

The materiality of the kitchen house: building, food and history on Mere Lava, northern Vanuatu

VOLUME I

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To Janet Philip

Abstract

Houses and food in Vanuatu are prominent artefacts that materialise people's links to the land and social relationships. Nowadays on Mere Lava, a striking emphasis is put on the building or re-building of kitchen houses, *n-eañ kuk*, as architectural elements central to households.

Drawing upon recent theories of material efficacy that consider objects as potent media through which people think, this thesis examines the underpinnings of the major cultural role these buildings play. It suggests that their prominence is grounded precisely in the ways their material features relate to people's conceptualisation of the world, such as the notion of *histri*, 'history'.

Key material features of *n-eañ kuk* as well as the values they embody are explored through the lens of the technical processes of house-building and food processing, as well as through the different usages and roles of these artefacts in daily and ceremonial life. The mechanisms that bind artefacts to Mere Lava key social concepts and values are highlighted, in order to show how these artefacts become parts of an efficacious social aesthetic that ensure the continuity and transformation of the social order.

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A note on language and spelling

As a consequence of their sustained contacts with other parts of Vanuatu, most of Mere Lava inhabitants are able to speak Bislama, the most widely-used of the three Vanuatu national languages (French, English and Bislama). However, on a daily basis, people would always speak Mwerlap, the language of Mere Lava, which is affiliated to other languages of the Banks Islands, yet separate. Despite my continuous efforts to master this language, I unfortunately never became as fluent a speaker as I would have liked. While at the end of my field research I was relatively able to sustain basic conversation in Mwerlap, most of the more formal interviews and enquiries were nevertheless made in Bislama, or in a mix of Mwerlap and Bislama.

As no transcription system was yet defined at the time of my fieldwork, I thank Alexandre François for the first indications he gave to me on that topic in September 2011. I am also most grateful to Agnès Henri whose work conducted in summer 2013 on Mere Lava will fill the gap still existing in linguistic research on Mwerlap language. The following tables and conventions for the orthography of this language come from a preliminary study she did from available Mwerlap recordings. Although Agnès' fieldwork will allow refining these, for now they will constitute the basis for my own transcription of Mwerlap words along this thesis.

Mwerlap words and Bislama words will be written in italic, but the second language will be indicated by a (B) following the word's first occurrence.

Consonants

	labio- velarized bilabial	bilabial	labiodental	alveolar/ post- alveolar	velar	labio- velarized velar
voiced prenasalized stops		^m b		ⁿ d		
voiceless stops		P		t	k	k ^w
nasal	m ^w (??)	M		n	ŋ	ŋ ^w
fricatives		B	(f)	s (ʃ ?)		
trill				r		
lateral				l		
approximant					ɥ	w

orthography	pronunciation (ipa)
b	[^m b]
d	[ⁿ d]
p	[p]
t	[t]
k	[k]
q	[k ^w]
mw	[m ^w]
m	[m]
n	[n]
ñ	[ŋ]
ñw	[ŋ ^w]
v	[β]/ [f]
s	[s]/ [ʃ] (?)
r	[r]
l	[l]

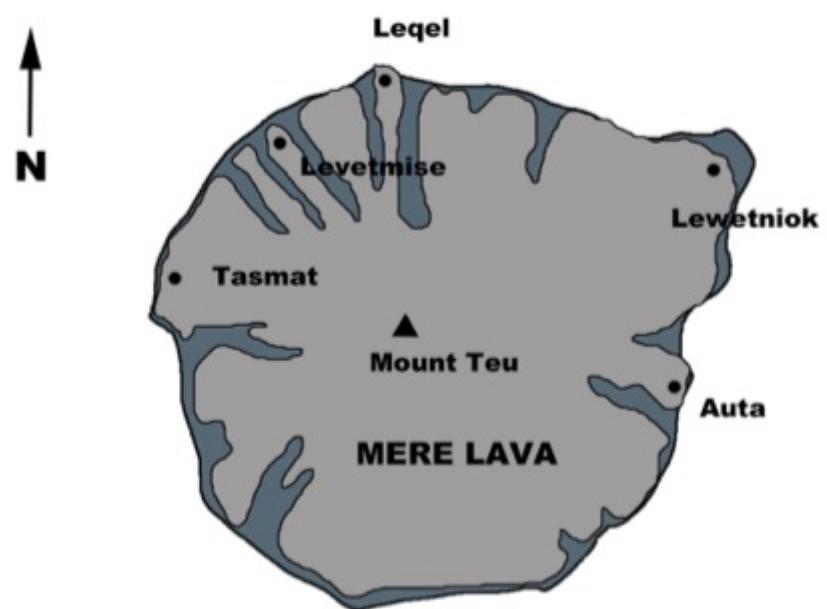
g	[ɥ] / [ɣ]
w	[w]

Vowels

	front (unrounded)		central (rounded)	back (rounded)	
	front	near-front		near-back	back
close	i		u		
near-close		I		v	
close-mid			θ		
open-mid	ɛ		ε		ɔ
open	a				

All front and near-front vowels are unrounded, and all central, near-back and back vowels are rounded.

orthography	pronunciation (ipa)
a	[a]
e	[ɛ]
ē	[e]
ē	[ɪ]
i	[i]
o	[ɔ]
ö	[ø]
ō	[v]
u	[u]



Map 1.01 and 1.02: Map of the Banks Islands. © Alexandre François (C.N.R.S., Paris). Map of Mere Lava, 1:100,000 New Hebrides Geological Survey. Sheet 2, Geology of the Banks Islands. London: Directorate of Overseas Survey, 1978. Modified 25/08/2013.

Chapter 1: Introduction

When I arrived in the household that I would later call my adoptive uncle's place, situated in the area of Palon on Espiritu Santo in November 2010, the very first building that was proudly shown to me was a square house measuring approximately five metres wide and three metres high at the front side, and about ten metres long. I was immediately told that they had built it 'in the proper style' of Mere Lava, with three series of tree-fern posts set up lengthwise, of which the two higher ones, planted at the centre in front and back of the house, supported the roof central ridgepole. A low stone wall formed the base for side walls of twined reeds and the two slopes of the thatch roof were made of sago palm leaf tiles fastened onto a frame of hard wood beams and bamboo rafters. Looking at that considerable building, I was struck by the high level of technical skills that were involved in its construction. Once past the doorstep, I found myself in a smoky, shadowy space with a raised wooden bed covered with pandanus mats and a mosquito net standing on the left side, and piled crops, either inside or outside pandanus baskets, lying on the right-side earthen floor. Behind the door, a wooden shelf supported the plastic dishes, plates and promotional cups and glasses used to cook, share and eat the significant amount of food prepared daily. At the back of the house, almost at the centre, a large pit was dug in the ground and thoroughly lined with stones. Other roundish pebbles were piled close to it, ready to be red-heated and used to bake the various dishes commonly made from garden crops and cabbages.¹ Over this oven and another fireplace, indicated by a simple pile of ashes topped by a metal shelf, diverse items were stored, stuck into the *natanggura* (B) tiles of the roof. Hollow bamboos full of seeds for planting, *no-bo*, bigger and smaller knives used for cooking or for any kind of task requiring the help of a sharp blade, *ne-gisel wirig* or *ne-gisel lap*, *ne-tebēr* coconut leaf tray used to gather all kinds of detritus from food preparation and as basic protection to avoid putting plates or dishes directly on the ground, *ne-gēt* baskets to carry the garden produce or store food out of the reach of the numerous rats, and diverse empty rice and noodles packages, covered the lower parts of the ceiling. Carved walking sticks, *ne-kēr*, wooden pounders, *ne-vetiglōt*, and knives, *no-*

¹ For names of the main edibles on Mere Lava, see Table 6.

got, as well as bows, *nu-vus*, and arrows, *no-tot/ne-ser*, all blackened by the smoke, were also kept higher in the roof. Several wooden dishes, *ne-tabēa*, were disposed against the stone bases of the sidewalls. A wooden platform, called *ne-lesles*, erected over the fireplace and close to the oven at the back of the house, was eventually described to me as being the proper place to store the special pandanus leaf baskets, *no-tok*, inside of which the nuts, *ne-ñiē*, *nangae* (B) were kept dry in order to be preserved for years. Firewood, *ne-lēat*, was put to dry on a rack standing against the back wall, between the stone oven, *nu-um*, and the fireplace, *ni-ep*. By contrast with the rather packed aspect of the periphery of the house, its central space appeared empty, except from a few wooden stools, *ne tensiagsiag*, to sit on. People would gather there to chat, cook or do manual tasks when the weather would not allow them to stand outside. In front of the house, the protruding roof defined a protected space where another fireplace surmounted by a *ne-lesles* platform was set.

Entering the house, I did not realise instantly that this kind of house was specifically to be referred to as a kitchen or *n-eañ kuk* (*kitjen haos* (B)). Indeed, as I was to understand later, the elaborate ways in which kitchen houses were constructed on Mere Lava, and the importance given to these buildings, contrasted from shelters or roughly fashioned houses where people cooked on many other Vanuatu islands (for instance Taylor 2008: 145).

Yet, the importance given to the house nevertheless echoed some comments heard during the few weeks I had spent in Port Vila in order to learn Bislama and organise my further fieldwork with the help of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC). While attending the annual woman's fieldworker meeting held in the VCC, I had found myself listening to a conversation between two of these fieldworkers. They both expressed strong disapproval at Port Vila residents who still wanted to manage lands in their native islands without even having a house there and using these lands in productive ways. At that time, the assertion had triggered my curiosity, for it seemed to underline a peculiar importance given to houses and to link these buildings with a specific sense of presence and identity in the context of people's migrations between islands. Moreover it also resonated with my growing interest in houses that had arisen in the course of my pre-fieldwork research about female-ranking in the northern part of the archipelago and related material culture forms.

Starting my PhD, a year earlier in September 2009, I had indeed been convinced by several well-informed interlocutors to focus my research on the material culture of the

Banks Islands, in the northernmost part of Vanuatu.² Being myself a woman, I had decided to look at the material culture linked to women, especially focusing on some finely plaited waistbands housed in several museum collections.³ Literature, archival and museum-based research had indicated that almost all of those artefacts could be associated with a system by which women acquired high social positions in the Banks group in a similar way as, and in relation to, men's more well-known "status alteration system" (Bolton 2003b: xxxiii). However, whereas waistbands, along with other material insignia, materialised the high-ranking women's positions, especially at ceremonial occasions, the preliminary research unexpectedly revealed that the most prominent artefacts related to women's status were their houses (Rivers 1914: 131).

