in which Gao speakers came face to face with the post-mortem existence of deceased persons. I argue that whilst conversion to Christianity has diversified the number of domains inhabited by aspects of the deceased's soul, it has not eliminated the possibility that deceased persons can remain intimately connected to the localities which they shaped whilst living.

According to reports of the pre-Christian religion of Santa Isabel, departure to the land of the dead did not amount to a severance of relationship with the places with which the deceased was associated in life. Codrington (1881: 308) reports that according to the pre-Christian religion on Santa Isabel, 'the soul, the *Tarunga*, of the living man becomes a *Tindalo*.' He defines a *Tindalo* as a 'departed spirit,' furthermore, such spirits reside in the land of the dead whilst simultaneously remaining 'active in their old homes' (Codrington 1881: 308; see also Codrington 1891: 256).²³⁵ This claim is supported by Lagusu's (1986: 48) observation regarding the Knabu of Maringe District: 'the Knabu people believed that when a person died, his breath

²³⁵ Codrington calls this island Laulau. From his description however, it is clear that this is the same island that is now referred to throughout Santa Isabel as San Jorge (Codrington 1881: 308).

went away but wherever the remains of his body were, he would come back to visit them.' Both Bogesi (1948: 327) and White (1978: 117-120) emphasise that in the pre-Christian religion of Santa Isabel, despite the departure of ghosts to the land of the dead, *both* ghosts and spirits could be rendered immanent to the world of lived humans through various ritualised communicative means such as the use of charms, divination and propitiation at shrines.²³⁶

Throughout this thesis I have not employed the terms ghosts and spirits because they carry conceptual baggage pertaining to a reified domain of the 'supernatural' and fail to capture the extent to which ancestral beings constitute agentive aspects of the West Gao lived world (Sahlins 2012: 139). As will be recalled from chapters 3 and 4, Gao speakers recognise various types of not-fully-human entities, three of which are relevant to the present discussion: *tarunga* (an entity seen when a man dies and also the term used to describe the Christian soul and the Holy Spirit); *naunga* (the image or shadow aspect of the soul that is detachable from living humans as a result of encounters with ancestral beings); and *na'itu* – an ancestral being. These categorical distinctions should be borne in mind as we consider the following narratives, collected during fieldwork, which are directly concerned with post-mortem existence.

During the church services surrounding burial practices in West Gao emphasis is placed upon the deceased attaining eternal life in heaven. The force of such claims of post-mortem heavenly existence was evidenced during an unusual event that was connected with outbreaks of sorcery accusations in Poro. In February 2011, an adolescent girl from an Anglican Youth Group in Buala had a divine experience in which she 'died', ascended to heaven, and was given a message from the Son of God. The divinity had located Poro as a hotbed of sorcery in which young and old alike were implicated. With the permission of the Diocese of Isabel, approximately eight months later, the girl came to All Saint's church in Poro to deliver her story. Her narrative constructed a topography of heaven and hell drawing upon both biblical and local landscapes. After seeing people she 'recognised' burning alive inside flaming stone ovens

²³⁶ According to one commentator, spirit-mediumship was practised in Maringe district as late as the 1970s (Whiteman [1983] 2002: 355-7). However, I heard of no such procedures performed either in the recent past or during fieldwork in West Gao.

(*biti*), the girl received her ‘message’ from the Son of God on the banks of a ‘living water’ whilst angels flew overhead with children completing their heavenly procession. Although sceptics pointed out that everything that the girl had described was written in the Bible, many people took the girl’s vision seriously. They stated that the girl’s face had changed colour during her oratory, commenting that this was unsurprising given that she had already ‘died’ and was in heaven, whilst it was only her ‘image’ or ‘picture’ that stood before them.²³⁷ This latter point suggests that the image aspect (*naunga*) of a Christian can become separate from the other soul ‘aspect’ (*tarunga*) in death, just as in life. It is alongside such ideas that the following narrative must be considered.

In early 2012 a West Gao resident - Saelasi - confided in me a story regarding his first-hand encounter with ancestral beings (*na’itu*, SIP, *devol*) that resided in the forest surrounding a West Gao village where he had resided whilst serving the community as a catechist. One evening in June 2003 he spotted a shadowy figure outside his house and thinking it was a *mae kropo* (a man who uses the cover of darkness to pester females of a household) he chased him off with a knife and shouted threats. The following night he heard the footsteps of “SIP, *devols*” close to his house, so he placed the King James Bible on his veranda. The “*devols*” appeared to be “afraid” of the holy book, but persisted in returning. Although hidden by the thick vegetation, the ancestral beings made their presence known by the sound of splitting bamboo and the ‘*gre gre gre*’ of the seed-rattles worn on their legs. In a state of confused panic he ran to the other residents of the village, telling them that an army had come to fight him.²³⁸ The group of men he had roused stood facing the shadowy figures. At this moment Saelasi realised that his unwanted visitors were the kin of the men he had awoken to aid him. He admitted to the shadows that he was wrong to chase and threaten them, but added, by way of explanation, that he belonged to a different matriclan (*kokolo*). Hearing this, the figures began to disperse. Saelasi told me that as

²³⁷Stories are also told on Santa Isabel of a period prior to conversion in which living humans travelled to the pre-Christian land of the dead (Vilasa 1986: 61-63). To remain there, however, was to sacrifice human existence and to regain ones humanity one had to leave, an act achieved by trickery on the part of the human (Bogesi 1948: 209).

²³⁸Such fears were exacerbated, he explained, by the ethnic tensions that continued to decimate the national capital Honiara at that time.

dawn began to break some of the men recognised the ancestral beings as their own relatives. Further, some of the beings had short hair rather than long hair - a comment that implied such short-haired beings had died more recently (and were therefore Christians at death). Completely unprompted, Saelasi began to think through the claim he had just made. He suggested that when a person from this *kokolo* dies, although their body is buried he or she undergoes the transformational process of *juruku* and becomes an ancestral being. Alternatively, he continued, when a person of this *kokolo* dies a new *devol* is simultaneously “born” among a group of existing ancestral relatives.

It is important to note that this narrative concerned the post-mortem trajectories of members of a different *kokolo* from his own: Saelasi’s theories were about one matriclan, not every matriclan. He was therefore able to hypothesise in this manner because such ideas corresponded to a post-mortem fate that he, as a member of a different *kokolo*, would not necessarily have to experience. The possibility of different post-mortem trajectories for members of different *kokolo* adds further support to the contention developed throughout this thesis that these categories are perceived as ontologically distinct. Furthermore, it illustrates that such essential differences are perpetuated rather than erased by the event of death. Saelasi was, however, a catechist, well-schooled in Christian doctrine. It is crucial to note that he emphasises the ancestral beings’ fear of the Bible. If such beings were afraid of the Christian text it could hardly be possible that they were wholly Christian beings, but more likely comprised a non-Christian aspect of a deceased person’s soul. Both of Saelasi’s theories: the creation of the beings he witnessed via the process of *juruku* (a process that is explicitly associated with more ancient ancestral beings, and by extension, the image component of the soul *naunga*); and the separate ‘birth’ of a new ancestral being at death, left space for the theological reality of the simultaneous departure of the Christian soul (*tarunga*) of the deceased to heaven or hell.²³⁹

²³⁹ In at least one other context I was told that ancestral beings (*na’itu*) reproduce in a similar way to humans and therefore increased their numbers.

Uncertainties with regard to the location and agency of deceased persons have been documented by ethnographers working in Christian contexts throughout Melanesia (Lattas 1998: 110, 302; Lohmann 2005: 203), and in places - such as the lowland Philippines - that have a much longer exposure to Christian doctrine than West Gao (Cannell 1999: 152-155). In their respective analyses, both Cannell (1999: 162) and Lohmann (2005: 203) highlight that the co-presence of traditional or local ideas/doctrine and Christian theology within speculations about post-mortem existence point to unresolved tensions, or active competition between these ideas. By contrast, in Saelasi's theories and the responses to the youth group member's visions, a similar co-presence involves neither tension nor competition, but productive interrelation. Ideas concerning the dual quality of the human soul consisting of an image component (*naunga*) that is detachable from the Christian soul (*tarunga*) in both life and in death, facilitate narratives which posit the deceased as (potentially) occupying multiple locations without contradiction. Furthermore, Saelasi's narrative evidences the extent to which theorising about the post-mortem destination(s) of the dead is an activity that is informed by the poly-ontological nature of West Gao cosmology and Christian theology simultaneously.

Saelasi's encounter with the ancestral beings was intimately bound up with the nature of his particular kind of relationship (in comparison to his fellow villagers) to a given locality. In acting anti-socially to the ancestral beings he illustrated his lack of intra-*kokolo* relationships to the place in which - following his job as a catechist - he had come to reside. Furthermore, to ensure that the ancestors' equally anti-social retaliation ceased, he needed to admit his own lack of recognition, a happening that was elicited by the positive recognition by his fellow villagers of their own ancestral relatives. Such moments of recognition/non-recognition reinforce the guiding claim of this chapter, namely, that death is one of the key contexts in which the ontological singularity of *kokolo* identity comes to the fore. To develop this claim, I now consider the continued agency of recently deceased persons - much like the 'living' but ancient ancestral beings (SIP, *laef devol*) formed through the processes of *juruku* that we discussed in chapters 3 and 4 - as mediating the intra-*kokolo* relationships that inhere in a given locality.

In March 2012, one of my neighbours, Smithi, was walking back to our hamlet after visiting his sister in Maringe District. His journey took him through the village lying on the north-eastern periphery of West Gao. As he followed the road that climbs the hill out of the village he became disorientated (*fa'io'aho*). He wandered in circles for a long time through a plantation of betel nut (*gausa*) planted by a maternal uncle of his who had recently died. Luckily, he happened upon two residents of the village he had just left, who were tending their garden site. They explained he was heading back to their village instead of away from it. Upon hearing Smithi's tale, my adoptive 'mother' Ka'aza located a possible cause of this incident. She stated that Smithi's deceased maternal uncle (her classificatory brother and the man in whose betel palm plantation Smithi had become lost) had been "making a fool" (SIP, *hemi mekem fool*) of his nephew.²⁴⁰ This encounter reveals how after death, the agency of the deceased continues to permeate the areas of land/property with which he was directly associated during life. The phenomenon of *fa'io'aho* was explicitly associated with the agency of ancestral beings in West Gao. As we saw in chapter 3, people can experience *fa'io'aho* when failing to follow the "kastom" associated with a given locality. This involves a failure to establish a relation of communication with ancestral beings residing in that area, or alternatively, seeking out the mediation of a landowner who has the capacity to do so on one's behalf.

Smithi's experience is testament to the fact that even the recently deceased can have ancestral-like effects on the living. They pose a danger to living humans if their presence is not recognised or attended to appropriately. Displaying this logic, some inhabitants of the village through which Smithi passed just prior to his experiencing *fa'io'aho* were adamant that if he had paused in his journey to "visit them" (SIP, *kam long mifela*) he would not have lost his way. From their perspective, Smithi's failure to attend to the living persons of a place (in this case also his own matrilineal relatives) caused him to become vulnerable to the non-living ancestral persons (their deceased relatives) who also inhabited that place. It is possible the deceased uncle's interference with Smithi's journey was linked to the fact Smithi and other relatives had

²⁴⁰ In this case Ka'aza used the name of the deceased, showing that there is not a strict taboo on this. However, it was more normal for a deceased person to be referred to using kinship terms, as a matter of respect.

not yet performed the final ritual work involved in the mortuary sequence - cementing the grave (see section 7.4 below). However, this explanation falls short. A further example will illustrate how the descendants of deceased persons need to be cautious of the latter's continued agency in particular areas of the landscape after the passage of three generations, that is, long after the grave has been cemented.

There was a large tree (*putu*) growing outside my neighbour's compound that provided a shady seaside area where the family could rest between household activities. My neighbour Robert - a man in his late-twenties - explained that the tree had been planted by his namesake (mother's grandfather - MMF - now deceased). He recalled that a few years previously he had been forced to cut back some of the tree's branches, much to the distress of his elderly neighbour. She was adamant that if he cut the tree a mighty wind would rise. Robert reassured her by deciding to address his great grandfather directly; before chopping the branches he spoke to the tree saying: "My namesake! I am going to cut your hair." Robert then cut the branches and, sure enough, there was no wind. Stories like this were common in West Gao, although they were more frequently told with regard to areas of the landscape associated with ancient ancestral beings said to reside there. Manipulation of such areas always required the living to address their ancestors directly, communicating their intentions and thus counteracting any destructive ancestral response. In contrast to such beings, Robert's great grandfather died a Christian. However, like pre-Christian ancestral beings, he continued to be 'present' within areas of the landscape that he had 'shaped' whilst living (i.e. the tree he had planted).