Finally, the ultimate element that influenced my decision to re-centre my focus on the kitchen houses, *n-eañ kuk*, was the lack of memory regarding such items as women's waistbands on Mere Lava, the island where I had decided to settle during fieldwork.⁴ Although archival material attested for the wearing of these garments by women in the past (Figure 1.01), none of the people I asked remembered ever having seen one or even had heard about it, while they had a lot more to say about high-ranking women's houses and about kitchen houses more generally.

This thesis will therefore examine the reasons that render those buildings so crucial for Mere Lava people. It aims to investigate the diverse articulations between the kitchen houses' material and conceptual dimensions and thereby unveil what precisely creates the very specific cultural prominence of these artefacts. It will therefore be concerned with the multiple interactions between *n-eañ kuk* and social, spatial and temporal conceptions informing people's experiences of the world. Moreover, because the most crucial thing that appeared while documenting the different aspects of Mere Lava kitchen houses, was that they were indeed kitchens, food will be included in this study.

² I thank particularly Kirk Huffman, Lissant Bolton and Jean Tarisesei, whose comments assisted the choice of my research topic.

³ 61 waistbands have been identified so far: in the collections of the University Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology in Cambridge (12), the Museum für Völkerkunde in Basel (27), the British Museum in London (14), the Sainsbury Research Unit Teaching Collections in Norwich (1), the Te Papa Tongarewa Museum in Wellington (3), the Auckland Museum and Art Gallery (3) and the Australian Museum in Sydney (1).

⁴ I owe to Monika Stern this decision to go to Mere Lava. As an ethnomusicologist, she stayed six weeks on this island in 2005. When I met her in Port Vila, in early October 2010, she not only warmly recommended Mere Lava to me as a good place to undertake my fieldwork, but also introduced me to the people she knew in order to organise my stay there and ask for research permissions. In addition, she generously granted me access to the recordings she had made in 2005, some of which revealed invaluable documents for my own research (credited as Monika Stern's recordings in this thesis).

Similarly, food dishes will be explored as artefacts articulating various realms in order to understand their social efficacy on Mere Lava.

Finally through a productive comparison of kitchen houses and food material qualities the thesis will examine how they came to be key elements performing in unique ways the values considered essential to the proper reproduction of society. To that aim, I looked at buildings and food through both lenses of technical production or processing, and usages and circulations. This follows recent trends in material culture studies that combine the analysis of technical processes of production with a concern for meaning, consumption and exchange of material artefacts in order to understand in a processual way how their social efficacy is produced (Coupaye and Douny 2009).

If the fundamentality of Alfred Gell's approach to objects as efficacious agents (Gell 1998) has become something of a commonplace in studies about material culture, a number of scholars nevertheless continue to assert the importance of the notion of meaning (see for instance Pinney and Thomas 2001, Buchli 2002, Layton 2003, Keane 2005, Küchler and Miller 2005, Miller 2005, Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007). While acknowledging the need to distance oneself from the semiotic approaches of material artefacts developed in the 1970s that tended to reduce those to "no more than an illustration of things that are external to it" (Thomas 1999c: 5), recent work thus emphasised the complex and processual construction of meaning, material artefacts and persons at the same time (MacKenzie 1991: 24). Indeed, the traditional segregation between the material and the social or the concrete and the abstract constituted a theoretical basis a number of scholars attempted to overcome. Drawing upon Hegel, Daniel Miller developed for instance a conception of materiality as arising from a dialectical process of "objectification" based on the idea of the mutual constitution of both artefacts and persons (Miller 1987: 19-33, Hegel 1977 [1807]). This could be related to Bourdieu's classical notion of *habitus* according to which individual practices are informed by conventions and structure while being at the same time the very substance or medium through which the structure is reproduced (Bourdieu 1977 [1972]). Indeed, whereas Bourdieu's tendency to reduce actors' agencies, diversity of experiences and innovative capacities has been accurately criticised (see for instance Latour 2006, Kaufmann 1994, Lahire 1998), it is nevertheless still valuable in that it shows the material world as integral to conceptual realms.

In Melanesian anthropology, a number of studies have stressed that the relationships between persons and their products are precisely the locus where conceptual ideas and values are created (Battaglia 1983, 1990, 1992, Bolton 1993, Jolly 1994, Keller 1988, Küchler 1992, Munn 1986, Tilley 1999, Kelly 1999, Hermkens 2005). More precisely, the connections between material, conceptual and social realms should be seen as located in both the formal characteristics of the artefacts and in the ways they are manipulated and used. Indeed, Küchler's assertion that bound forms have for instance the "capacity to emulate both being and thinking" (Küchler 2003: 206) is a fertile premise in order to look at the efficacy of such artefacts as houses and food. Moreover, underlying all these works is the idea that artefacts aggregate different things and articulate together multiple elements through processes of making and use (Rio 2009: 293). This multifaceted character, because it allows selective de-composition at specific moments, should therefore be seen as an important aspect of their abilities to create or re-create values and ideas (Strathern 1992a, Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2007).

I will draw upon these approaches to analyse what constituted the materiality and efficacy of kitchen houses and food on Mere Lava, where both kinds of artefacts, I suggest, were privileged items that performed social relationships and linked people and place together. In this view, the material form and physical characteristics of these artefacts necessarily come to the fore of the analysis, but they do so together with people, whose movements in and out of houses or in circulating food appeared to be a crucial part of what could be understood as the materiality of kitchen houses and food.

This thesis is based on fourteen months' fieldwork carried out in Vanuatu from October 2010 to September 2011 and from August to November 2012. Although mainly based on Mere Lava, where I spent 8 months, field research was also conducted with Mere Lava people living on Espiritu Santo (especially in Palon area and Luganville), Efate (Port Vila and Teuma Bus) and Gaua (West coast). The analysis is thus mainly based on the interpretation of ethnographic data obtained through participant observation, semi-formal and informal interviews, and everyday conversations. Research was also undertaken in a number of museums and archives in order to document Mere Lava's and the Banks Islands' past, particularly its material forms and associated practices. Although information specifically related to Mere Lava was relatively scarce, the following account of the Banks group's history aims to place this island into a broader regional and national context.

1.1 Mere Lava and the Banks Islands: a brief history

Mere Lava is a four-kilometre-long by three-kilometre-wide volcanic cone situated on the eastern fringe of the Banks Islands archipelago, in northern Vanuatu (Map 1.01 and 1.02). In 2009, approximately six hundred and fifty people were living on its slopes, gathering in stonewall-terraced hamlets organised in five villages (Vanuatu National Statistic Office 2009). Situated about hundred metres above sea level, the villages were connected by a pedestrian path, which allowed completing the island tour in a seven or eight hours walk. When I first arrived, the island was accessible only through copra trading ships that travelled around the Banks archipelago – it was usually a twelve-hour trip from Luganville, Espiritu Santo – or by small glass-fibre boats which made irregular trips from Gaua. Compared to other islands in the Banks group, Mere Lava was thus a relatively isolated place. Yet, people continuously moved back and forth from this island in order to find wage-paid employment, to go to school or to hospital, or simply to visit relatives residing in other islands and travel around a bit. These patterns of movements echoed connections that linked Mere Lava to other islands of the Banks group in the past, when it was part of a broad network constituted by trade and intermarriage links that extended to the northern part of Maewo, further South to Ambae and West to Espiritu Santo. These ties were still visible at the time of my fieldwork, for migrants from Mere Lava were primarily found in Maewo, Gaua, Espiritu Santo and in the capital Port Vila. Similarly, objects, practices and knowledge have also always been fluidly moving between islands, even before the arrival of Europeans and the changes that came in the wake of their boats (Huffman 1996: 192).

According to archaeological data, Vanuatu was populated through a series of movements of Austronesian speakers coming from the northwest islands around 1000 BC. Those first settlers, identified by archaeologists as Lapita people, founded short-lived colonies mostly on the coastal parts of the islands from where they spread out to the inland areas (Bedford 2006).⁵ From the earliest time of settlement, some important networks linked inhabitants of what are now the islands of Vanuatu among themselves and with nearby archipelagoes, as demonstrated by the overall homogeneity of material culture remains associated with Lapita colonists. Despite lower levels of inter-archipelago

⁵ The name Lapita comes from the eponymous site in New Caledonia, where the main characteristics of this culture were identified. A specific dentate-stamped ceramic, called Lapita, was recognised as its main material culture trace.

connections in the immediate post-Lapita period, it seems that long-distance contacts occurred again more frequently in the last 1000 years. The Banks Islands were integrated in those networks. Obsidian sourced to the Banks Islands has been recorded in both Lapita and later contexts (after AD 1200) in Tikopia and after AD 1000 in Fiji (Kirch and Yen 1982: 260-261, Best 1984: 494, Bedford 2006: 210).⁶

Despite the lack of specific archaeological data, Mere Lava was probably among the last islands of the Banks archipelago to be populated, perhaps because the late activity of its volcano prevented people from settling there earlier (Coombe 1911: 41). According to Rivers, the island was populated by small groups of people coming from the neighbouring islands, especially from Maewo and Gaua, who identified themselves as descendants of specific female ancestors (Rivers 1914: 24). The stories he collected were still the ones accounting for the arrival of the groups during my fieldwork. Knowledgeable persons, considered the repositories of matrilines' memories, would be able to enumerate the successive members of their genealogy, often from single high-ranking female ancestors who had come to Mere Lava. According to the four such genealogies collected during my fieldwork, the arrival of their ancestors should be placed between five and nine generations back, which would correspond to the idea of a late migration of the current population's ancestors to this place.⁷

Coombe's information on Mere Lava's recent volcanic activity came from the accounts of the voyage of the Spanish ships *San Pedro y Pablo*, *San Pedro* and *Los Tres Reyes* under the leadership of Don Pedro Fernandez de Quiros. Sailing from the northeast, they noticed a light coming from Mere Lava on April the 27th and consequently named the island Nuestra Señora de la Luz before landing on Santa Maria (Gaua) on April the 28th 1606. They soon sailed further south however, as far as Big Bay on Santo, which they

⁶ These connections were probably maintained, at least occasionally, with Tikopia until the 19th century. The missionary Codrington thus gave an account of the arrival of eleven canoes from Tikopia in 1870 (Codrington 1870: 1st and 10th of September). George Sarawia, one of the first Christian converts from the Banks Islands, remembered in his memoirs: "Until now we had known of the existence of only six islands, Maewo, Aoba, Marina, Vava (Torres), Vanikoro and Tikopia. These were the furthermost islands in the world, and there were no more" (Sarawia 1973: 13). The statements made by Sarawia have to be taken cautiously, though, not only because of the inherent subjective nature of the writing of memoirs, but also because he wrote them as a Christian convert looking retrospectively at his previous heathen and uneducated life. Yet it stressed nevertheless broader links between the Banks Islands and southernmost or northernmost areas.

⁷ These genealogies were told by interlocutors in their early seventies. Although it is very difficult to give precise indications of time corresponding to these genealogical data, I propose a very broad estimation of about twenty-five years timespan for one generation. This is based on the 2009 Vanuatu Census's table on "Age-specific-fertility rates between 1989 and 2009", the studies conducted by Annie Walter on birth-related practices on Pentecost, and what interlocutors told me during fieldwork about past birth and marriage practices (Vanuatu National Statistic Office 2009, V. 2: 26, Walter 1988). This would place very broadly the arrival of these ancestors between the end of the 17th century and the first decades of the 19th century.

named "Terra Australis del Espiritu Santo", and where they formed a short-lived colony (Quiros 1876-1880, Markham 1904, Kelly 1966, Bonnemaison 1997). The crews of the French navigator Louis Antoine de Bougainville followed Quiros 162 years later, in 1768. They sighted Mere Lava and named it Pic de L'Etoile, or Star Island, but went ashore briefly only on another island, Ambae. Bougainville called the whole Vanuatu archipelago "Grandes-Cyclades", a name that lasted only a few years before Captain James Cook in 1774 renamed it "New Hebrides" (Taillemite 2006, Bonnemaison 1997).

The Cook expedition thoroughly charted the area but overlooked the Banks Islands, which were only later re-visited by Bligh in 1789, during his voyage back to Timor after the well-known mutiny of the *Bounty* (Cook 1777, Beaglehole 1955-1974, 1974, Bonnemaison 1997). Bligh named this group after his sponsor Sir Joseph Banks and sketched the position of the various islands he saw. He did not land, however, and only recognised the islands as "fertile and inhabited, as [he] saw smoke in several places" (Bligh 1792: 273).

During the first decades of the 19th century, contacts between Banks islanders and Europeans occurred probably with whalers who occasionally went through Vanuatu. From 1853, those contacts might have been slightly intensified by the discovery of sandalwood in the neighbouring island of Santo, but the Anglican missionaries were nevertheless the first Europeans to establish regular contacts in the area (Shineberg 1969: 129-130). In 1848, the Anglican George Augustus Selwyn, Bishop of New Zealand, organised the first missionary tour through the islands of Melanesia. His project was to make contact with natives and if possible to take on board several young men from the islands to be educated in the Christian faith at St John's College in Auckland, New Zealand. He expected them, through this education, to be instrumental in the conversion of their own countrymen in islands where the difficult climate and the existence of a large variety of languages complicated the work of European missionaries (Hilliard 1978). From that date he organised usually two trips a year to bring people to spend the summer months at school in New Zealand and then get them back to their islands during winter. The missionary voyages were first directed toward the south of the New Hebrides archipelago and Loyalty Islands. The Southern Cross mission vessel and its crew touched at the Banks Islands only in 1856. Bishop Selwyn was accompanied by the missionary John Coleridge Patteson, who later was to play a crucial role in the conversion of Mere Lava (Melanesian Mission 1869: 83, 122).

Because of their longer contacts with the islanders, missionary narratives, accounts and collections appear as the best sources for this early period. Most of them kept journals and sent detailed letters during their time in the islands, in which they recorded their daily life in the mission station and their visits to the surrounding villages. However, as far as the Banks Islands are concerned, these accounts are mostly drawn from information about Mota, which was the centre of the mission, and to a lesser extent about Vanua Lava and Mota Lava. This therefore contributed to create an overall homogeneous picture of the Banks Islands based on parts of it only. Despite the high level of similarities in the practices of the different parts of the group, those early accounts probably fail to acknowledge the specificities that existed in islands like Gaua or Mere Lava (see also Vienne 1984).

According both to oral stories recounted on the island and missionaries' accounts, regular contacts between Mere Lava people and the Melanesian Mission started in the early 1860s. Although by 1860, four boys from Mere Lava were already reported to have spent some months in the mission school in New Zealand (Report of the Melanesian Mission 1863: 12), it seems that missionaries limited contacts to the shore area only, at least until 1863. On the first days of June of that year, Rev. Robert Henry Codrington reported:

"(...) we went back to Mota after a fortnights absence, dropped the new scholars, inspected the improvements in building clearing and fencing, and sailed again the same afternoon for the New Hebrides. The first we reached was Meralav, Star Island, a cone some 2000 feet high terraced half its height for villages and gardens. A lava stream which has reached the sea makes a natural pier, where a market for yams was held. The Bishop for the first time mounted inland." (Codrington and Patteson 1863: 15)

Oral traditions on Mere Lava state 1857 as the arrival date of missionaries. Also, the customary account of Patteson's arrival differed strikingly from the progressive impact that can be gathered from Melanesian Mission reports and missionaries' journals. Fox noticed the short duration of the first school created in 1873 and reported that:

"... the condition of this island is so miserable and apparently so hopeless that hardly any good effect can be looked for. Ten years ago it had a considerable population and was cultivated in terraced gardens, but now, it is a wilderness. The population has fallen to 100. Among these, murders with the firearms and poison brought back from Queensland, is rife. Men and women are cut down or shot down, and left unburied on the paths and no one ventures to eat food offered by another. (...). All who could get away did so. It is not probable that anything can be done by the Mission in the future." (Fox 1958: 139).

In contrast, the oral account stressed the immediate end of interisland fighting and the quick conversion of the population, with the conversion of Qoqo, one of the main high-ranking and powerful men on the island, in 1900, as a highlight. It stressed the role of heroic characters such as Bishop Patteson or well-known converts and early catechists like Clement Marau or William Vaget.⁸ At the turn of the century, the island was thus probably entirely Christian, Auta being the last village to be converted (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 14/02/2011, figure 1.02).

In the second half of the 19th century, sandalwood traders gradually gave way to labour ships searching for potential workers for the plantations of New Caledonia, Queensland and Fiji. Vanuatu, including the Banks and Torres groups, and the Solomon Islands were the main areas providing people to the labour ships. The scale of recruitment has been widely debated but, according to Shineberg, by the turn of the century, "in regularly recruited areas, most of the men had been to one or other labour destination, some more than once" (Shineberg 1999: 5). Yet, the labour trade impacted women and men unequally. The percentage of women recruited was always small compared to men and they needed the agreement of their husbands or male relatives to be able to engage.⁹ Although kidnapping occurred for women as well as for men, some of them were willing to engage, either in an attempt to gain access to trade goods and more independence, to flee from abusive treatment by their husbands or an undesired marriage, or for other personal and contextual reasons (Shineberg 1999: 90).

The labour trade as well as missionary influence left a deep mark on the life of the islanders in the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century. The

⁸ The story is summarised in Chapter 2. For a full transcript of it see Appendix I. Clement Marau was born circa 1855 and died in 1920. In 1869 he went to the Melanesian Mission school in Norfolk Island. In 1890 he became Deacon and was ordained Priest in 1903. William Vaget was born circa 1860 and died in 1916. He became Deacon and was ordained Priest the same year, 1892.

⁹ Shineberg (1999: 90) assesses for example that the overall proportion of women among those recruited for New Caledonia was 10%.

attitudes of the various Anglican missionaries with regards to cultural practices of the Banks Islands varied according to their individual personalities. Despite being generally more tolerant than those of the Presbyterians working further south in Vanuatu,¹⁰ they nevertheless contributed to increase the transformations and changes that had continuously taken place in this area. They also influenced housing patterns as well as gender behaviour and food habits.

In an attempt to control the violence and deaths accompanying labour trade and to deal with increasing claims over land, the French and British established in 1887 a joint naval commission to exercise authority in the region and in 1906 the archipelago became the Anglo-French condominium of the New Hebrides. The colonial era was strongly marked by rivalry between French and British politics, notably about land, the most crucial issue in Vanuatu at the time, and still today. In the first decades of the 20th century, the Société Française des Nouvelles-Hébrides claimed rights on almost half of the land in the archipelago, whereas the Australian company Burns Philp acquired a concession for a steamship and mail run. In the Banks Islands, both British and French planters developed a few plantations but the catastrophic fall in copra prices in 1925 probably contributed to the departure of most of them. Only one short-lived attempt at commercial exploitation of copra was reported on Mere Lava, probably because of the unsuitability of the steep slopes with respect to copra plantations (Jif Lenat Rubin, Big Stone, 11/01/2011).¹¹

Partly due to the numerous problems of a joint administration, the influence of the colonial power stayed quite localised in the coastal areas and the capital, Port Vila. Agents of the colonial government only occasionally visited the Banks Islands, the area being far away from the administration centres. The Melanesian Mission was nevertheless supported by British funds in order to run schools and develop medical care. The depopulation caused by diseases and blackbirding was indeed felt strongly in the Banks Islands at the beginning of the 20th century. Missionaries' accounts frequently outlined the dramatic outbreaks of diseases and the general depopulation of the area (Patteson 1871, Codrington 1870, 1872, see also Rivers 1972 [1922]). This sense of depopulation was a major motivation for anthropologists such as Felix Speiser and William Halse Rivers, who wrote the most detailed ethnographies available for this period. Speiser visited the New

¹⁰ See Chapter 4 for a further description of the views and effects of missionaries on organisations associated with status acquisition.

¹¹ With the exception of the area of Big Stone, where larger patches of land have been planted with coconut trees, slopes on Mere Lava generally vary between 50 and 100% (Simeoni 2009: 20).