To summarise the argument so far, death involves a transformation from a composite state of inter-category entanglement to a form of ancestral existence. This transformation does not, however, amount to a complete severance of relationships between the deceased and living persons. Much like the interactions with ancient ancestral beings, the quality of relationship - as playful or aggressive, say, - between more recently deceased ancestors and living persons depends on moments of recognition or non-recognition, which are in turn predicated upon the presence or absence of intra-*kokolo* relationships between the interacting parties. With this

series of observations in hand, I now explore certain aspects of the mortuary sequence.²⁴¹ I argue that the ritual work undertaken at death operates to encourage the deceased to adopt a singular categorical identity by severing his or her identification with non-*kokolo* relatives. However, this is ultimately counter-balanced by ritual efforts to emphasise cross-category relationships both among the living, and between the living and the dead. In terms of the latter, such relationships are facilitated by, and therefore restricted to, a specific sacred locale, namely, the cemented grave itself.

7.3: Untimely deaths and the transformative work of the mortuary sequence

It has long been upheld that mortuary ceremonies - in particular their temporal sequencing - secure a transformation in the nature of relationships between the living and the deceased, and a reconsolidation of relationships among the living in response to the absence of the deceased (Hertz [1960] 2004: 43, 73, 82, 86; Bloch and Parry 1982: 4-5). Whilst drawing upon such themes, in this section and the next, I highlight how the mortuary sequence in West Gao achieves a particular pattern of both separation and continued connection between the deceased and his or her surviving relatives. Central to the first part of my analysis is a distinction between timely and untimely deaths. This distinction recalls Hertz's ([1960] 2004: 85) observation that certain types of death evoke particular reactions and ritual responses (see also Allerton 2013: 66-67). In a similar vein, Bloch and Parry (1982: 17) argue that 'good' and 'bad' deaths instantiate the interplay between ideological order and the disorderly, or uncontrollable, nature of biological death. The corresponding distinction in West Gao, whilst certainly invoking issues of 'control', is best analysed as marking a difference in how far the dead must be *encouraged* to assume a singular categorical identity.

As will be recalled from the previous chapter, in the week leading up to Christmas 2011, my friend Joselin was in mourning for her husband who had died tragically in a freak canoe accident. When I arrived at her house Joselin stated explicitly that her family would not say anything in public that suggested their father had been killed by sorcery. She added that it was

²⁴¹ A detailed description of the three-stage mortuary sequence is provided in appendix C.

written in the Bible that: “We must be prepared. We do not know when God will take us”. However, in the privacy of her own home Joselin seemed convinced that the presence of her husband, which had been repeatedly sensed by her children in the days following his death, suggested that he wanted to “tell them all something [about the cause of his death] before he could go in peace.”²⁴² Despite this assertion she also made it clear to her children that despite the on-going presence of their father he was without doubt “no longer human.” When I returned home late that evening I sat long into night with my adoptive mother Ka’aza reviewing the day’s events. When I mentioned the strange occurrences reported by Joselin’s household members she seemed unsurprised and remarked: “[In the event of] that kind/type of death, it will be difficult for him to leave them.”

Ka’aza was alluding to the sudden nature of Joselin’s husband’s death. In the first section of this chapter, I considered cases in which death could be controlled by monitoring the release of ancestral knowledge. However, in most circumstances death is an event caused by uncontrollable and invisible agencies.²⁴³ In Joselin’s case, both the appeal to divine agency and the speculations regarding sorcery attack provided different means by which to explain the ‘untimely’ nature of her husband’s death.²⁴⁴ In stark contrast to the elderly persons whose controlled revelation of ancestral knowledge is tantamount to their embracing of a transformation into ancestorhood, persons suffering a sudden or untimely death must be encouraged to sever the multiple cross-category connections in which they were entangled in life. This ‘encouragement’ takes place during the first stages of the mortuary sequence - the wake, the burial, and the memorial ceremony.

²⁴² When the children went to the garden one of them smelt tobacco smoke although no one was smoking (their father was a smoker). In another incident the house door was mysteriously un-locked when the children were asleep.

²⁴³ Sorcery-induced deaths were a central aspect of many of the life histories I collected. Gao speakers also attribute certain deaths to introduced and poorly understood illnesses such as TB, although this will be a matter of perspective. Outside of the immediate circle of relatives TB may be the posited cause, but in the case of close relatives a sorcerer is blamed.

²⁴⁴ In the Youth Group member’s vision narrated above, the topography she laid out included a liminal ‘second world’ between the extremes of heaven and hell that consisted of the dispersed bones of persons killed by sorcery whose incomplete skeletons meant that they were unable to “rise up for judgement” because they had died “before God’s time”. Sorcery is therefore presented as acting directly against the divinity, a point that is no doubt linked to the increasing connections made by Gao speakers between sorcery and satanic agency. Suicide victims were also said to be trapped in this liminal ‘second world’.

On the day of death it is taboo (*blahi*) throughout the entire community to undertake gardening or fishing.²⁴⁵ Such taboos are extended to the close family of the deceased for a week.²⁴⁶ By ceasing to work, members of the community focus their attention solely on the deceased person and their family. From the moment of death and throughout the week of mourning, more immediate relatives of the deceased will channel this attention directly by visiting the house of the deceased to “wake up” with the members of the household where the death occurred.²⁴⁷ Usually ‘wakes’ involve playing cards and watching DVDs. People did not provide any exegesis of this practice other than that the bereaved should “not be alone” in their grief (cf. Cannell 1999: 142). Therefore, unlike societies throughout the matrilineal Massim region of PNG, wherein affines undertake most of the work of mourning (Battaglia 1990: 157-160; Fortune 1963: 10-13; Foster 1995: 102; Macintyre 1989: 138; Munn 1986: 167; Thune 1989: 161, 166; Weiner 1988: 48, 128, 133), in West Gao the process is undertaken with no divisions according to who are in an affinal or consanguinal relationship to the deceased, but is carried out by as many people as possible. I was told, however, that for members of one *kokolo*, deceased matrilineal ancestors come to visit the house of the recently deceased: during the night of death their cries can be heard outside the house walls. In this case, the deceased is presented with the display of grief in both an intra-category (deceased ancestors of their own *kokolo*) and inter-category (the full household of mourners) register.

As we saw in my conversations at Joselin’s household after the burial of her husband, physical burial does not amount to the removal of the presence of the deceased from the lives of the living. Instead, it is a memorial ceremony called *ghat’hofapulo* - literally, ‘to think back’, which encourages a reduction in the social relations that exist between the living and the dead. However, the extent to which this ceremony is elaborated depends upon the particular nature of

²⁴⁵ I was told that to plant a garden at such a time might result in the tubers rotting in the ground, mimicking the decaying corpse.

²⁴⁶ By the turn of the century, missionary Henry Welchman discouraged the strict mourning taboos involving the wearing of rough bark cloth and abstention from particular foods, known as *hiroku* in Bugotu (E. Wilson 1935: 54-55). In the sparse records of the missionaries there is little evidence to indicate who (in relation to the deceased) took up such practices.

²⁴⁷ In cases where the deceased is felt to be seriously ill and nearing death such all-night vigils will be enacted by close relatives even before death has actually occurred.

the death to which it corresponds. For example, when my adoptive mother's eldest sister - a woman of over eighty years - died after suffering declining appetite and strength over several weeks, my family were quick to point out that the woman had died of old age rather than any unpredictable force. In short, her death was anticipated. Although practices of "waking up" with the deceased's family continued for a few days after death, it was decided that in this case the *ghat'hofapulo* would be performed on the day of burial. This was surprising because in every other death I had been aware of there was a significant delay - usually five days - before the performance of *ghat'hofapulo*. My host family was adamant that such a decision was not against the dictates of *kastom*, as my line of questioning had implied.

Of the eight deaths I recorded during fieldwork that of my adoptive 'mother' (MZ) was the only case in which sorcery was not implicated, either as an explanation for the specific timing of death or the illness leading up to it. It was also the only death in which the burial and *ghat'hofapulo* were performed on the same day. Taken in isolation, this could simply be an accidental correlation rather than a causal relation. However, recall Ka'aza's comment that Joselin's husband was reluctant to leave his family because his death was sudden, or unexpected. I suggest that the temporal break required between the burial and *ghat'hofapulo* - which is linked to how elaborate the ceremony (in terms of number of guests and therefore the amount of food required to feed them) - is dictated by the type of death that occurred. In the case of an untimely death, an elaborate *ghat'hofapulo* encourages the deceased to undergo a transformation from a state of inter-category entanglement to a *kokolo* ancestor possessing singular categorical identity. To evidence this claim, I now turn to ethnography drawn from *ghapt'hofapulo* ceremonies performed in cases of sudden or untimely deaths.

In the cases of sudden death, in the period immediately following death until the *ghat'hofapulo* ceremony has been performed, the dead person is seen to retain their influence in the world of the living, a phenomenon called '*fabaibati*.' In the case of Joselin, she had to speak with her husband on two occasions to stop his interference with the proceedings of burial: firstly, at his dead body, when the gravediggers repeatedly failed to clear the earth from the grave; secondly,

at his graveside at the outset of a fishing expedition for his memorial feast, when she implored her husband not to make the sea rough so that the fishing trip would be a success. In a further example of *fabaibati*, during the preparations for a *ghat'hofapulo* ceremony in my home hamlet involving the tragic death of a teenage boy, the male relatives of the deceased were constructing a temporary shelter for the feast. Rosita, the dead boy's grandmother, told me that none of the sticks the men cut and shaped were the appropriate size. They kept falling out of the holes or being too short. Rosita explained was because the deceased was making fun of his male relatives: "SIP, *hemi mekem fool long olketa*."

White (1991: 249n9) argues that according to 'traditional religious practices' of Maringe District, the spirit of the dead person was lured out of the village using cooked food placed in a remote area of the forest so that 'the spirit would follow it and not find its way back to the village.' With reference to the deceased's apparent disruption of the memorial ceremony in contemporary West Gao, it appears that the preparations surrounding *ghat'hofapulo* involve similar efforts to curtail relations between the dead and the living.²⁴⁸ Such encouragement towards detachment is necessary: if close connections are maintained, it can be fatal for the living. In one reported case, a son's grief for the loss of his mother was so intense that he became seriously ill and unresponsive to 'kastom' treatment. The boy's father was "afraid" because in such cases the deceased may come back and "take" the sick person with them (cf. Allerton 2013: 67-68; Astuti 1995: 123-124; Cannell 1999: 161, 163; Stasch 2009: 218).

During *ghat'hofapulo* participants share a large feast. Speeches are made to commemorate the life of the deceased and may also mention the absent relatives who were unable to attend. Mimicking the situation that occurs during the wake, *ghat'hofapulo* operates to perform the full extent of the relationships within which the deceased person was enmeshed during their life. The extent to which the deceased attempts to interfere with the proceedings indicates that the commemoration involved in the ceremony is also an act focused on forgetting. *Ghat'hofapulo*

²⁴⁸ This situation is similar to that reported by McDougall (2004: 452) for Ranongga (western Solomon Islands) where the 'fourth day feast is still thought to be the day when the spirit departs.'

thus displays an anthropologically salient theme regarding the ‘double movement’ achieved by the work of mourning that encapsulates the dialectical relationship between commemoration and forgetting (Stasch 2009: 229; see also Astuti 1995: 127; Battaglia 1990: 60, 193). In West Gao, however, the extent to which this dialectic is ritually elaborated depends upon whether the death was timely or untimely.

To elaborate, by virtue of shared *kokolo* identity, the living and the dead of a given matriclan belong to the same category of being. As suggested in the first two sections of this chapter, the core aspect of personhood (*kokolo* identity) does not alter at death, but is accentuated as other relational proximities are removed. Rather than involving a transformation from one category of ‘being’ to another - from a living human to a deceased, tomb-bound ancestor, say (Astuti 1994, 1995), or from a human to demonic mode of existence (Stasch 2009: 218, 251) - in West Gao, death involves a transformation from a state of inter-category entanglement to a state of categorical purity. In the case of deaths occurring in old age, this transition (pre-empted both by the dying and the living) happens more smoothly. In the case of sudden or untimely deaths, however, both the living and the deceased must be encouraged to undergo this transition. It is the dialectic of commemoration and forgetting undertaken during an elaborate *ghat’hofapulo* ceremony - involving the performance of the multiple relationships in which the deceased was entangled - that achieves this transition. As suggested above with reference to the Vezo of Madagascar, complete social segregation of the dead and the living is the desired outcome of the ‘work’ of mourning, even if the dead and the living are momentarily ‘reunited’ during specific rituals in order to achieve this aim (Astuti 1994: 121, 1995: 151-152; see also Stasch 2009: 230). By contrast, during the *ghat’hofapulo* ceremony, the deceased is presented with a plethora of social relationships to encourage him or her to retain only some of them, namely those in an intra-category register. *Ghat’hofapulo* thus achieves what in cases of timely deaths occurs ‘automatically’: relationships between the living and the dead are, through the work of ritual, actively reduced to a single strand.