Hebrides from 1910 to 1912 and spent time in the Banks Islands in December 1911 and January 1912. He was based at the headquarters of a copra company in Port Patterson, Vanua Lava, but visited also other islands of the group, notably Gaua and Ureparapara. His detailed study of the material culture of Vanuatu and the Banks archipelago as well as the objects he gathered in the field are still important references for researchers working on material culture.¹² In January 1912, he attempted to visit Mere Lava but was unable to land due to bad weather. His account testified to the presence at that time of an employee of the Port Patterson's company, whom they brought back with them to Vanua Lava. About the island he noticed in his journal:

"I was very sorry to have to give up my visit to Meralava, as the natives, though all christianized, have preserved more of their old ways than those of other islands, owing to their infrequent intercourse with civilization. (...). The people on Meralava live on taro, which they grow in terraced fields, the water being obtained from holes in the rocks, and on cocoa-nut, of which the island yields a fair supply" (Speiser 2009 [1913]: 180).¹³

Rivers in 1914 also gathered information and objects in the Banks Islands, accompanying the mission vessel *Southern Cross* during one of its voyages to the islands. His invaluable survey and collections were, however, more based on the accounts made by missionaries such as Mr. John C. Palmer, and Rev. Walter John Durrad, who were especially interested in the specific knowledge and practices of the islanders, and explanations given by John Pantutun, a Melanesian Mission teacher from Mota (Rivers 1914: vii-viii, Durrad 1920). Although he did not reach Mere Lava, he collected detailed information on kinship terms and the social organisation on this island that was published in his book *The History of Melanesian Society* the same year.¹⁴

During the Second World War, a large number of Americans were stationed on Espiritu Santo and Efate. From 1942 they had to coordinate defences against Japanese advances in the Solomon Islands and other parts of the Pacific. Their attitudes towards the New Hebrideans they employed and the large amount of goods and materials they brought

¹² Most of Speiser's collection is today housed in the Museum der Kulturen in Basel. Some objects are also housed in the Bern Historisches Museum, the Burgdorf Völkerkundemuseum, the Saint Gall Neues Museum, the Zürich Volkerkundemuseum, the Hamburg Museum für Völkerkunde, and the Köln Rautenstrauch-Joest museum für Völkerkunde.

¹³ Compare Chapter 2 for Mere Lava resources and main staple crop at the time of fieldwork.

¹⁴ Kinship information will be looked at more precisely in Chapter 2.

to the archipelago had strong effects on the life of the region.¹⁵ Edwin Tommy from Mere Lava thus remembered:

"Because of the war, the French were forced to change a little bit. We were then eating together. We were able to appreciate each other. Before, we were too wild for them [the white men] and we were also frightened. They too, they were not thinking of us in good terms. They thought we were just natives. But the war came. We saw that we could just be in peace with them and that they were also in peace with us. Before it was not like that. We were looking at the white men and we were afraid. But the war came and made that we could both have access to all the things. It is very true. (...) We have cars, we have boats because of the war. First, all these things were only for white men, not for us. It is the same now" (Lindstrom and Gwero 1998: 294, my translation).

While both men and women experienced new kinds of interrelations with 'white men' and increased access to foreign goods, ill treatments were also recorded. Women notably had to face issues of sexual exploitation, and prostitution was not uncommon. Yet overall, the Second World War enlarged the New Hebrideans' political and material expectations (Van Trease 1995: 13).

This partly influenced indigenous claims in the 1950s and 1960s. Tension rose during the last years of the 1970s and, finally, Independence was officially proclaimed on the 30th of July 1980. The first government was dominated by the historically more British oriented Vanua'aku Pati (VP), which won elections organised at the end of 1979. Despite participating in a peripheral position to the events that led to Independence, the Banks Islands supported strongly the VP after 1980. From the 1990s, however, politics had become more complex in the area and there has been more diversity in voting. The links that had existed during the decades preceding Independence between language, denominations and party affiliation had loosened (Van Trease 1995: 248). During my fieldwork, people on Mere Lava strongly recalled the feasts that celebrated Independence. They had received a bullock from the provincial authorities, to be killed and shared. However, most of all, in Tasmat village, they recalled the gesture of one of the most respected and knowledgeable men, Jif Manasē Wovē. Having hung some exemplars of various yam cultivars at different heights on the front gable of the village ceremonial ground's men's house, *ne-gemel*, he had exhorted the members of the five Mere Lava villages, gathered for the feast, to identify which cultivar they would be associated with.

¹⁵ After Independence, the people of Vanuatu took the name of ni-Vanuatu. I will nevertheless use the term New Hebrideans when speaking about pre-Independence contexts.

This, he did as a question, asking which village would keep firmly the old ways, as he had hung cultivars recognised as customary ones as well as manioc, of more recent introduction (Deacon Steve Turris, Jif John Norman Turris, Jif Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011).

The principal activity on Mere Lava during my fieldwork was subsistence agriculture, with a regular engagement in copra preparation, to be sold to the occasional trading ships coming to the island. The latter cash-cropping provided essentially money to pay the school fees for children and for store goods like rice, tin meat, soap, matches and fuel for those who had been able to acquire generators. Tourism, although increasingly important in the Banks Islands, had not developed yet on Mere Lava, due to the absence of regular transportation services. Although residential groups were not permanently defined with regards to kinship, local groups appeared nevertheless as important political units. As far as social organisation was concerned, these local groups were divided between two matrilineal exogamous moieties, subdivided in named matrilines. In 1891, Codrington already remarked the crucial character of moiety affiliation in the Banks Islands. He stated: "In the native view of mankind, (...) nothing seems more fundamental than the division of the people into two (...) classes, which are exogamous and in which descent is counted through the mother. This seems to stand foremost as the native looks out upon his fellow men" (Codrington 1891: 21). However, according to Bernard Vienne, Banks Islands' principle of moieties functioned as a conceptual model, used mainly in terms of marriage prescription, rather than as real structural notions. Thus, the division into moieties was not expressed in the spatial organisation of the villages he described, nor did it prescribe rules for the transmission of land, which was inherited from both the father's and the mother's side (Vienne 1984: 170). In contrast to this statement, on Mere Lava, the matrilines appeared as important social units, and moieties could be expressed in the spatial organisation of some villages, while land was conventionally inherited from fathers. Whereas these questions will be looked at more thoroughly in Chapter 2, a last remark by Vienne is worth noting here. He stated generally, using Mota language, that members of the same moiety were said to be *sogoi*, 'from the same thing' to each other, while they were *tavala ima*, 'from the other part of the house' to the members of the other moiety. The image of the house was therefore particularly important to him and could be understood as a visual materialisation of the two-moieties conceptual model while he broadly characterised the Banks Islands social organisation as "concentric dualism" (Vienne 1984: 174, Levi-Strauss 1963). This vision of the house as a single entity formed

by the complementary association of its two sides with marriage, directly referred to the fundamental idea of sameness created out of difference that was generally shared in the archipelago. While on Mere Lava the two moieties were rather called *tavalsal*, 'the other side of the path', a same general view of the house was expressed. This idea will be explored further in this thesis along with the examination of the role of kitchen houses, together with food as performing various social relations.

2.2 Food and houses: literature review

The prominence of houses in Melanesia, and more generally in the Pacific area, has been recognised in numerous studies. Dwellings and other architectural constructions have often been included as a compulsory part in ethnographies focusing on the region. Although the perspectives through which these spaces have been looked at are hugely diverse, and informed by different disciplinary traditions, as far as anthropology or material culture analyses are concerned, two broader visions of the 'house' seem to dominate in these works.

On the one hand, some scholars documented the forms taken by islands' architectural constructions through the lens of their materials and their manufacture processes. They aimed at understanding the ways these cultural artefacts related to conceptual ideas through visual mediation as well as proposing models accounting for the nature of this mediation. Architecture of ceremonial houses stood for instance as a privileged example in Anthony Forge's seminal study on Iatmul and Abelam art. Through the analysis of the different parts of this building and of the existing exegesis surrounding it, the author considered the relationships between art, myths and rituals in these two groups. He eventually stated that ceremonial houses, as well as carvings, paintings and the display of long yams had to be understood as integrated into a visual system, which communicated "implicit non-verbal statements" to people (Forge 1966: 30). Despite the broad influence of this approach on the following decade's works about art, architecture and material culture in general (see for instance Bowden 1992: 67-93, 90), Forge's statements also encountered criticism, the most well-known being perhaps Alfred Gell's rejection of communication or aesthetic bias in the anthropology of art (Gell 1998: 6).

Drawing upon Roger Neich's detailed study of Maori architecture, Gell analysed Maori meeting-houses, which he put together so as to form a bounded corpus, especially

representative of a "collective agency" (Neich 1996, Gell 1998: 251-252).¹⁶ As in Forge's work, houses were interpreted as specific constructions, made of aggregated elements:

"Houses are complex artefacts, consisting of many separate, standard, parts; they are thus organized or 'organic' entities, unlike, say, a bowl or a spear, however wonderfully wrought. Their organic plan and capacity for disassembly and reassembly, remodelling and redecoration allows them to objectify the organic connectedness of historical processes." (Gell 1998: 252)

Gell associated the meeting-houses' efficacy with the fact that, as "distributed objects", they were "structurally isomorphous to consciousness as a temporal process or *durée*" (Gell 1998: 251, see also Husserl 1996 [1928], and Bergson 1889). The 'aggregatedness' of the houses, both in the physical and the temporal realm, would thus be related to the cognitive processes by which people experience the world. Therefore, Gell made the aggregating characteristic the basis of the house's efficacy at creating, transmitting and transforming a group's cultural identity. The "organic" capacity of these assemblages to be constructed, decomposed, ornamented or changed enabled them to "objectify the organic connectedness of historical processes" (Gell 1998: 252).

Similarly focusing on the study of houses' material and technical characteristics, a series of studies attempted to establish typologies of houses that could be integrated in comparative studies and related to broader cultural patterns. Pioneering, in that it was willing to initiate a worldwide relevant discussion about architecture, Oliver's work paved the way for more regionally focused studies (Oliver 1987). In Melanesia, Christian Coiffier's study of the architecture of the Sepik area of Papua New Guinea presented an overview of building forms and variation over a broad area, and highlighted the significance of technical characteristics in people's reflexive perception of their identity (Coiffier 1984). In the same way, Roger Boulay, Alban Bensa and Alain Saussol's work about the Kanak house in New Caledonia associated the technical and material features of the chiefs' round houses with meaningful political and economical concepts. They also emphasised the strong interrelations between architecture and the way people think about and manipulate social organisation (Boulay, Bensa and Saussol 1990).