Upon the completion of the *ghat'hofapulo* ceremony, in cases of both untimely and anticipated deaths, an elaborate final ceremony called *simedē* must be performed, during which a cement structure is built over the grave.²⁴⁹ To my knowledge, *ghat'hofapulo* ceremonies are not performed for new born infants in West Gao. Their graves, however, are always cemented. This raises two distinct, yet interrelated, points. Firstly, the lack of *ghat'hofapulo* in cases of infant death reinforces my argument that these memorial ceremonies encourage the deceased to curtail the scope of their social relationships in order to achieve the transition into ancestorhood. Akin to elderly persons who confront their own death in life by transmitting ancestral knowledge, infants do not need to be encouraged to make this transition because they never became entangled in multiple relationships. Constituted only by the core aspect of personhood - *kokolo* identity - for infants a return to that essence through death is not really a painful return at all. Secondly, the fact that the graves of infants are always cemented suggests that this aspect of the mortuary sequence is related to a problem raised by death that *ghat'hofapulo* leaves unaddressed. If this problem pivoted upon the opposition between individual death and the coherence of 'society,' the death of children should, according to Hertz's ([1960] 2004: 83) seminal argument, provoke a 'weak' and 'instantaneously completed' social response. Given that the deaths of infants elicit a strong and time-consuming ritual response in the form of a cementing ceremony, I suggest that this aspect of the mortuary sequence in West Gao reconciles a different opposition to that identified by Hertz. The deaths of both infants and adults (sudden and anticipated) are alike in that they confront the living with a potentially chaotic return to categorical isolation, a state that is inimical to the forging of cross-category relationships upon which 'peaceful existence' (*au taglosa*, SIP, *stap kuaet*) depends. In the final section of this chapter, I argue that the cementing ceremony is ultimately about emphasising and extending categorical entanglements in the face of death.

7.4: Cementing the grave

²⁴⁹ *Simedē* is derived from the Solomon Islands Pijin word *simen*, from the English word cement (Jourdan 2002: 210)

Cementing the grave is described as “the last work that children have to do for their parents” (cf. Astuti 1995: 123). Crucially, in this description it appears that the deceased is honoured as a parent, whilst the children play a crucial role in this ritual alongside members of the deceased’s *kokolo*. Inter-*kokolo* collaboration is a key feature of the lengthy and expansive preparations for the *simede* that begin approximately a year before the event. During my walks through the bush, people would frequently identify huge gardens as “for the *simede*” of a particular person. I was involved in the cultivation of two such gardens (one of sweet potato, the other taro) in the lead up to two different *simede*. In both cases, the brushing, cultivation, planting, weeding and harvesting involved cooperation between affinal and consanguinal relatives of the deceased, known collectively as the ‘workers’. The large gardens are divided into smaller plots (*hmala*), which the organiser of the garden (upon whose land it is cultivated) allocates to female relatives who want to cultivate them. These plots were made available to them for two or three plantings following the communal harvest for the *simede*. Thereafter, the garden reverts to the land holder. Continued planting of the *hmala* thus extends the cooperative relations between both affinal and consanguineal relatives of the deceased (members of different *kokolo*) beyond the event of the *simede*. Mirroring the situation reported for mortuary rituals elsewhere in Melanesia (Weiner 1978: 161, 181) and in the western Solomon Islands (McDougall 2004: 250-251), Gao speakers utilise the work involved in completing the mortuary sequence to celebrate and extend cooperative relations between the different matrilineal descent groups affected by a particular death.

Despite this overt enactment of inter-*kokolo* cooperation between the ‘workers’, essential divisions that obtain between people of different *kokolo* nevertheless structure the exchanges of labour and food that form an integral part of the event (see appendix C). After the completion of one *simede*, members of the deceased’s *kokolo* were quick to criticise, albeit in private, the actions of the children of the deceased (people who, despite close kinship ties, were nevertheless of a different *kokolo* to those making the complaints). Such complaints emphasised the difference between persons with reference to relationships central to *kokolo* identity, namely, siblingship and the cross-cousin relationship. For example, one woman commented: “I am

unhappy with the children of my brother.” In response to the same event, I was told that a different person was “angered by the actions of her *fakahrai*.” These complaints were made because, in the days prior to the feast, key contributions by members of the *kokolo* of the deceased had not been sufficiently recognised with a large return gift.²⁵⁰ This criticism was followed up with a description of a different *simede* that served to illustrate how things should be done. I was told with pride how enough fish had been provided for all households throughout the surrounding hamlets in the week before the feast to ensure that they had enough to eat for themselves, as well as that required for the feasting. Furthermore, the man who had orchestrated this fishing (a member of a different *kokolo* from the deceased) - despite his protestations that the deceased was his “brother” and thus he wanted to “help” - had received sweet potato, rice, and a carton of noodles in recognition of his effort. To summarise, in the case of the complaints, children of the deceased had failed to compensate the key contributions of members of the deceased’s *kokolo*. When the description of the successful *simede* was given, the over-compensation of contributors belonging to a different *kokolo* to the deceased had been achieved. Therefore, the successful enactment of overt cooperation between the ‘workers’, which has the aesthetic effect of blurring *kokolo*-based distinctions, is in fact achieved by the successful recognition of such distinctions by those orchestrating the event. In the final analysis, however, such tensions reveal that everybody who works for the dead during the mortuary sequence must be compensated for their efforts. This point is central to the analysis undertaken here because it allows the final feast to be directed at the community as a whole.

The formal blessing of the cemented grave takes place three days after the cementing process. After the gravesite ceremony (see appendix C) the ‘workers’ return to their kitchen houses and begin cooking for the final feast, which is held in a central location within the village. The ‘workers’ serve the food to the relatives, non-relatives and important community members who, whilst not themselves ‘workers’, nevertheless attended the morning Eucharist and blessing (*fablahi*) ritual at the graveside. The ‘workers’ are able to feed these other guests because they have already held their own feast on the day of the cementing of the grave (see appendix C),

²⁵⁰ Such oversight was described as “not understanding *kastom*.”

and, as we have seen, have been compensated for their ‘work’ with gifts of uncooked food by those orchestrating the proceedings. As the community eats, chiefs make speeches that link the life of the deceased to community concerns. In one case, a chief highlighted that the community had lost a ‘peacemaker,’ comparing the behaviour of the deceased to two other West Gao persons – one living and the other also deceased - who had shared this quality. Another chief praised the deceased for the smart clothes he always wore when attending church, and went on to chastise other men in the community for not making such efforts when attending Holy Communion. Other speeches remind the community of the correct way to behave: to work together (*loku faudu*); live together in peace (*au faudu ka taglosa*); and not divide people up according to their origins, or past mistakes (*ovi a’ahé*).

As we have seen, the entire mortuary sequence proceeds by way of cooperation between the affinal and consanguinal relatives of the deceased. Even if *kokolo* identity continues to structure particular exchanges, the work of mourning does not overtly emphasise categorical differences between persons. This facilitates a situation in which community-wide appeals to enact ‘togetherness’ can be asserted during the final feast. If the mortuary ceremonies enacted the strict division of community according to matrilineal difference, as is widely reported in analyses of mortuary sequences in the matrilineal Massim region of PNG (Fortune 1963; Thune 1989; Makintyre 1989), such assertions of ‘togetherness’ would become intensely problematic to uphold. In publicly highlighting the importance of ‘togetherness’ and ‘peaceful existence’ - central to the enactment of unity among the living - at the very moment in which the final ‘work’ for the deceased has been completed, the mortuary sequence in West Gao recalls Bloch and Parry’s (1982: 26-27) analysis of death rituals as a mechanism by which the ‘ideal order’ is constructed out of the vicissitudes of death and decay. In West Gao, however, this tension is transposed into a commentary upon the ‘ideal’ (or utopic) purity of intra-*kokolo* relationships and the existential (and political) necessity of maintaining inter-*kokolo* entanglements. This dynamic is not, however, equivalent to a distinction between two domains corresponding to the ideological and the everyday (Bloch and Parry 1982: 38). Rather, it is a socio-cosmic dynamic

that is part of the fabric of the lived-world of Gao speakers. I now explore how this dynamic is rendered inherent to the grave itself.

The *simede* ceremony is an Anglican innovation particular to Santa Isabel. The priest I interviewed about the blessing (*fablahi*) undertaken at the gravesite explained that the Diocese had not formalised the structure of the graveside service or the blessing itself. The words uttered during the blessing were idiosyncratic, generated by the priest himself and contingent upon his particular knowledge of Christian texts and liturgy.²⁵¹ When I asked about the origin of *simede* he responded: “children nowadays see this ceremony and think it started a long time ago, but it is a new thing, it all started when white-men brought a new material [cement].” In West Gao, and elsewhere in Santa Isabel (White 1978: 119), ancestral shrines (*phadaghi*) are constructed from stones. As we saw in our analysis of the cosmological process of *juruku* in chapter 4, stone is a crucial material in other contexts because it makes ancestral potency immanent to contemporary contexts. Cement is a ‘new’ stone-like material, which, during the three-stage blessing ritual, is transformed into a *Christian* stone-like material as it is imbued with Christian *mana* through the process of Christian blessing (*fablahi*).

The time delay between the initial burial and the cementing of the grave, alongside the overt similarities between the burial service and the blessing ceremony (see appendix C), suggest that *simede* is a kind of secondary burial (cf. Lannoy 2005: 310). However, when *simede* is compared to pre-Christian burial practices, the differences are as crucial as the similarities for understanding its cosmological significance. According to ethnographers of Santa Isabel only particular persons had their corpses ritually prepared for instalment in ancestral shrines (*phadaghi*), namely chiefs and warriors who were powerful in life and perceived to retain their powers after death (White 1978: 118-119; Bogesi 1948: 327). Propitiation at these shrines was organised according to ‘uterine descent’ and involved the leaving of food offerings (White 1978: 119) through which the ancestors were called upon for protection and strength in raiding

²⁵¹ Unfortunately did not transcribe these words directly. After the interview, however, this priest said that my interest in the ceremony had given him the courage to raise the issue of formalising the blessing at the next Diocesan synod.

(Bogesi 1948: 328). Indeed, during fieldwork, extant pre-Christian shrines were located on the territories that were shaped by the same ancestors whose skulls are housed in the shrine. As I discovered during my own visit to see the skulls of dead ancestors, an escort is required. This person, a direct matrilineal descendant who therefore shares *kokolo* identity with the enshrined ancestors, utters a warning that an unfamiliar visitor is approaching. More generally, such sites are usually avoided by everybody except direct matrilineal descendants of the ancestors located there (figure 22; see also White 1978: 119-120).



Figure 22 an ancestral shrine - *phadaghi*. West Gao, October 2011.

In direct contrast to the practices surrounding pre-Christian secondary burial, every person in West Gao has their grave cemented rather than simply a select few. Furthermore, in contrast to the trepidation with which West Gao residents approach extant *phadaghi*, Christian graves are treated with respect and are actively attended to, rather than avoided. As we saw in chapter 1, villagers continue to look after the cemented graves of their dead relatives. Such acts, often intensifying during Lent season as part of the weekly ‘penance’ duties, involve clearing

vegetation and tidying the graveyard. In one case, a West Gao family sang hymns at the graveside on the anniversary of a deceased relative's death. Outside of such public contexts Gao speakers sought out the grave of a deceased relative to perform a particular *fanitu* which the deceased person transmitted (*fakhakasa*) to them whilst living. In the case of Jason, whom we met in chapter 5, this involved the enactment of a *kilo* ritual. In two other cases, one of the *fanitu* involved a manipulation of the weather in order to ensure calm sea prior to fishing trips or travel to important Church events. The other *fanitu* involved a particular technique to ensure a large catch of specified fish prior to undertaking a deep-sea fishing trip.

In all these cases the people involved stated that their techniques were efficacious because they stood on the grave of the deceased person who had originally transmitted the techniques to them. The *mana* or efficacy of different *fanitu* was enhanced by establishing a connection to the deceased. That this takes place on a grave imbued with Christian *mana* via the process of *fablahi* suggests that this kind of 'activated' presence of the deceased Christian ancestor is bracketed and enhanced by the agency of the Christian God. During the *simedē*, Christian ritual is being used to secure a productive kind of presence for the dead. *Simedē* is, therefore, a denominationally and historically specific *solution* to what Cannell (1999: 162) has called, in a different Christian context, 'the problem of achieving a correct separation' between the living and the dead. Not unlike pre-Christian ancestral shrines where the *mana* of the dead could be channelled for the success in the activities of the living, the blessed, cemented grave comprises, albeit in very particular circumstances, a mode of on-going connection to the agency of the deceased that is used to secure success in community endeavours. However, unlike pre-Christian ancestral shrines, the Christian grave is a sacred monument that is accessible to all relatives of the deceased, not simply those belonging to the *kokolo* of the deceased. Indeed, in the case of the *fanitu* that secured a large catch of fish, the relationship between the living and the deceased was father and son - persons belonging to different matriclans.

In this chapter I have repeatedly evidenced that *kokolo* identity is carried forward into post-mortem existence. In connecting to their deceased forbears, either in areas of the landscape or at

the gravesite, matrilineal descendants can reinforce their on-going connections to particular localities through the mediation of ancestral agents who have undergone Christian burial. In many ways, therefore, the practices surrounding death, much like the property transfer that occurs during *fangamu taego*, are topogonic acts that - quite literally – ‘ground’ categorical differences between persons. However, persons can also be buried away from their matrilineal land. Thus, as we saw in the case of the Bugotu settlement, the grave of the Big Man was central to his son’s mediated connection to the land on which he currently lived. Furthermore, the cemented grave is a literal sedimentation of cross-category relationships, insofar as the children (and other persons belonging to a different *kokolo* to the deceased) work alongside members of the deceased’s *kokolo* to facilitate and fund the construction of the grave. Such persons can also ‘approach’ the deceased at the gravesite during the enactment of certain *fanitu*. In sum, I suggest that the cemented grave is a ‘dual-axis’ monument to the deceased: it allows the dead to continue to be, as they were in life, a locus of both intra-category relationships and cross-category entanglements (see figure 23).

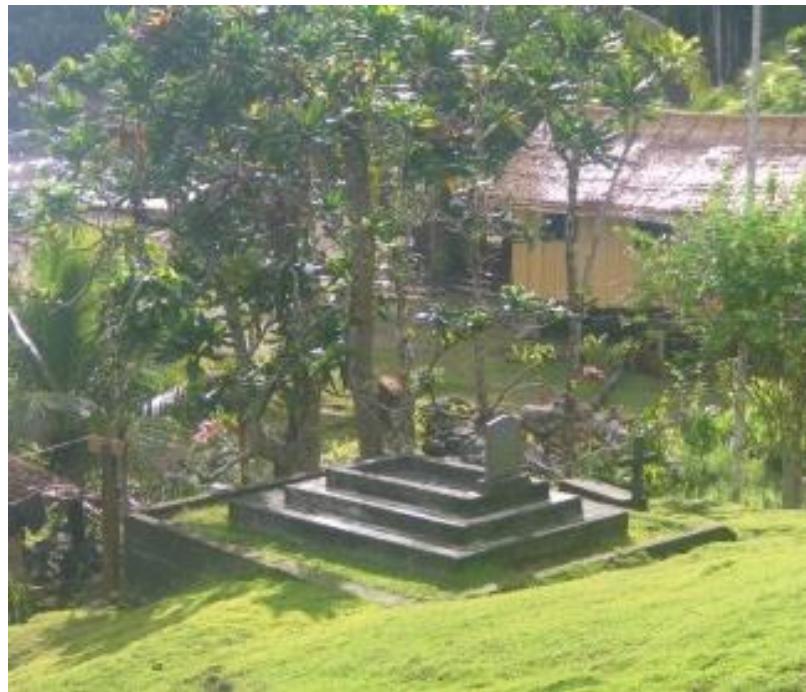


Figure 23 a cemented grave, located in the centre of Ghurumei, October 2011.

This wholly Christian form of ‘secondary burial’ thus obscures what pre-Christian practices of secondary burial actively achieved, namely the categorical isolation of the deceased as a *kokolo*

ancestor accessible to only to his matrilineal descendants. In the previous section I suggested that the cementing ritual, because it was performed for both infants and adults alike, reconciled a particular problem raised by death for West Gao inhabitants. Death is the moment at which essential differences between persons come most clearly to the fore. It is also, therefore, a moment in which inter-category relationships are most threatened. The *simede* ritual resolves this problem in two ways. Firstly, it requires that West Gao residents successfully enact inter-category relations as they work to create the cemented structure on the grave. Secondly, upon the completion of the final blessing ceremony (*fablahi*), *simede* facilitates the enactment of *both* intra *and* inter-category relations between the living and the dead at the grave site.

In this chapter I have argued that *kokolo* identity is at the forefront of Gao speakers' minds in the way they approach their own deaths, theorise about post-mortem existence, and engage with deceased persons in the landscape. In light of this ethnography, I argued that the first stages of the mortuary ceremony 'work' to encourage the deceased to undergo a transformation from a state of cross-category entanglement into a state of categorical singularity as a *kokolo* ancestor. In the final section, I argued that the last stage of the mortuary ritual - the *simede* ceremony - is undertaken to counter-balance the return to categorical singularity of the deceased by emphasising inter-category relationships among the living. The balancing of both intra and inter-*kokolo* relationships is materially achieved through the construction of a 'dual-axis' monument to the deceased.

Simede's overtly Christian aspects are no accident of history, but emerge from the dialectic relationship between history and the deepest stratum of ontology. As stressed throughout this thesis, Anglican Christianity, with its emphasis on pan-human unity, is consonant with the first order burden placed on praxis by the poly-ontological nature of West Gao cosmology. Forging cross-category relationships is a synthetic mode of praxis, ultimately producing an encompassing moral whole out of essential differences between persons. The construction of the cemented grave and the final Christian blessing ensure that such synthetic relationships can be

articulated at a ritual site (the grave) which, without such ritual intervention might, in a similar manner to pre-Christian burial sites, be nodes in the enactment of purely intra-category relationships.

However, as illustrated in the opening vignette, selfish acts that threaten the vitality of inter-category relationships can lead to an abrupt swinging of the scale. Intra-category relationships are violently asserted and the body of the deceased is reclaimed according to his or her categorically-singular *kokolo* identity. If the angered *kokolo* relative of the deceased had carried out his threat, the cemented structure would have certainly been destroyed in the process. From this perspective the elaborate cemented grave appears as a fragile shroud, masking the more uncomfortable *reality* that the bones it contains index the singular categorical identity of the deceased as an ancestor to whom only certain persons can lay claim. In the final analysis, practices surrounding mortality and burial encapsulate the argument, stated in the introduction to this thesis, that the balance between inter and intra-category relationships in West Gao is in no way fixed, but shifts in response to particular historical circumstances. In the remaining pages of this thesis I offer some further observations in this regard in order to draw my argument to a close.

Conclusion Fractured Futures?

Kokolo is eternal, it goes on without end. What we worry about are matrilineages.

—Chief Zephinaea, West Gao resident, February 2012.

During a conversation with a young West Gao chief (a man in his mid-thirties whom I shall name Jacob) about the ritual techniques (*fanitu*) that he had received from a deceased relative, he explained that one such technique involved the construction of an object out of two sticks taken from a particular tree and tied together with the midrib of a coconut palm. This object, when buried in the sand at a particular point on the coastline, would cause the sea level to rise, consuming (SIP, *kaekaem* - literally, eating) the land up to where the object was buried.²⁵² Jacob explained that if people in his community decided to dispute the area of land on which he currently resided, he would use his *fanitu*, thereby removing the ‘disputed’ land right out from under the feet of those who sought to (illegitimately) claim it as their own. He added that he probably would not pass on the knowledge of this *fanitu* to upcoming generations because manipulating the tides in this way could have devastating consequences in some unnamed location far away from West Gao. Jacob associated such concerns with what he termed “climate change”.

In this vignette the destructive force of a land dispute is countered by the destruction of the land itself. This destructive symmetry is a particular manifestation of the overarching claim of this thesis, namely, that the unifying social relationships which constitute communal existence are predicated upon more essential unities of particular persons and their ancestral territories. To threaten the former is to provoke an active assertion of the latter. However, the reference to climate change indicates that whatever the intricacies of socio-spatial existence in West Gao, such micro-concerns are articulated with reference to an imagined future. Although I did not press Jacob about the subject of climate change itself, his remark resonates with other comments

²⁵² The chief also possessed a *fanitu* to reverse this process, to make the sand-beach expand and the sea recede.

made by Gao speakers regarding a potentially volatile future world, one in which global forces and the attitudes of the upcoming generation share an aura of unpredictability.

At the ‘deepest level of ontology’ (Scott 2007b: 23), the West Gao lived world is based in *a priori* difference between discrete categories of being. In each of these categories - three matriclans known respectively as *kokolo* - substances (blood and land), persons (both human and ancestral), and genres of knowledge (origin myths - *pagusu*, genealogies - *susurai*, ritual techniques - *fanitu*) congeal to form a unique ‘matrilineal identity’. Taken together, these categories comprise a triadic plurality of ‘substantive essences’ (Descola 2013: 163) the existence of which renders the West Gao lived world poly-ontological. Building upon Michael Scott’s (2007b: 13) argument that a poly-ontological cosmology impinges upon praxis in particular ways, I have deployed a terminological distinction between inter-category relations and intra-category relations, and stated that socio-cosmic reproduction in West Gao is based on maintaining a balance between them.

The use of this terminology allowed me to extend my analysis beyond the three themes of matrilineality, place-making, and Christianity, which form the ethnographic backbone of Scott’s work and adopt a more holistic perspective by tracing the life cycle of Gao speakers - from birth, to marriage, and finally to death. Such a move, whilst ethnographically motivated, illustrates the productivity of combining Scott’s notion of poly-ontology with analytical themes that are more familiar to Melanesian ethnography, such as personhood and exchange. This approach was consolidated in chapters 6 and 7, in which I explored how Gao speakers achieve a balance between two opposed forms of relationality to great effect during two large-scale ritualised exchange events.

Whatever the theoretical merits or shortfalls entailed in such an attempt, the ease with which Chief Jacob was able to scale-switch with regard to the cosmological scope of the relationships within which he was embedded, is a stark reminder that the relational co-ordinates of the West Gao lived world have already exceeded (both spatially and temporally) the parameters placed

upon them by my analysis. In this conclusion I highlight some crucial ethnographic sub-plots that render the poly-ontological cosmology I have depicted as ultimately open to transformation.

If Chief Jacob's narrative achieved a 'zooming-out' of perspective that resulted in a widening of the cosmological 'frame' (Abramson and Holbraad 2014), the comment of Chief Zephinaea with which I have opened this conclusion 'zooms-in' with exactly the opposite effect. The juxtaposition of eternal matriclans with worrisome matrilineages achieves a narrowing of the socio-cosmological focus by marking a tension with regard to the 'level' at which Gao speakers articulate their relationships to the places they call home. Matrilineages (sng. *t'hi'a*) are the units that control particular tracts of land, even if they are perceived to be part of a larger dispersed territory associated with a *kokolo*. However, these dispersed *kokolo* territories have yet to be formally registered by the Gao House of Chiefs. This has led to a state of uncertainty with regard to exactly how the 'parts' (matrilineage-controlled territories) join together to form a 'whole' matriclan territory. Adding to such socio-spatial politics is the fundamental point that a lack of female children can amount to the extinction of a matrilineage, leaving the territory it controls 'vacant', and therefore open to the transformative interactions of other people (see also Scott 2007b: 227). Consequently, West Gao residents "worry" about ensuring that the land controlled by their matrilineage continues to be inhabited by their direct descendants (the children of the women of that matrilineage). Chief Zephinaea's comment signals the importance of temporality for understanding such concerns. It encourages me to ask, what are the future trajectories of the descent-based land-person unities - matriclan (*kokolo*) and matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) - in West Gao? To address this question, I now explore an emerging tendency among certain Gao speakers to distrust pan-*kokolo* 'oneness' in the context of land-person relationships.