On the other hand, a major part of anthropological studies of houses focused on their connections with kinship and social reproduction and transformation. Inspired both

¹⁶ See also Thomas 1995: 103, quoted in Gell 1998: 251.

by Morgan's *Houses and house life of the American Aborigines* and by Beuchat and Mauss' *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo: A study in social morphology*, Claude Lévi-Strauss' work about "sociétés à maisons" figured as the fundamental milestone to which other scholars have continuously returned until the present day (Morgan 1881, Beuchat and Mauss 1979 [1904-5], Lévi-Strauss 1982, 1987, see also Fox 1993).¹⁷ This concept was formulated by Lévi-Strauss on the basis of Boas' data on the Kwakiutl and Kroeber's problems trying to systematise Yurok social organisation in California. The difficulties these two scholars encountered arose partly from the presence of both matrilineal and patrilineal characteristics in the formation of kinship groups, and the subsequent irrelevance of the pre-existent social structure categories at that time. Comparing it to European noble houses, Lévi-Strauss developed the concept of 'house' seen as an alternative type of social structure that brings together previously opposed principles such as "descent and alliance, property and residence or endogamy and exogamy" (Fox 1993: 7). The house as a social institution would thus act as an illusory construction, temporarily solving tensions between opposing principles and allowing the creation of original social units. This constructed unity contains in itself its temporary character, and has to be continuously re-affirmed and re-enacted by the proper management of marriage alliances, transmission of wealth and property as well as names, titles and prerogatives. Levi-Strauss consequently borrowed the Marxist notion of 'fetishism' to qualify the processes of objectification that build such illusory-based, but ever-reproduced, solid and stable social entities from the matching together of conflicting principles (Levi-Strauss 1987).

Moving away from his fundamental distinction between elementary and complex societies, Lévi-Strauss situated house-based societies in between, thus colouring his formulation of the concept with the evolutionary bias that he has been much criticised for. The house-based societies would thus represent an intermediary step between conceptions and organisations of the world based on kinship, and organisations where wealth and power associated with economic and political interests are the main underlying moving forces (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 151, see also Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 9-10). He argued that in house-based societies, kinship terms are used in a way that objectify and thus 'naturalizes' hierarchical ranking. Despite the fact that he did not articulate it explicitly,

¹⁷ I use here the French notion as Lévi-Strauss formulated it. As Carsten and Hugh-Jones (1995) pointed out, there is a problem lying in the English translation of the concept. Indeed "sociétés à maisons" could be variously translated as "house societies" or "societies with houses" thus emphasising differently the importance of the actual, material houses. I prefer the translation "house-based societies" which seems to convey at the same time a sufficient level of abstraction and give enough relevance to material forms.

what follows from this statement is that house-based societies present a certain stratified character, hierarchically ordering their diverse constitutive elements, namely the houses in this case.

From the end of the 1980s, a number of scholars critically reassessed Lévi-Strauss' concept of house-based societies' usefulness in other geographical contexts, especially focusing on South-East Asia and the Americas. Charles Macdonald, writing about South-East Asia, established that the scope of relevancy of Lévi-Strauss' notion of the house would only cover relatively stratified societies. In contrast, Roxana Waterson, working in the same area, chose to give a broader sense to the concept, thus making it relevant to less stratified societies as well (Macdonald 1987, Waterson 1990). Although it was often criticised for its vagueness and lack of detailed definition, the extent to which Lévi-Strauss' idea of the house was examined in the past decades proved eventually its high potential, if not as an analytical device to be taken for granted, at least as a thought-provoking tool. Recent work has thus largely used Lévi-Strauss' ideas in a critical way, demonstrating that, beyond the misleading illusion of a universally relevant explanatory concept, the house was still a productive anthropological focus, especially when looking at connections between spatial devices and the performance of more abstract conceptualisations of social realms (see for instance Hamberger 2010).

The importance of the building's materiality, rather overlooked in Lévi-Strauss work except in relation to fetishism, formed also the core topic of the collection of works edited by James Fox (Fox 1993). Focusing broadly on "cultural designs", the contributions were centred on Austronesian emic understandings of the building (Fox 1993: 9). Spatial organisation and architectural elements were examined in order to highlight the diverse ways they interacted with "collective social patterns", showing that houses were operating at diverse levels which cannot be merged to form a bounded symbolic entity (Fox 1993: 23, see also Ellen 1986: 4). Together with another major publication edited by Janet Carsten and Stephen Hugh-Jones, these two collections stressed the necessity of considering the house in a more holistic way:

"(...) a single theory of the house is as fraught with difficulties as a single theory of the body. Houses, like bodies, are complex, multifaceted entities, particular aspects of which are given meaning by different people, in particular cultures, in particular contexts and particular historical conditions. These meanings constantly shift within cultures, and they have no inherent cross-cultural validity. However, although the meanings of the house may be specific, the processes by which they are generated (...) are much more general." (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 45-46)

Therefore, either privileging a more material-focused approach or seeking to unravel the threads of socio-political organisations, recent research on houses tended to set aside analytically fixed visions of the relationships between people and their architectural environment in order to turn towards studies highlighting processes and dynamics underlying it. By setting the transformational and changing character of the house as a general analytic framework, these works encompassed such aspects as the materiality of the buildings, time and memory, the space / body interactions, or the shaping of groups, hierarchy and authority (Fox 1993, Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995, Rodman and Rensel 1997). They rightfully gave attention to the ways house spaces and their conceptual associations may change according to particular moments, either ritual times or everyday life, or with regard to the age, gender or status of the individuals. Conversely, they also considered how houses mould human beings, hosting their bodies and their social lives, accompanying them through birth, marriage, death and all the other steps marking their existence in the world.

Adopting this same general approach, Rupert Stasch's work about Korowai houses of West Papua showed how these buildings must be understood as "superimpositions" of various elements organising people's lives (Stasch 2011: 327). However, he further brought into account the "sensory experience of the physical building", seen as a fundamental path through which houses take their force and efficacy (Stasch 2011: 327). By critically examining the current touristic craze for Korowai tree houses, Stasch interrogated the aesthetic experience of Korowai people themselves to these buildings. Inspired by Jakobson's work about 'poetic function', he argued that houses' aesthetic dimension was to be found in the "poetic density with which they draw together in one medium a multiplicity of relational connections to other levels of activity" (Stasch 2011: 329, Jakobson 1960). He thus chose to explore the "links of causality and spatiotemporal contiguity" that shape people's relations to houses, using the semiotic notions of "iconicity" and "indexicality". Defining those respectively as "felt resemblance" – houses literally are what they make present – and "felt spatiotemporal connection" – houses are signs related to what they make present – he indeed produced a highly inspirational account of the ways houses, people, and ideas about temporality, social belonging and death are all intertwined (Stasch 2011: 330, see also Peirce 1955).

Drawing upon these approaches, the present research aims to consider the multiple facets of kitchen houses on Mere Lava, and to show the diverse ways in which

these spaces crystallise people's social, spatial and temporal interactions. As far as superimposition and multiplicity of orders are concerned, though, and despite the relevance of Stasch's approach, I aim to demonstrate that a further comprehension of the processes through which houses come to acquire such a central importance in people's lives can be achieved through a close consideration of building processes. While Part II of this thesis will give a general consideration of the theoretical premises and tools that such an approach would mobilise, I complete now this brief overview of previous studies of houses by looking at the literature on architecture in Vanuatu.

Early works by Codrington, Rivers, Speiser or Deacon mainly treated houses as artefacts (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 298, Rivers 1914: 96, 110, Speiser 1996 [1923]: 88-131, Deacon 1934: 31-32).¹⁸ Rivers and Speiser especially used houses' formal characteristics to support further classifications into broader cultural regions. In contrast, kinship and socio-political organisation of the diverse islands were thoroughly investigated, and presented in chapters significantly separated from those about houses. The work of Christian Coiffier on Vanuatu architecture presented the only general overview of building diversity throughout the archipelago (Coiffier 1988).¹⁹ Intended as a tool for the preservation of this "traditional heritage", it gathered the available data from the previous studies conducted about this region and classified the buildings into three geographical areas: the northern islands with rectangular buildings covered with two-sided sloping roofs reaching floor level, the central islands where houses tended to have apsidal ends, and the central and southern islands where oblong buildings presented an ogival roof also reaching the floor level. However, detailed analysis of the ways architectural forms related to people's experiences and social organisation generally lay outside of the scope of this study.

More recently, Margaret Rodman and John Taylor provided other significant insights on Vanuatu architecture (Rodman 1985, 1987, Taylor 2008). They both combined a close look at the physical characteristics of the buildings with a detailed study of the social experiences they sheltered throughout people's lives, appropriately conveying an idea of architecture as a lived and living space. Rodman particularly considered the changes and transformations that occurred in the patterns of residence and in the

¹⁸ Although Layard and Harrisson's main studies about Vanuatu, and especially Malakula, have to be mentioned here, they only briefly refer to architecture and do not provide any specific account of it (Layard 1934, Harrisson 1937)

¹⁹ A summary of this work can also be found in Coiffier (1996: 231).

architecture of the building themselves in Longana, Ambae, during a twelve-year period. She highlighted the various social meanings associated with the moving or the transformations of houses. Whether drawn by marriage, a birth, a change of status, increased income or some other factors, people in Longana often modified their dwelling location or material condition. They consequently modelled the space into a "historically crafted landscape", the rights to which, partly legitimated through associated knowledge and on-going residence, were manipulated by and inherited through kinship groups (Rodman 1985).

Following Rodman's statement, Taylor explored the "architectonics" of the houses of the Sia Raga of North Pentecost. In the same way as "memory palace" described by Fox (Fox 1993: 141, borrowing the term from Yates 1966), houses were seen to be imbued with knowledge, conventions and events, then in turn actively shaping the life of individuals:

"Houses are part of a broader corpus of grown and made things that give shape to Sia Raga renditions of past and present. Through these things, the links that bind people together, with their ancestors and with their land, are materialized and crystallized." (Taylor 2008: 171).