Whilst sorcery attack continued to threaten Gao speakers' relationships to their ancestral territories during fieldwork, a newer threat was becoming visible. Fears regarding loss of control over ancestral land were frequently voiced in terms of unnamed 'others' who "stole stories" in order to "cover" a person's connections to land by extracting and manipulating

details of ancestral histories (*pagusu*) and genealogies (*susurai*). One research participant expressed this phenomenon emphatically. Pointing to a vine that grew up and smothered a nearby orange tree (*moli*) until its trunk/branches were completely covered and its growth stifled, he explained that this was how some people sought to smother a person's organic connection to their land. Through the illicit extraction of narratives and genealogical information such persons systematically 'covered over' the landowners' knowledge until, in the words of my research participant, they "cannot breathe" (SIP, *no save brid*). Referring to a land dispute that had occurred during my fieldwork, the man signalled to me that this was exactly what one of the disputants was attempting to do to his opponent. He stated that the community would not let it happen because many people were able to understand the court case as part of a wider project to appropriate a tract of ancestral land illegitimately. The fact that the court case had occurred at all however, left open the possibility that a lack of such widely held agreement could engender a situation in which the 'life' of a legitimate owner was smothered and extinguished as their ancestral lands were taken over by the expansive and extractive desires of their opponent (cf. Scott 2007b: 234). It is significant that this particular dispute concerned two persons belonging to the same matriclan or *kokolo*.

The threatening possibilities raised by the illegitimate appropriation of land are, of course, enhanced by the emerging value of land as a source of monetary wealth. Thus far, West Gao District has yet to confront resource extraction in the form of logging, which has been undertaken in the past in various parts of Santa Isabel, and nickel mining, which continues to be negotiated in other parts of the island (Regan 2014).²⁵³ Nevertheless, land as the basis for economic development in terms of starting trade-stores and eco-homestays for tourists was a possibility often discussed by my research participants. Increased competition over land as the most valuable economic resource in West Gao is leading to heightened emphasis being placed on land 'ownership.' In turn, discursive silences upheld between members of one *kokolo* are

²⁵³ An area just over the south eastern border of West Gao District (Raja) was logged in 2008-2009. The project was originally going to extend well into the forests behind Poro Village. However, local opposition caused the licence to be revoked. One resident told me that that if the logging had gone ahead as initially planned, the landscape of West Gao would have been "SIP, *spoel finis*" (completely ruined).

becoming an endemic feature of discourses surrounding land. In certain contexts, such as the court case discussed above, this is pitching members of different matrilineages (sng. *t'hi'a*) belonging to the same *kokolo* against one another. Such processes are also traceable as fathers look to protect the property rights of their sons, as the following case will illustrate.

In April 2012, one West Gao resident, whom I shall name Lotu, explained how the sons of a woman of a different matrilineage (*t'hi'a*) to his own, but belonging to the same *kokolo*, had recently approached him asking to exchange their ancestral histories (*pagusu*). “We are one,” they told him, “so tell us what you know.” Lotu refused the request, explaining to the men: “You want to take my stories now, but when I am dead your children will seek to chase away my children, my family, away from my land.” The children Lotu refers to are his own children, who lack inalienable relationships to his matrilineal territory. His concern about their future residential security is linked to an uncertainty with regard to the behaviours of the upcoming generation of members of his own *kokolo* who will assume control of his ancestral land in the future. Such persons may not be trusted to uphold the ethical relations of invitation and incorporation of ‘other people,’ which as we have seen, amount to appropriate ethical behaviours of ‘true’ landowners of a given place. In light of such uncertainty, Lotu modifies his actions with regard to members of his own *kokolo* - persons whom are ‘one’ with him - in the present.

Young persons are themselves aware of the volatility of land-person relationships at home. During an interview with Ma’ane Iho, a middle-aged man with a large repertoire of *kastom* knowledge, whom we met in chapter 3, I was told that he had been recently approached by his young ‘uncle’ (*nebu*, nephew or ZS; SIP, *ago*) who was currently at university in Fiji. The young man had asked Ma’ane Iho if they (his matrilineage) were going to remain “sitting quietly” whilst others sought to “do them harm” (SIP, *spoelem*) by illegitimately seeking to appropriate Ma’ane Iho’s ancestral territory. ‘*Spoelem*’ is a pijin term sometimes used to

describe sorcery attack, indicating that such processes amount to a threat akin to sorcery. This possibility is supported by the commentary given above that emphasised the ‘life-sapping’ effect of the misappropriation of ancestral histories by those wishing to illegitimately claim land. However, this emerging topography of power includes court cases, notebooks with elaborate genealogies, and educational capital, as its crucial vectors of influence, rather than the potent materials of one’s ancestors. Furthermore, navigating such terrain will become the responsibility of future generations characterised as possessing unpredictable ethical dispositions.

The behaviour of young persons in West Gao often became the focus of commentaries by prominent community figures such as chiefs, priests and member of the Mothers’ Union.²⁵⁴ Between 2010 and 2012 alcohol consumption was on the rise throughout West Gao and was certainly not restricted to young persons. Nevertheless, concerns were often voiced about the behaviour of young persons who spent time staying with relatives in Honiara, and also during the various night-time discos that were organised throughout West Gao to mark key holidays, life cycle events and, occasionally, as part of fundraisers. The consumption of alcohol - both in Honiara and at ‘home’ - by the youth was a key cause for concern, particularly because drunken behaviour often led to arguments, fighting and pre-marital sex. Such behaviour was seen as ethically suspect by the majority of older members of West Gao communities. Although certain persons expressed the view that drinking alcohol was not an anti-Christian act in itself, drinking in excess and behaving inappropriately as a result, was universally condemned.²⁵⁵ Furthermore, as we saw with the case of Jason (introduced in chapter 5), his youthful interest in attending village discos rendered him reluctant (*t’ho’a, SIP, les*) to learn about his ancestral histories from

²⁵⁴ In certain communities in West Gao, the ‘Youth’ had organised themselves into a coherent body that generated its own funds by undertaking community labour or local fundraising. These funds would be utilised to organise particular excursions during which they would visit other communities in West Gao and beyond to sing and perform Christian ‘choruses’ or *kastom* dance patterns. Youth groups also performed during community events such as the ‘Day Church’ celebrations, community feasts at Christmas and Easter, and when important persons visited the community.

²⁵⁵ Young, unmarried, women in particular were heavily criticised if they were suspected of drinking alcohol. The social problems surrounding alcohol consumption in West Gao - across all sectors of society - are certainly worthy of further research.

his maternal grandfather. In sum, there were certainly concerns in West Gao that the behaviour of young people signalled that established modes of ethical action were disintegrating.

Other domains of experience indicate further transformative possibilities that typify young persons' behaviour. After returning from a visit to one of the villages located on the southern periphery of West Gao, I approached my adoptive mother Rosita with a question. I had spent the afternoon with a man in his late-twenties who had proudly described his elopement with a woman belonging to his own *kokolo*. Upon their arrival in his home village he had succeeded in deflecting the anger - by non-violent means - of her family. Consequently, even though the union flouted the rule of *kokolo* exogamy, the couple had married and were living happily with one child.²⁵⁶ My question regarded the *fangamu taego* feast, which as we have seen, is central to the life cycle of West Gao families. How, I asked Rosita, could the feast be performed if only one *kokolo* could participate? Her answer was swift and assured. Of course the feast could go ahead. When I looked puzzled she explained that many people in West Gao would simply highlight that the married couple belonged to "different matrilineages" - *soasopa t'hi'a*.

If this married couple did eventually undertake a *fangamu taego* feast, the fundamental opposition would be that between the affinal relatives belonging to two territorially discrete matrilineages. In the case of property transfers, the transacting units would be, as is the case with conventional *fangamu taego*, the matrilineage of the father. During *fangamu taego* as it was performed during fieldwork, this transaction was encompassed by an inter-category relationship between the two participating *kokolo*. In its present form, the feast enacts a synthetic movement emphasising cooperation. However, in the case of my mother's posited intra-*kokolo* *fangamu taego*, the presence of only one *kokolo* would render the exchanges

²⁵⁶ I knew of one other intra-*kokolo* marriage in West Gao during fieldwork. This union was causing intense and painful conflict between the families concerned, even though a child had already been born to the couple. However, the argument laid out in chapter 5 with regard to the dangerous potency of incest in West Gao, and the condition of marrying close (but not too close) epitomized in the institution of cross-cousin (*fakahrai*) marriage, suggests that tensions surrounding intra-*kokolo* unions are not simply a new phenomenon, but are laden with longstanding cosmological significance.

analytic in nature. That is, they would be fracturing a pre-existing whole into its constituent parts. If such feasts proceeded successfully (as my mother seemed certain they would) the original ‘problem’ posed by the endogamous union would be replaced by a relation of ‘difference’ articulated at the level of matrilineage rather than *kokolo*. This possibility assumes heightened importance in a context where the given ‘oneness’ of a *kokolo* is already being replaced by relationships based on distrust, secrecy, and competition. Future generations may begin to emphasise difference where their parents and grandparents saw only similarity. Acting on such perceptions through actual marriages would operate to consolidate such differences for the children born from this type of union. In sum, Rosita’s statement points to a potential future in which ontological unity, currently emphasised at the categorical level of *kokolo*, could be broken apart as difference becomes ‘essentialised’ at the level of matrilineage, or *t’hi’ā*.

If this transformation did occur in West Gao, it would not bring about a fundamental alteration in the poly-ontological cosmology. Rather, the articulation of essential difference at the level of matrilineage rather than *kokolo* would amount to a change in the ‘nature and scale’ of the ‘constitutive monads’ (Scott 2014b: 44) that make up West Gao poly-ontology. In the reconfiguration of a poly-ontological cosmology in Makira recently analysed by Michael Scott (2014b: 44), ‘a plurality of monadic matrilineally defined categories’ is being replaced by a ‘plurality of monadic insular categories.’ In the case of West Gao, there is potential for an ‘intensive’ shift in the opposite direction as a triadic-plurality of matrilineally defined, pan-insular categories (*kokolo*), threaten to fracture into a post-triadic multiplicity of more localised matrilineally defined categories (*t’hi’ā*). Such a shift would, in direct contrast to the emergent pan-island identity that is currently the focus of ‘ontology politics’ on Makira (Scott 2011, 2014b), result in the breaking apart of pan-island identity on Santa Isabel. To explore why this is the case, I return to relationships of complementarity between Christianity and the ontological structuring of cosmology in West Gao.

By arguing that the three *kokolo* in West Gao may be ‘fracturing’, I am not seeking to impart some untouched ‘holism’ (Abramson and Holbraad 2014) to West Gao ‘cosmology’, as if the latter were somehow being ‘eroded’ by history, or political economy. The current ontological configuration of West Gao cosmology has itself emerged from the historical articulation of Christianity and a descent-based, poly-ontological cosmology. Drawing from ethnographic and historical data, I have argued that certain agents of the Anglican Church on Santa Isabel may have actively intervened in the existing system of matrilineal descent by encouraging emphasis on pan-island relationships operant at the level of three ‘primary’ matriclans. Whilst I emphasised that such pan-island relationships between three ‘primary’ matriclans pre-existed missionary interventions and were not ‘created’ out of thin air, I drew attention to the Church’s apparent interest in maintaining and controlling the level at which matrilineal ‘difference’ was articulated. Controlled categorical difference, it appears, was encouraged in order to secure the development of the Santa Isabel Church.

The productive alignment between existing poly-ontological cosmologies and Christianity is supported by other ethnographers of Island Melanesia. Following the lead of Scott (2005b: 108, 110, 2007b: 267, 317), Rio and Eriksen (2014: 67) have reported that fundamentally ‘pluralist cosmologies’ (poly-ontologies in Scott’s terms) such as that of Ambrym, Vanuatu, are ‘open’ to intellectual projects that seek, via Biblical knowledge and nationalist discourses, to create a ‘unitarian narrative.’ Such projects take place at the level of ethical and social practice, leaving deeper ontological premises untouched (Rio and Eriksen 2014: 66; see also Scott 2005b: 107, 110, 2007b: 259, 319). As suggested in chapters 2 and 6 of this thesis, the ‘synthetic’ nature of forging inter-category relationships through exogamous marriage is a project that corresponds practically and ethically to the Christian emphasis upon pan-human unity. However, Scott (2005b: 115, 117, 2007b: 266-267) has argued that latent tensions between poly-ontological cosmologies and the mono-ontological nature of Christian cosmology inevitably lie behind such practical and ethical alignments. By contrast, current ontology politics in West Gao leave open the possibility that Christian cosmology (the three-in-one doctrine of the Trinity) and a poly-

ontological cosmology (the three-in-one moral whole of West Gao, and by extension, Santa Isabel) can be complementary at the deepest level of ontology. I have emphasised throughout this thesis that a cosmogonic notion of processual autochthony lends itself to productive synthesis with Christian cosmogony. This is so because narratives of ancestral arrival leave room for a notion of the ultimate creation of a pre-existing landmass by the Christian divinity, even as the ancestors themselves became enfolded within, and had a formative effect upon, that landscape. In short, the landscape of West Gao (and by extension Santa Isabel as a whole) can be posited as of God and of the ancestors simultaneously. Moreover, it will be recalled that one Gao speaker attempted to connect the triadic structure of the matriclan system to the Christian doctrine of the Trinity. The prospective reconfiguration, described above, of the existing ontological structure of West Gao cosmology from a triadic plurality to a plurality made up of multiple smaller matrilineal units, may be rendering such potential ‘deep’ alignments between Christianity and a triadic poly-ontology increasingly compelling to Gao speakers.