Acknowledging the problems pointed out by Carsten and Hugh-Jones on Lévi-Strauss' "sociétés à maisons", Taylor nevertheless argued that the lack of a detailed and bounded definition of the concept was precisely what made it relevant for the analysis of Sia Raga architectonics. For him, houses seen as enduring social institutions successfully expressed the fundamental conception materialised by the buildings of that area: that of a "unity made of difference" (Taylor 2008: 173). Recalling Vienne's assertion (1984: 174) this idea of identity and otherness indeed pervaded northern Vanuatu and had generally strong kinship associations.

In Raga, as in the Banks Islands, the division into two moieties was a common pattern of social organisation, and was usually metaphorically expressed through the image of the two sides of the house (Taylor 2008: 173). While broadly linked to other islands of the area, Mere Lava appeared however to slightly differ from this general feature of North Vanuatu sociality. Rivers remarked:

"All the islands, with the exception of Merlav, possess the dual organisation of society, there being two chief social groups or moieties, called *veve* or *vev*, a term also meaning mother (...). In Merlav, it was found that the social organisation was of a kind widely different from that of the other islands. I obtained the names and something of the history of ten different groups called *tagataga* and my informant thought that there was at least one other." (Rivers 1914: 20, 24).

Chapter 2 of this thesis will give a more detailed account of social organisation on Mere Lava, but what can be remarked now is that the *tēgētēgē* (Rivers' *tagataga*) were only recently gathered in two sides on this island, following a decision taken by *jifs* around the time of Independence. If houses, particularly kitchen houses, also appear as crucial buildings linking people, landscape and temporal experiences, the social sides were not described as being like the 'two sides of the house', but rather as *tavalsal*, as already pointed out above. However, social bonds and spatiotemporal conceptions did, in the same way as Taylor remarked for Sia Raga, strongly intertwine with house materiality. Chapters 3 and 4 will highlight the place and transformative efficacy of kitchen houses at various levels during people's and matrilines' lives, while Chapter 5 will consider how these diverse connections between social, spatiotemporal and material realms were achieved during the physical construction of the buildings themselves.

As far as food is concerned, the anthropology of food as a domain of research has led to a wide range of approaches and adopted various foci, broadly concerned with how food production, food exchange and food consumption created and transformed human bodies and social relationships in relation to time and space. From the study of Robertson-Smith (1956 [1889]) who introduced the idea of commensality, or in other words how eating together crucially frames the formation of social groups, to the fundamental work of Levi-Strauss (1969, 1987a) on things raw, cooked and rotten, through to the important insights of Douglas (1966, 1975, 1984) about the structures of meals and how they relate to memory and understandings of time, the question of food and food habits has importantly pervaded anthropology.²⁰

²⁰ Through his examination of myth structures, Lévi-Strauss asserted that the discovery of fire and therefore of cooking could be seen as a symbolic expression for the transition from nature to culture. He thus defined a fundamental culinary triangle based on a "double opposition, on the one hand between raw and cooked, on the other between fresh and rotten. The axis that joins the raw and the cooked is characteristic of the transition to Culture; that joining the raw and the rotten, of the return to Nature. Thus cooking brings about the cultural transformation of the raw, just as putrefaction brings about a natural transformation." (Lévi-

In Melanesia, food has importantly been examined through the lens of exchange relationships. Again, the close links between food, sociality and spatio-temporal domains appeared as a striking aspect developed in those works. If Malinowski noted the flow of food in Trobriand exchanges and their outcomes in terms of expected return, his main interest went nevertheless on the *mwali* and *soulava* shell valuables circulating throughout the area (1922).²¹ Later on, however, broadly focusing on the same area, Weiner and then Munn paid more attention to yams' and pigs' circulation. Situating the notion of reciprocity into a larger view of reproductive systems, Weiner argued for the consideration of food items, as well as social identity or blood, as "exchange objects" in the same way as manufactured artefacts such as shell valuables (Weiner 1980: 73, compare Sahlins 1972: 215-219 for the fundamentality of foodstuffs as primary items of exchange shaping social relationships). She showed how their trajectories in conjunction with the whole "life-cycle of individuals (...) establish the temporal dimensions around which a particular societal system is structured" (Weiner 1980: 83).²² Similarly, pointing out the importance of food in the context of conceptions about space and time, Munn further asserted the centrality of food production and food giving in her study of the Gawan value system. According to her, the dialectic between food consumption and food giving, in defining particular "spatiotemporal value transformation", can be seen as the very "processual matrix" constructing the specific system of value on Gawa: "Whereas consumption directs food 'immediately' into the body, reducing the duration of the food and destroying its potential for yielding anything in the future, the transaction of food away from the body can produce further positive value products that themselves transcend the body of the donor, and in this instance, are seen as going beyond Gawa itself" (Munn 1986: 50-51). In this process of value creation through production and circulation of food, Munn identified memory as a fundamental aspect of the conception of the various spatiotemporal realms (1986: 60-67), a

Strauss 1987a: 40). For a review of the place of food in anthropological studies, see for instance Farquhar (2006: 145-60) and Sutton (2001: 4-16).

²¹ Malinowski, however, looked more thoroughly at the production of food and especially at the rituals related to it in his *Coral Gardens and Their Magic* (1935).

²² That food could be a major exchange item has also been powerfully described in Michael Young's study of exchanges in Goodenough Island, *Fighting with Food: leadership, values and social control in a Massim society* (1971). However, a touch of ecological determinism induced him to paradoxically denigrate food, as he seemed to place it on a lower scale of value compared to exchange artefacts. According to him: value could concentrate primarily on food "in an island where drought, food-shortage and famine were familiar, where pigs and shell-goods were not a store, standard and symbol of wealth as in so many parts of Melanesia and where external trade had not developed strongly" (Stanner 1971: xiii). Young's vision of exchange on Goodenough Island as an integrative mode of social control, expressed primarily through food, is relevant for Mere Lava and will be considered in Chapters 3, 4 and 7. On food, the creation of sociality and exchange, see also, for instance, Margaret Mead's "How the Papuan plans his dinner" (Mead 1934).

fact that Sutton also stressed in her study about food and memory in the Greek island of Kalymnos (Sutton 2001). Although focusing on an area far away from Melanesia, Sutton drew upon the work of Melanesianists such as Munn and emphasised the importance of the notion of synesthesia in constructing active memories through food exchange and consumption. She stated that the "synthesis or crossing of experiences from different sensory registers (...) is a key aspect of eating practices on Kalymnos", shaping the persons as they experience eating as repeated "embodied practices" (Sutton 2001: 17). Here the anthropology of the senses explored by Sutton through the lens of food and memory linked with Munn's phenomenological approach when she considered how the state of lightness or heaviness of the gardens as well as acts of eating one's own food or giving it away were seen as interrelated aspects that affect Gawan persons' own states of being and memories (Munn 1986: 80).

Similarly linked to the shaping of persons and sociality in general, studies focusing on the relationship between food and gender also matched with conceptions of food on Mere Lava. Drawing upon Mary Douglas' concepts of purity and pollution, Anna Meigs showed how among the Hua of Papua New Guinea gender qualities were considered as an inherent part of specific foods. Men and women respectively restricted themselves from eating the foods of the opposite gender, as it could be harmful for them. In contrast, they privileged other food thought to enhance appropriate inner states of being (Douglas 1966, Meigs 1984). Also working in Papua New Guinea, in the area of Milne Bay province, Miriam Kahn focused her work on the symbolism people attached to food according to gender (Kahn 1986). There, while human fertility, she argued, had to be associated with female spheres, the proper growing of taro was attributed to male magical powers. Again, the strict observance of food prohibitions and gendered division of labour was seen as a necessary condition for the proper reproduction of both garden products and human beings (Kahn 1986).

In Vanuatu, the relationship between food production, circulation and consumption, and ideas of place, time, sociality and the constitution of gendered persons, has triggered the interest of several scholars. While providing a thorough account of the behaviours related to food production and consumption in South Pentecost in the 1980s, identifying patterns of the gendered division of labour and gendered symbolism connected to crops such as taro and yams, Margaret Jolly also looked at the transformations of people's relationships to food brought about by contact with Europeans and imported food products (see especially Jolly 1981, 1991). Inspired by the same trend of reflection on the

impact of colonialism and modern migration to urban centres, numerous authors examined the changes in practices associated with food production and food consumption (Bonnemaison 1974, 1977, 1978; Walter *et al.* 1999; Walter and Tzerikantz 1998, 1999; Greindl 1996, 2000). More recently, research conducted in the northernmost part of Vanuatu has led scholars such as Sophie Caillon, Virginie Lanouguère-Bruneau and Carlos Mondragón to look at food in various ways (Caillon 2005, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002, Mondragón 2003, 2004, 2006). Caillon, as an ethnobiologist, focused on coconut tree and taro cultivation on Vanua Lava in order to explore the cultural importance of these two agricultural resources in the Banks Islands and to assess the ways in which both notions of cultural and agricultural diversity should be locally defined and combined so that they could be tools for the preservation of local heritage (Caillon 2005). She noted, for instance, the fundamental connection of the various taro cultivars to people's identity and memory through their specific names and history of transmission among lineages and individuals (Caillon 2005: 308-309). This association of gardens, crop cultivation and food preparation with memory, relationships to ancestors and local conceptions of time was also pointed out in the studies of both Lanouguère-Bruneau and Mondragón. Perhaps the most striking expression of these associations is to be found in their relation to ideas about transformation, fertility and reproduction, as crystallised into devices such as stone-ovens (Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002: 206, 291, 358; Mondragón 2003: 177; see also Nojima 2008).