To elaborate, agents of the Anglican Church actively sought to stem what it saw as a potential proliferation of totemic difference at the level of ‘sub-clan’ or matrilineage in the establishment of the island-wide Santa Isabel Church. Consequently, the political-economic processes that I have described above may actually be revitalising a potential that was already present within the poly-ontological cosmology described in the previous chapters.²⁵⁷ However, the vitality of the Santa Isabel Anglican Church is itself predicated upon an island-wide notion of a ‘three-in-one-moral whole’ constituted by the existence of three ‘primary’ matriclans. Therefore, the emergence of a post-triadic, anti-Christian poly-ontology consisting of multiple ‘wholes’ that can no longer be easily synthesised into a higher-order totality would, I suggest, severely threaten the unifying status of Anglican Christianity on the island.²⁵⁸ In the face of such a threat, comments regarding the ‘eternal’ status of the three *kokolo*, and the Trinity-like features of the

²⁵⁷ See Scott (2007b: 227) for an analogous point made with regard to the ‘heterotopic constructions’ undertaken by matrilineages in the Arosi landscape which, whilst exacerbated by colonial processes, may have already been a feature of Arosi poly-ontological cosmology prior to the onset of colonialism.

²⁵⁸ Perhaps this is what Sir Dudley Tuti sought to highlight by stating in 1975, that land ‘divides people’ (White 1991: 235)

current matriclan system in West Gao, assume heightened significance. The potential shift in the nature and scale of the monads that make up West Gao poly-ontology, whilst an inherent possibility of the system itself, may encourage counter-movements that attempt to block such transformations. Such efforts might seek to emphasise the divine status of the triadic structure of the current descent-based poly-ontology.²⁵⁹ Whilst speculative, this possibility points to the dynamic nature of the relationship between historically embedded praxis and ontology.

To return to the exchange between Ma'ane Iho and his nephew introduced above, the latter's queries were not left unanswered. Ma'ane Iho explained to me that he responded to his nephew by reflecting on both the advantages and disadvantages of speaking out about his ancestral relationships to land in West Gao. Whilst it was against the advice of the "old men of the past" to speak out about land, it was impossible to deny that more and more people in West Gao were doing so, even when such persons did not "own" the land they spoke about. Ma'ane Iho continued,

I told my nephew to think long and hard about what we had talked about. I told him that I would continue to follow the way of the old men of the past. I intend to remain quiet for the sake of working together. My sisters and I will continue to follow the ways of the people of the past. I told him that he, and others like him who have schooling, are part of a new life. After we have gone you all [the nephew and his peers] will decide by yourselves what is best to do.

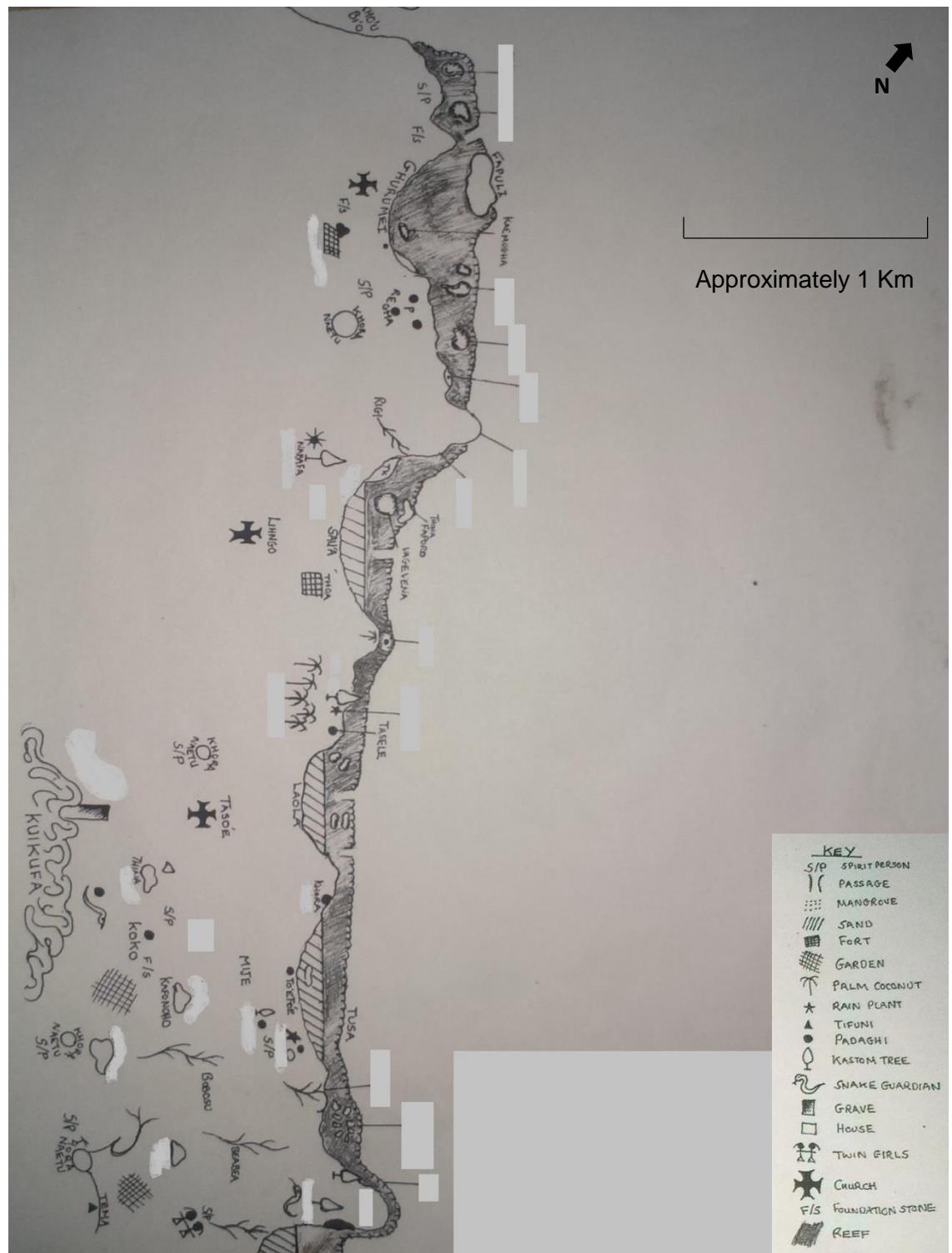
In this commentary, Ma'ane Iho contrasts the 'ways of the old men of the past' (*puhi nodi mae tifae*, SIP, *we blong olketa bigman bifoa*) and 'working together' (*loku faudu*) with what he

²⁵⁹For a fascinating parallel to this possibility among the Rurutans of the Austral Isles (Polynesia), see Gell's (1998: 137-141) discussion of the A'a carving. The figure encompasses the gods corresponding to *both* the 'kinship units (clans) comprising Rurutan society as a whole' *and*, according to certain esoteric knowledge, the Christian Trinity (Gell 1998: 137, 137n4). Gell's (1998: 140-141) discussion of the fractality of the A'a carving suggests the relationship between the clans and the Trinity embodied in the A'a may be predicated on the mono-ontological structure of Rurutan cosmology, a fact that would not necessitate a theological reformulation of notions of the Trinity. By contrast, in West Gao, if efforts were made to align the Trinity with the poly-ontological nature of the triadic matriclan system, such efforts might lead to novel 'ethno-theological' (Scott 2005b, 2007b: 301-303) formulations of the nature of the Trinity in which each aspect – God, Son and Holy Spirit - was posited as a unique 'God', unrelated to the others.

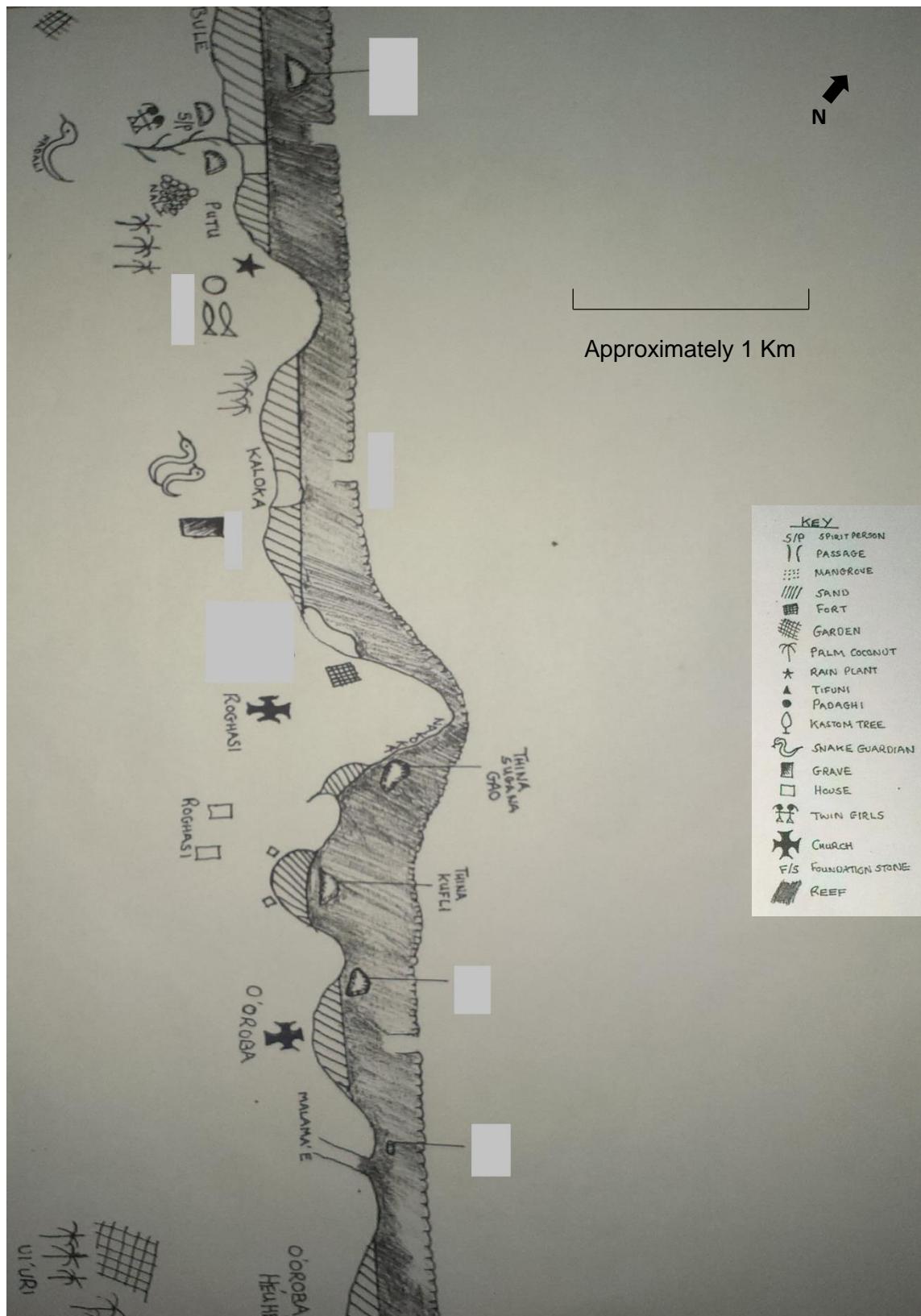
terms the ‘new life’ (*nakahra valu*). Whilst the ‘old ways’ and the condition of ‘working together’ index a morally-inflected mode of existence that is simultaneously ancestral and Christian (see also White 1991: 127), the ‘new life’ is based around future generations who possess education. Ultimately, Ma’ane Iho stated that after his death, his overseas-educated nephew could choose for himself how to act with regard to his ancestral land. It is possible that this comment posited a future in which the ancestors no longer remain active interlocutors in the world-making endeavours of their descendants. A world in which descent-based identities, and the poly-ontology they index, did indeed cease to *matter* (White 1991: 35). However, constructing such a world would involve a movement away from mode of emplaced being that is as inherently Christian, as it is undisputedly ancestral.²⁶⁰ With regard to the exact coordinates of such ancestral and Christian futures in West Gao, the matter remains open to question.

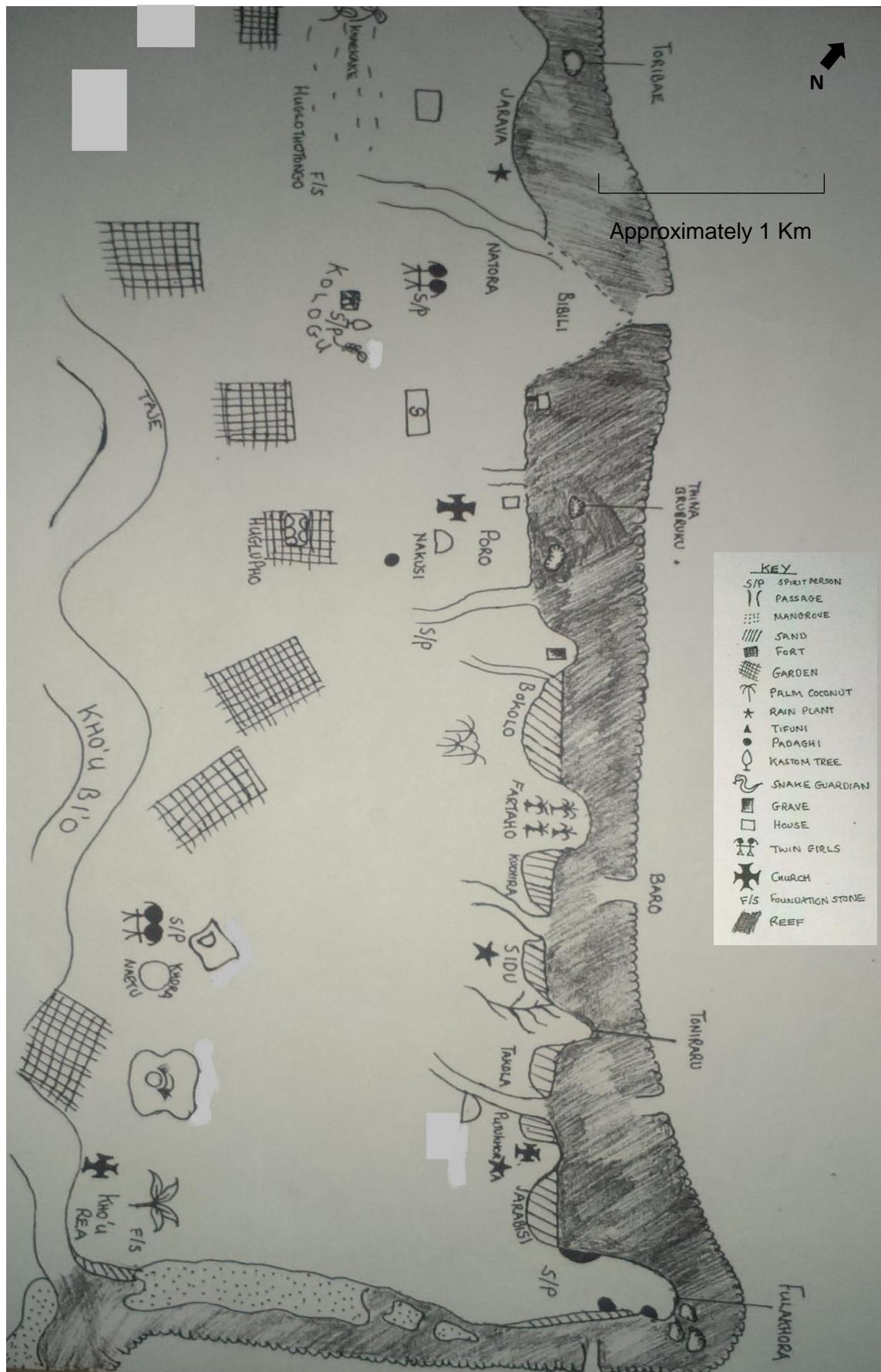
²⁶⁰ See McDonald (2001: 195) and Scott (2007b: 324-325) for a discussion of the significance of emplacement in indigenous forms of Christianity.

Appendix A: Hand Drawn Maps Showing Sites of Interest in West Gao²⁶¹



²⁶¹ Certain proper names of ancestral sites have been removed to protect such information from misappropriation.





Appendix B: Description of *Fangamu Taego*²⁶²

People arrive at the feasting ground in the early morning. Usually, tea and bread cakes are served to the participants. On one occasion, however, a more elaborate meal was provided. If available, betel nut is distributed while people wait for the event to begin. The chiefs (numbering between three and six) are already situated behind a table ready to document the proceedings. Many wear shell-pendants known as (*bakiha*).

As more people arrive, the two participating *kokolo* begin to amass their respective piles of exchange goods side-by-side on the feasting ground. The pile amassed by the mother's *kokolo* is labelled *posa* ('to move downward from a higher elevation inland'), whilst that amassed by the father's *kokolo* is labelled *t'hutuku* ('to wait'). In both piles, baskets of sweet potato and occasionally taro form a base around which bags of rice, cartons of noodles, and boxes of *taiyo* (tinned tuna) are systematically layered. Objects recognised for their *kastom* status - pandanus mats (*gnagru*) and pandanus 'umbrellas' (*taringo*) - are placed on top of the food piles, alongside huge branches of betel nut and parcels of stone-oven baked 'home tobacco' *viri naguta*. Finally, the pigs are carried screeching into the feasting area and laid alongside the respective bases of the two completed structures.²⁶³

The father now takes up his position in a decorated chair situated in the centre of the feasting ground. He often wears a shell pendant (*bakiha*) and/or a porpoise teeth head-ornament known as *grade*. Two or three of his siblings or classificatory siblings will take up seats to one side of him. Chairs are also arrayed at the opposite side of his chair for his wife and children. These remain empty until later in the feast (see below). A pandanus mat (*gnagru*) or a wooden table is positioned in front of the father. He sits with his head bowed, looking humble and lost in thought.

The feast is formally opened with a speech by one of the chiefs outlining what the event is about and why it is important to perform the feast. A prayer will also be said at this stage. The event proper begins with the ringing sound of a conch shell as a procession of people - the men often shouting - enters the feasting ground. A large structure, covered with plastic or leaves and decorated with flowers is carried on a bamboo stretcher and laid before the father. This presentation is called the *siakakae*. The portable structure contains extra baskets of uncooked food (taro, sweet potato). Pigs and, occasionally, turtles, may also be carried in as part of the *siakakae* presentation. All items that make up the *siakakae* are specifically for the father to take home and do with as he pleases.

The wife then leads the procession forward, carrying the *kastom* pudding *malahu* decorated with flowers, which she lays on the table or mat in front of her husband. Her children follow in birth order presenting various gifts (a mattress, clothes, money, an axe or bush knife, a mobile phone comprise some of the items I saw offered).²⁶⁴ If clothes are offered, the child may dress the father in the new clothes. After making their presentations, the wife and children take up their seats beside their father/husband. Behind the children, other relatives of the mother and belonging to her *kokolo* approach the father. Each carries a smaller gift (for example: string

²⁶² This description is based on four feasts witnessed in Poro (West Gao) and Lagheba (Bugotu) between January 2011 and May 2012.

²⁶³ In all the feasts I witnessed the mother's *kokolo* presented one or more pigs. With the exception of one event witnessed, the *kokolo* of the father also presented pigs.

²⁶⁴ The children and the wife may wear clothing and ornaments recognised for their 'kastom' status.

bags, betel nut, or pandanus ‘umbrellas’ - *taringo*) which they place in front of him. All the items given to the father during the procession are, again, for his personal use and consumption.

When the procession has been completed, the speeches begin. The eldest child (male or female) speaks first, addressing their father and thanking him for all the hard work he has put in to raising and providing for them. All the children may then address their father in turn if they have prepared a speech of their own. The following is an excerpt taken from the speech undertaken by the eldest child:

In order to empower the *kastom* of making this feast for you, father, we have placed down [before you and your matrilineal relatives] a piglet, a small parcel of *malahu*, torn clothes, a handful of rice and a watery areca nut. These things should burn in fire, float on the sea, and become covered by sand. That is how it is, my father.

The stylistic features of this excerpt – the deprecatory language and the penultimate sentence are conventional aspects of the speech by the eldest child in every *fangamu taego*. The meaning of the penultimate sentence is that no reciprocal return for the presentation should be made in the future – in the words of one of my research participants, the gifts are not “SIP, *fo senisim*” or “SIP, *luk falom*.²⁶⁵”

After the speeches of the children, a close relative of the wife will address the father, representing the wife’s *kokolo* at large. The father will then make his own speech in response. During the speech he may choose to transfer usufruct rights in certain areas of garden land or planted property such as coconut palms to his children. The speech lays out these properties in detail. Other members of the father’s *kokolo* may also choose to say some words to the children and wife. If such property transfers occur, the chiefs formally document the content of the transfer.

Upon the completion of the speeches, the *kastom* pudding *malahu* is cut. Its striking black colour is achieved by the careful ‘toasting’ of canarium nuts - individually threaded onto a coconut palm midrib and placed in open flames. The nuts are then pounded and added to cooked and pounded taro. The mixture is then placed into a *kastom* wooden bowl (*daho*) with two handles which allow the bowl to be shaken vigorously until the mixture attains a dome like shape that follows the contours of the interior of the *daho*.²⁶⁵

One of the chiefs steps forward and slices the pudding. As he does so he utters an ear-splitting shout of “*CASTOM*”. The chief cutting the pudding is the first man to consume it. He does this with exaggerated flair, taking up the piece and shouting “*Rei kofiza! Rei haboza! Ni rei ngamuza/gnamiza.*” (I see it! I hold it! And I eat it!). Everyone attending the feast, starting with its main participants and including even the youngest spectators, must come forward and taste the pudding, each uttering the accompanying words, which they do at varying levels of audibility. This is often a matter for personal performance and therefore hilarity. The words (present progressive tense) mark the action, so that the last of the triplet – ‘I eat it’ - it is often

²⁶⁵ During one *fangamu taego* the father’s *kokolo* prepared a *kastom* pudding called *mogna* made from swamp taro (*khaekake*) and creamed coconut milk (*sulu*) that was eaten during the event. I was told that the pudding ‘matched’ the *malahu* prepared by the mother and children’s *kokolo*. My research participants pointed out the contrast between the black colour of *malahu* and the stark white colour of *mogna*.

shouted with the food already in the mouth. Older informants explained that this aspect of the feast had assumed a level of exaggeration not seen in the past.²⁶⁶

After the consumption of *malahu*, the members of the two *kokolo* begin to divide up their respective piles of goods in separate areas of the feasting ground. The ‘*posa*’ pile - amassed by the mother’s *kokolo* - is distributed to the members of the father’s *kokolo*, whilst the *t’hutuku* pile - amassed by the father’s *kokolo* - is distributed to the members of the mother’s *kokolo*. The distribution is orchestrated using the list of persons who contributed items to help each *kokolo* amass goods in the months and days leading up to the feast. Each contributor should receive an amount equal to, or greater than, that which they initially offered. These goods are taken home by the recipients, and as the participants disperse, the feast comes to an end. Any pigs included in the *posa* and *t’hutuku* piles are slaughtered away from the feasting ground and are distributed to senior members of the corresponding *kokolo* after the event.

²⁶⁶ My adoptive grandmother Rachel told me how her mother used to get irritated by “all the shouting,” describing it as new element that involved “*gheje*” or showing off – detracting, for her at least, the seriousness of the moment.

Appendix C: Description of the Mortuary Sequence²⁶⁷

Stage 1: burial

When death is confirmed, a priest is immediately called to give the final rites, and the village church bell is tolled three times to announce the death to the community at large. The body, covered in blankets and cloth, is visited by close relatives. These persons will fling themselves across the shrouded body in their grief, addressing the deceased with appropriate kinship terms. Close relatives welcome the mourners and sing sung-stories (*tauaru*) that are composed spontaneously. These stories will express grief at the death and mark the kinship relationships between the singer, the deceased, and the mourner who is visiting. As soon as possible, relatives and friends will purchase store-bought food such as rice, noodles, and tinned tuna (*taiyo*) and take them to the household where the death has occurred. These foods will be cooked and served to the immediate family after the burial.