Although these insights on food and its metaphorical and symbolic connections are absolutely relevant to Mere Lava, the modalities of their local expression need to be examined more thoroughly in order to identify the precise articulations between the different elements that come to be entangled in food production, circulation and consumption. These aspects will be considered along with kitchen houses in Chapters 3, 4 and 7, while the processes of food production, centred on two categories of dishes called in Bislama *laplap* and *nalot* will be the subject of Chapter 6.²³

Drawing upon these theoretical approaches to food and houses, this thesis intends to provide contextual data in order to understand how material and conceptual realms articulated together through both *n-eañ kuk* and food on Mere Lava. Part I will demonstrate

²³ Rather than designating specific dishes, *laplap* and *nalot* were in Vanuatu used to define two categories of dishes characterised by specific cooking techniques. Thus *laplap* designated all sorts of puddings obtained from various cultivated crops or from breadfruit, grated, wrapped into bundles of leaves and then baked in stone ovens. *Nalot*, by contrast, was used in Vanuatu to describe a category of dish obtained through the pounding of pre-cooked crops. More associated with areas situated in the North of the archipelago, *nalot* was most often obtained from breadfruit, taro or manioc. Generally speaking, *nalot* was in Vanuatu related to masculinity and prepared by men, while *laplap* tended to be associated with femaleness.

the foregrounded place these two kinds of artefacts possess in daily life and during ceremonial occasions. It will focus on their transformative efficacy at various levels and highlight the underlying values and conceptions that characterise social transformation on this island. Chapter 3 will examine kitchen houses' and food's efficacy at transitional stages in life such as birth, marriage and death, and it will consider these artefacts in a broader perspective according to which persons and things continuously circulate in order to ensure social groups' durability. Chapter 4 will focus more specifically on the transformative efficacy of food and kitchen houses in the contexts of status alteration systems and political achievement both in the past and during my fieldwork.

Part II will be concerned with the technical processes associated with building and cooking. It will characterise the various interactions 'in-the-making' between the physical building and social manifestations and show how these anchored the house as a crucial materialisation of people's social and spatio-temporal conceptions. Kitchen houses' multifaceted aspects will be exposed and questioned through the examination of construction processes in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 will explore more closely the production of food, as being one fundamental aspect of both the building technical sequence and a basic element of the house itself.

Finally Part III will draw upon the previous parts of the thesis in order to highlight how physical characteristics of kitchen houses and food interrelate with the specific condensation of space, time and sociality people called *histri* (B), 'history', on Mere Lava. In Chapter 7, spatial and physical patterns will therefore unfold as elements of a "social aesthetic" that privileges processes of tying, containment and revelation, and materialising values such as collaboration and balance. The efficacy of this aesthetic will ultimately be shown as ensuring in a significant way the social groups' continuity.

This will all be preceded, however, by background ethnographic information about Mere Lava in Chapter 2. By summarising how people explained their world and customs to me during fieldwork, I hope to convey the complex and lived context in which I conducted my study of kitchen houses and food. Although I am aware that its length could be questionable, I believe that this chapter gives some necessary information, prior to the analysis of houses and food, regarding the scarcity of information specifically related to Mere Lava in the pre-existent academic literature on Vanuatu.

Chapter 2: Settings

It is commonplace to remark in anthropology that fieldwork and the discipline itself rests upon relationality and even locates its very fundamental methods and "raison d'être" in a continuous dialogue between sameness and otherness. As Roy Wagner expressed it, fieldwork is thus a mutual invention during which the researcher, his topic of research as well as the people with whom he interacts, are constructed and construct themselves along shared (and unshared) experiences (Wagner 1975: 2).

As a researcher related to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, people genuinely expected me to record *kastom* stories, which are oral accounts and stories considered by ni-Vanuatu as specifically pertaining to themselves as opposed to imported ones. Doing this, they consciously or unconsciously referred to the fact that since the late 1970s the fundamental project developed by the VCC was indeed called the Oral Tradition Training Program and consisted of the tape recording of oral traditions from the diverse islands of the archipelago. After Independence in 1980, this programme developed further into the Vanuatu Cultural Centre fieldworker network, whose main objective was initially to "transcribe and publish some of the oral traditions already recorded, and to push ahead with recordings for use in schools" (Tryon 1987: 10). All the recordings made in the 1980s were at that time relayed in the islands of the archipelago through radio broadcasts (Bolton 1999b, 2003b: 27-32). For many people, these radio broadcasts are still at the core of their understanding of the *kastom* concept popularised by the VCC after Independence. They notably contributed to this general idea of VCC work being closely linked with the recording of oral traditions, which were in fact "mainly *kastom* stories from around the islands" (Tryon 1987: 11). That these stories were the focus of the first large-scale programme set up by the VCC is meaningful. As Jonathan Friedman noted about history, in Vanuatu as well, "the discourse of history as well as of myth, is simultaneously a discourse of identity; it consists of attributing a meaningful past to a structured present" (Friedman 1992: 194). As a narrative performance, *kastom* stories allow continual renegotiation of the relationships people keep with their past, which in turn ensure an ongoing shaping of their future in new and adaptable forms. Stories, while being an important medium through which people formulate and transmit knowledge about their

past, has also been for the VCC an important way to promote ideas about preservation of traditions and revival of those that were falling into disuse.

Following this association of my work with the VCC concern for an ever-promising and performative past, people consequently built for me a fieldwork methodology in harmony with their understanding of knowledge and learning processes, as well as with their current political concerns. I was often introduced to important notions about objects, time, kinship, or genealogy through being asked to record stories. These were often about the origin of matrilines, invariably finishing with that enumeration of women's names that traced the kinship ties of the narrator back to the mythical arrival of an ancestress and to the places related to her matriline. Other stories narrated the numerous tricks of spirits, generically called *temet*, in their attempts to eat human beings and the way the latter ultimately defeated the *temet*.

First, I will give an overview of the crucial Vanuatu notion of *kastom* and of the ways it was understood on Mere Lava at the time of my fieldwork. Then, the second and third sections will be concerned respectively with supernatural realms and kinship conceptions. Finally, a last section will give first a basic description of housing and physical features of houses on Mere Lava, before drawing a broad picture of food habits. Overall, the chapter will provide background information about the two kinds of artefacts, houses and food, which will then stand at the core of the thesis' discussion.

2.1 *Kastom* versus *moëtup verē*: the local conception of *kastom*

According to Lissant Bolton (1999a: 1), *kastom* is a Bislama term used by ni-Vanuatu to refer to their own set of knowledge and practices in contrast to those of Europeans. It is associated with a pre-colonial past and specific local practices in the archipelago, but it does not refer to a permanently fixed set of knowledge and practices. Benedicta Rousseau similarly underlined the absence of relevant definitional boundaries delimiting this concept. Speaking about the academic literature on *kastom*, she stated:

“My post-fieldwork re-reading of the same writings left me frustrated that no-one seems to have produced a definition of *kastom* yet that resembled what I had encountered. At the same time, I was not able to produce a definition myself that could cover the range of actions, practices, and verbal expressions of *kastom* present in Vanuatu” (Rousseau 2004: 24).

Therefore the most striking characteristic of *kastom* seemed precisely its potential and speculative nature, used to concretely classify and organise objects, behaviours and knowledge (Rousseau 2004: 2). Consequently, this notion should firstly be understood along with the socio-political history of the archipelago.

2.1.1 Historical developments of the notion of *kastom*

While the term was introduced from the English 'custom' in the beginning of the twentieth century, its use became popular only during the second half of the century. Then, in the 1960s and early 1970s, *kastom* was referred to as essentially associated with "islander way of life" in opposition to *skul* (B) 'school', meaning the Christian way of the Church introduced by missionaries as well as educational institutions that developed through it (Jolly 1992a, 1994: 21; Bolton 2003b: 10-12). Just before Independence in 1980, political parties such as the Nagriamel and the New Hebrides National Party (NHN) both used *kastom* as a key issue in order to promote their respective positions, but they did so in slightly different ways. The Nagriamel asserted an idea of *kastom* based on effective practices, whereas the National Party strongly linked *kastom* to the idea of a national identity. Meanwhile, due to the fact that the Nagriamel and National Party were supported respectively by French Catholics and British Protestant Churches, the term *kastom* moved from its old conception in opposition to *skul*. Churches operated a "moral reevaluation by means of which some *kastom* could be identified as good and worthy of revival within Christianity" (Bolton 2003b: 17).

After Independence, the idea of *kastom* as a unifying principle at a national level was disseminated by the National Party and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC). The VCC soon became a central place for the expression of cultural and political claims of indigenous people and a major agent in the promotion and thinking about *kastom* (Geismar 2003: 48). During the following years, it created notably for *kastom* the role of attributing value to particular sets of knowledge and practices, not only nationally but also at a local level, asserting the importance of local diversity in a unified archipelago. The development of a network of fieldworkers, local anthropologists documenting and researching their own knowledge and practices, supported by the VCC, played a crucial role (Bolton 1999a, 2003b: 184).

The central place of *kastom* in the debates around the time of Independence probably influenced foreign researchers, especially anthropologists, to particularly focus on the study of this notion. In the 1980s, the analysis of *kastom* was closely entangled with notions of “invention of tradition” and authenticity.²⁴ Simply stated, these studies particularly stressed the crucial differences between the (true) local understandings of *kastom* and the (false) view of the political elites of the government: “the view of *kastom* to emerge from the political circles of the capital is one of a set of survivals. This is so because those who have to decide what *kastom* was/is are precisely those who have lost theirs” (Philibert 1986: 8; see also Keesing and Tonkinson 1982, Jolly 1992a, Rousseau 2004). However, in 1982 Lamont Lindstrom already demonstrated the creativity and potentiality encompassed in the use of *kastom* versus not *kastom* concepts. He stated that “a codified answer is usually non-existent, people must reach this or failed to reach this in debate” (Lindstrom 1982: 326). Both in towns and in rural areas, *kastom* was thus to be seen as a situationally-negotiated and efficacious concept that people used to classify knowledge and practices into categories. The process involved was what Rousseau, following Miller (1987), identified as objectification. Indeed, she argued that whereas categorisation implied classifying things into a pre-existing realm by a process that does not transform the person, “objectification, on the other hand, defines a creative interaction between subject and object, in which change in the subject is the desired outcome” (Rousseau 2004: 39). Indeed, the idea that the use of the *kastom* concept modified both the person and the knowledge and practices that he/she aims to categorise appeared highly relevant when looking at people's relationships to houses and food on Mere Lava.

Material culture was crucial in constituting the categories of *kastom*/not-*kastom* because it connected materiality with conceptual realms and hence it was an important issue in political and cultural debates in Vanuatu (Geismar 2003: 29). On this point, the following quote from Robert Tonkinson, speaking about the reaction of people from south-east Ambrym to the newly-valued idea of *kastom* around Independence time, was revealing:

²⁴ These notions have been strongly debated by academics. Nevertheless, it lies outside the scope of this thesis to deal with these debates. See for example Keesing and Tonkinson 1982, Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983, Linnekin and Poyer 1990, Van der Grijp 2009.