Burial takes place as soon as possible after a death has occurred. However, if the deceased has died outside of his or her home village (*nau*), mourners must await the arrival of the body. The body is brought home to West Gao by one of the IDC ships, or by a privately-funded outboard motor boat.²⁶⁸ If key relatives of the deceased - such as a child - are absent at the time of death, burial will often be postponed until they arrive. The coffin is constructed and a grave (*beku*) is dug in the chosen graveyard. To my knowledge Gao speakers do not stipulate that this work be undertaken by any particular group of persons. They will most likely be males who are related to the deceased but who are not already occupied with attending the body or greeting mourners.

When placed in the coffin the body joins a procession led by the priest and the Servers and is carried to the village church, where it is placed in front of the altar. A communion service is then performed. After the service, the coffin is carried to the grave site where the burial service is undertaken by the priest with the aid of the Servers. Those who attended the Communion service follow in solemn procession, carrying flowers to throw on top of the coffin as it is covered. Grieving relatives will display their grief violently at this moment: in November 2010 I witnessed the daughter of a deceased woman being physically prevented from returning to the coffin as it was lowered into the grave. After the burial, the immediate family and other close relatives will return to the household of the deceased to share a meal. Until the *simedē* ceremony (see below) the grave will remain largely unmarked, the heaped earth or sand and bunches of dried flowers are the only indication that a body is buried there.

On the day of the death, it is forbidden (*blahi*, SIP, *tabu*) to undertake any work (gardening, fishing, and house-building). This is enforced throughout the village in which the death has occurred and in proximate villages, and in more distant places where relatives of the deceased reside. Laughter and shouting is also forbidden. Although for the majority of persons these restrictions are adhered to for only one day, they will be upheld by the immediate relatives of the deceased until the memorial ceremony (*ghat'hofapulo*) has been held. However, trips to the

²⁶⁷ This description is based on two burials, four memorial feasts (*ghat'hofapulo*) and two cementing ceremonies (*simedē*) witnessed in various villages in West Gao between November 2010 and May 2012, and on the oral histories of Gao speakers.

²⁶⁸ In one case, involving the tragic death of a teenage boy – the son of my adoptive ‘sister’, Jenny (MZD) who died in ‘Number 9’ hospital in Honiara, the fee for the outboard motor and petrol required to return the body was met by the Honourable Samuel Manetoali, a man from Huali, Santa Isabel, who was at that time, Minister of Culture and Tourism.

garden and fishing excursions undertaken to procure food in order to perform that ceremony are allowed. At the time of death and for approximately one week after death, close relatives will visit the household where the death has occurred in order to ‘wake up’ with the family of the deceased. Card games are played and DVDs watched to pass the long nights.

Stage 2: *ghat'hofapulo*

The memorial service, or *ghat'hofapulo* (‘to think back’) is performed either on the day of the burial, or, more commonly, after a period of about five days. Close matrilineal relatives, often accompanied by their spouses, arrive in the hamlet of the deceased on the afternoon before the day of the ceremony. Everybody then works together to help the hosting family prepare pudding and rice and various side dishes to serve alongside the fish that has been caught in the days leading up to the event. Usually an evening meal is served to feed the visitors - particularly the priest, and any chiefs that are in attendance.

The event begins in earnest the following morning, when a communion service is held, usually involving a sermon.²⁶⁹ After the service, both hosts and guests eat together in a large feast prepared by the relatives of the deceased. Both affinal and consanguineal relatives make speeches. Such speeches (often tearful) commemorate the life of the deceased, and may also mark conspicuous absences of relatives of the speaker who were unable to attend. After the serving of tea and bread-cakes, the ceremony is over and people return home; the mourning period is officially complete and hamlet life returns to its normal rhythms.

Stage 3: *Simede*

The final ceremony of the mortuary sequence, known as *simede*, is performed approximately two-three years after death. *Simede* is a week-long affair wherein the grave is covered with a cement structure, often with a cement cross at the head. When the structure has dried, it is then ‘blessed’ (*fablahi*) by an Anglican priest. These ceremonies require extensive preparations and the accumulation of large amounts of money by the family of the deceased in order to pay for the cement structure that will cover the grave. If the deceased is a ‘Big Man’ or a priest, these preparations are even more expensive and often involve community-wide fundraising events.²⁷⁰ Despite this, families aim to mobilize all resources at their disposal in order to produce the most elaborate structure possible.

In all the *simede* ceremonies that I had knowledge of, it is the spouse (if surviving) and children who orchestrate these preparations and preside over the week-long event. Although key matrilineal relatives of the deceased (often accompanied by their spouses) spend extended periods of time helping with the preparations at the deceased’s household in the months leading up to the *simede*. In the week prior to the construction and blessing of the grave these persons arrive in great numbers. If such persons live in distant villages they will take up residence in the houses of close matrilineal relatives and move to the deceased’s household to help with the work.

Every aspect of “work” undertaken - from harvesting a garden, collecting gravel for the cement mixing, to the construction of the cement cross - is followed by the household of the deceased

²⁶⁹ At one such service the Psalm 23 ‘The Lord is my Shepherd’ was read.

²⁷⁰ For example, one priest, whose grave was cemented during fieldwork, had a large marble cross erected at the head of his cemented grave. Marble is a significantly more expensive material than cement.

feeding those who help out. Such minor feeding events are, however, a precursor to the first major feast of the *simede* that occurs on the evening of the day upon which the wooden frame of the grave is filled and the cement structure completed. This day involves a strict division of labour wherein the men work to mix the cement and fill the grave, whilst the women prepare the food for the evening feast. This feast - called the ‘worker’s feast’ - is served at the house of the deceased. During this feast, close relatives of the deceased, who have worked over the past months and weeks, “eat together”.

The on-site ‘blessing’ (*fablahi*) of the cement structure by an Anglican priest, is undertaken about three days after the workers’ feast.²⁷¹ The day begins with the serving of the Eucharist. A sprig of plant that will be used in the blessing ceremony at the grave side is placed on the altar throughout the communion service. After the service is completed, just as in the case of the burial of the coffin, the priest and Servers proceed to the graveside with the congregation following on behind. The priest assumes his place at the head of the newly-cemented grave - now adorned with expensive plastic flowers - with the servers arrayed in a semi-circle behind him. The ‘*fablahi*’ ritual is a three-tiered process: a verbal blessing uttered in English; the shrouding of the grave in incense; and finally the sprinkling of Holy Water, using a sprig of the plant from the altar. Throughout this solemn ceremony the onlookers intone Christian hymns at the prompting of the catechist.

The regulation and structure of the *fablahi* ritual is thrown into stark relief upon its conclusion. As the priest and servers turn back towards the church, the close relatives of the deceased quite literally throw themselves across the cement structure, wailing and sobbing inconsolably. Cries of “my father/mother” or “my brother/sister” ring out as the relatives of the deceased address their loved one publically for the final time. More distant relatives will, in an act that again mimics the original burial, place fresh flowers onto the new cement as they take their leave.

Once this climax of mourning is over, the relatives return to their kitchen houses and begin the arduous task of cooking for the final feast. This is usually undertaken in a central location within the village/hamlet, so the food must be carried and distributed before the feast begins.²⁷² During this feast, the ‘workers’ (who have already eaten together in honour of the deceased during the ‘workers’ feast’) serve the food. Distant relatives, non-relatives, and important community members who have attended the Eucharist and ‘*fablahi*’ ritual at the graveside comprise the key consumers. As the eating commences after the usual blessing of the food, the chiefs will make speeches that link the life of the deceased to community concerns. As the speeches draw to a close, the mortuary sequence is complete.

²⁷¹ This time gap allows the cement structure to be fully dry before the ‘blessing’ ritual takes place.

²⁷² Following the usual structure of communal feasts in West Gao, a separate table (either an actual table or a banana leaf trestle) - called ‘The Table’ - with the most luxurious foods, is reserved for the priests, servers, chiefs, and any other special guests. ‘Ordinary people’ (*maevitu*) sit on banana leaf ‘trestles’ (*praka*) that are laid out along the floor in rows at a right angle to ‘The Table’

Glossary

A'ahe: to count; to read; used figuratively to refer to the act of dividing people up according to their origins.

Au: to exist; to have.

Beku: a grave; a cemetery.

Blahi: holy; taboo.

Boso: a sweet smelling plant with long leaves and white ball-shaped seeds.

Bresi mate'i: to break customary etiquette, principles, or rules.

Doklu: feast, now obsolete, given to attain inalienable rights in land

Fabaibati: a term used to describe a recently deceased person's interference with the affairs of the living.

Fablahi: to bless; to make holy; to imbue with efficacy.

Fafafunei: to ruin; an act of intentional harm or interference; often used as a euphemism for sorcery.

Fakahrai: to make alive; cross-cousin.

Fakhakasa: relating to knowledge and/or an embodied capacity - to transmit; to transfer.

Fa'io'ih: a state of confusion and disorientation; to lose sense - as when a person is very ill or old.

Fangamu taego: 'to feed the caregiver' – a feast given once in the life-cycle of a West Gao family in which gifts are presented by the wife/children to the husband/father.

Fanitu: ritual technique, usually prophylactic or curative in nature.

Faphegra: feast given to receive usufruct rights in land, from *phegra*, meaning 'old garden site.'

Fapulonoho: infertility illness in women.

Fatakle: feast involving a cycle of reciprocal exchanges between affinal relatives, also called *fatoro*.

Faudu: together.

Dadara: blood.

Gausa: areca nut.

Gau sisiri: a tree with aniseed-smelling leaves.

Gazu leme: dead tree/branch; used figuratively to refer to human males.

Ghat'hofapulo: to think back; name of the memorial ceremony performed for a deceased person.

Glona: an illness caused by loss of one's 'image' or shadow; to be stranded in a location unable to reach home.

Hnogle: shrub of the cordyline species, green, black, or red in color. Red variety planted for protection. All varieties frequently planted near ancestral shrines, sites, and graves or in Christian graveyards.

Jahna: startled; shaken; shocked.

Juruku: a transformative process afflicting apical ancestors involving petrification, or a transformation into an invisible ancestral being in a particular area of the landscape.

Kahe: one; signifying a state of 'oneness.'

Keru: lime powder made from sea-coral, chewed with areca nut, also used in ritual healing techniques.

Kheragna: relative; can also be used to mean close friend; a term of endearment

Khora: cavern, often associated with ancestral beings.

Kilo: to call.

Kokolo: type or kind; matriclan; a substantive essence.

Leghu: behind; after; later in time.

Loku: work.

Maefunei: chief; 'Big Man'.

Maevaka: white man.

Mana: efficacy

Nafugna: base of a tree; used figuratively to mean underling cause, origin, or foundation.

Naguta: forested, inland area of landscape.

Nahma: free gift; love; tame.

Na'itu: a non-human being; an ancestral being.

Naunga: 'image' aspect of the soul; shadow or reflection.

Neigano: feast.

Noilaghi: efficacy.

Nakahra: life; ways of life.

Naogla: voice; echo.

Nanoni: humans; people.

Nasura: raiders; people who attack without warning.

Nasnaghe: dance pattern.

Nau: home-place; village; hamlet.

Pagusu: ancestral history, recounting deeds of ancestors and telling of the generation of persons.

Phadaghi: ancestral shrine.

Polouru: compensation payments, or ceremonies during which such payments are made.

Posa: to move downward from a higher elevation inland toward the sea.

Sosolo: to tie; a looped rope made from plant matter that has prophylactic or curative functions.

Susurai: genealogy; account of inter-generational relationships.

Suga: house.

Suga gahu: kitchen.

Tautaru: a story sung in verse; a 'magical' spell or chant.

Tabutua: family, immediate and extended.

Taego: to care for.

Taglosa: peace.

Tarunga: Christian soul; entity that can be seen after a person dies.

Tifuni: ancestral site; area that is taboo, or 'off-limits,' due to its ancestral significance.

Tifa: far; long ago.

T'hi'a: belly; womb; connoting uterine origins; matrilineage.

T'hina: stone.

T'ho'a: reluctant; unwilling.

T'hoa: stone fort, usually located in the forested interior.

T'hutuku: to wait.

T'huturi: story; to relate a story; to share stories.

Toilaghi: marry; marriage.

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