“People in some rural areas took the message quite literally. They worried about a return to grass skirts and penis-wrappers, spears and bows and arrows, and wondered whether they would have to destroy non-*kastom* things such as hunting rifles, aluminium dinghies, outboards and so on” (Tonkinson 1982: 310).

Consequently, the movement of certain types of material culture production, and of the knowledge and practices associated with them, from the category of not-*kastom* to that of *kastom*, appears as highly political and strongly efficacious on both persons and material productions. Moreover, the role and presence of the researcher in a given place, at a given time, cannot but influence the definition of what things pertain to *kastom* and what not.

2.1.2 The notion of *kastom* on Mere Lava

On Mere Lava, the way people used and understood the notion of *kastom* was therefore to be appraised as a combined construction composed of the Vanuatu state conception of *kastom*, largely diffused through the VCC work, local conceptions organising the conventional ways to do things, and contextual situations involving, for instance, my presence. While trying to understand the diverse meanings encompassed by this notion, I was so constantly confronted with its overt manipulation that it ultimately appeared to me that, beyond a set of common understandings and uses, the actual relevance of *kastom* was probably to be located rather in the political potentialities it gave to people. As a Bislama term, *kastom* was used mainly by *jifs* (B), 'chiefs', in their speeches accompanying and explaining specific exchanges to the audience attending various ceremonies. *Kastom* was then related in these cases to very specific moments of the broader ceremonial occasions, and to particular spatial and social demonstrations during which certain kin relatives gathered together to present specific items to other relatives. Considered as crucial actions these demonstrations established and transformed social relations according to conventional expectations associated with the given ceremony. Most of the time, they took the form of a group of kinsmen and women gathering behind one or two persons, expressing their connection to their relatives, and to the ceremonial act, by touching the shoulder of the person standing in front. In this way, the notion of *kastom* was specifically linked to the creation of an efficacious, rhizomatic-shaped, socio-spatial pattern during ceremonial action.

Kastom was, however, also used more broadly in everyday talk to describe all the various named occasions that created and transformed a person's kin relationships during his or her lifetime.²⁵ Although these were always recognised as part of an ideal path through which individuals' lives were shaped, some of these *kastom* occasions were performed in very informal ways. A father would, for example, unpredictably stop to give a small amount of cash money to a man encountered on his way to the garden, in order to ensure the future help and advice of this man to his child, as his maternal uncle. Despite of its informal character, this *kastom* actually concerned and set up one of the most crucial relationships shaping people's lives on Mere Lava, the mother's brother/sister's child link.

Kastom was also widely used to describe the full set of practices and techniques that were considered to be genuinely originating from Mere Lava. Ways of building houses were thus divided into those that could be given the qualification *kastom* and others, understood as having been adopted from other islands. Among the latter were comprised, for instance, the techniques associated with corrugated iron and concrete houses, but also plaited split bamboo and wild cane walling, said to come from further north or the Solomon Islands, by contrast with stone walling conceptualised as a Mere Lava building technique.

However, in spite of the general use of the Bislama term in public speeches and discourses, people immediately agreed that the term *moëtup verē* should in fact be used in Mwerlap language to translate the set of notions encompassed in the Bislama *kastom*. Literally speaking, *moëtup verē* was translated to me as 'the way of the place' and thus emphasised a certain idea of geographical belonging and 'groundness' in much the same way as Taylor noted for north Pentecost (Taylor 2008: 11). Here, the association of *moëtup*, which corresponds to a person's behaviour (*fasin* (B)), and *verē*, a word used at various levels to describe one's hamlet, village, the whole island or more generally a place associated with human settlement, bound together ideas of locality and sociality in a meaningful concept and gave an interesting insight on the way people understood locally their relationships to place. However, whereas Taylor remarked that in North Pentecost people were emphasising the fact that *kastom* and the local expression were not loaded with exactly the same set of significances (Taylor 2008: 11), on Mere Lava my questions

²⁵ This notion has been popularised in anthropological literature under the French notion of "rite de passage", first named as such by Arnold Van Gennep (1909). According to him various rituals accompany the diverse changes of status during the individuals' life. They can be divided into three steps: separation, reclusion, re-integration (Van Gennep 1909).

about similar differences always resulted in a puzzled nodding, and the stressing that *moëtup verē* would be the good translation for the term *kastom*. Discrepancies between the nation-scale notion of *kastom* and Mere Lava *moëtup verē* were nevertheless evident through other reactions. Working with the VCC, I was associated with ideas of *kastom* diffusion and preservation. As such, people assumed that my first interests would necessarily be in dances and masquerades, together with *kastom* stories, as already mentioned above. Whereas they immediately recognised my concern about gendered relationships and buildings and identified it with *histri*, 'history', they were slightly more puzzled when I showed my interests to be as well in food, cooking and basketry, that seemed less self-evidently to be categorised as *kastom*.

These confusions were probably connected to the fact that there were not any VCC fieldworkers from Mere Lava. Consequently, some of the most recent meanings associated with *kastom* as a multifaceted concept had probably not deeply pervaded the conceptions of people on this island. As a term referring not to the entire system of knowledge and practices but to some of them, *kastom* was in Vanuatu, before the 1990s, fundamentally linked to men's knowledge and practices. In the 1980s, a sense of the need to consider also women's knowledge and practices grew progressively around the fieldworker group and the VCC. It led in 1991 to the creation of the Women's Culture Project, of which Lissant Bolton was appointed training officer, and which was based on Ambae. First with Leah Ture Leo and then Jean Tarisesei, she made the crucial assertion that "women have *kastom* too" during meetings with women in the various districts of Ambae (Bolton 2003b: xiv). This sentence became well known and was the departure point for the re-evaluation by women from Ambae of their practices, such as textile making. They developed a sense of the importance of its revival and transmission to the young generation, as *kastom* to be preserved and promoted. Women fieldworkers, radio programmes and the organisation of workshops and festivals had subsequently spread the idea to most of the islands in Vanuatu.

Similarly, on Mere Lava, people had organised in 2002 a women's art festival, gathering other women's groups from the Banks archipelago. Mainly created through women's Anglican Church groups, this festival focused on food processing, as well as on women's dances and songs. However, it seemed that it did not elicit the subsequent everyday use of *kastom* regarding the specific Mere Lava food dishes. When I arrived on the island at the end of 2010, what the VCC would have called *kastom kakae* (B), *kastom* 'food' (see for instance Annual women's fieldworker meeting 1992) was rather named

aelan kakae and differentiated from other islands' food ways through its being granted a specific *stael* (B), 'style'. By contrast, specific dishes made to avoid starving at cyclone times were the ones immediately identified as *kastom kakae*. As my work went on, however, the scope of what was encompassed into the category *kastom kakae* was progressively enlarged and other dishes were presented to me as such.

2.1.3 *Kastom* and *skul* from the Mere Lava perspective

Another major issue considered by scholars working on the concept of *kastom* in Melanesia, has been its formation as an oppositional category to Church (*skul*). Bolton, examining the various developments of the concept, stated that "the formulation of the idea of cultural difference as a category, as *kastom*, was itself a European introduction, emphasized in particular by the practices of Christian missionization", whereas the very idea of one's difference regarding to other groups obviously pre-dated European contacts (Bolton 1993: 81). The reformulation of the idea of difference into two divergent 'roads', *kastom* and *skul*, resulted then from the various contacts originating in colonial contexts, especially from the contact with the different Churches (Bolton 1993: 83-84). However, beyond the re-evaluation of the opposition between *kastom* and *skul* at the time of Independence, Margaret Jolly noted accurately that "in conceptualizing their different ways of life as two alternative roads, *kastom* versus *skul*, the degree to which *kastom* has been transformed by colonialism and *skul* accommodated to ancestral practices, has been obscured" (Jolly 1994: 21). Thus, on Mere Lava, the concept of *kastom*, or *moëtup verē*, was rather to be appraised through the careful examination of "convergences" and "divergences" that linked local conceptions of *kastom* and the Anglican Church (Taylor 2010: 422). Similarly to what Kolshus also noted for Mota, *kastom* and Christianity were rather "co-residing metaphysical domains", of which the mobilisation as interpretative devices reflected people's current political concerns at a given time (Kolshus 1999: 3).

Convergences and divergences between pre-missionisation beliefs and those that were developed after the arrival of the Anglican Church, as well as the ways in which the manipulation of past remembering and communicating was linked to socio-political strategies, were well highlighted into the story of the arrival of the Church. Asking who would be the appropriate person to tell me this story, I was directed towards a relatively young man, the Deacon of Tasmat village, who had been educated in English in South

Santo a few years before. He was designated to tell me this story because he was invested with the highest position in the Mere Lava Anglican Church at the time of my enquiry, but also because he was simultaneously leader of the main *na-salagor*, of Tasmat village.²⁶

Here was exemplified a first and quite frequent convergence occurring in Vanuatu between island conceptions of supernatural powers and beings and the Christian idea of sacred power, whose mastering and embodiment were expressed through, and incumbent upon, the same persons. While I will consider the correlation between supernatural and sacred power on Mere Lava later, the story of the arrival of the gospel supports here the argument that it would be misleading to approach the relationships between *kastom*, or *moëtup verē* and Churches in Manichaean terms. The story narrated the arrival of Bishop Coleridge Patteson in 1857 on Mere Lava and the subsequent conversion of one of the two important chiefs of the island at that time. Beyond a quite strong influence of what can be identified as an Anglican Church constructed mythology of arrival and conversion, particularly noticeable in the emphasis put on Bishop Patteson's mastering of the Mwerlap language, two details in this story particularly demonstrated the ways in which clergymen stressed a continuous scheme linking *kastom* and Church. The welcoming *jif*, named Qoqo, presented at first the Bishop to other supernatural beings of the island as one of them, who had to be peacefully integrated into the community of entities inhabiting the island:

"He first led him to another pass to come ashore, Nier Qarañar. At that place, there was a tabu village, which was secret and where the chiefs performed what we call *mwowmwow* in Mwerlap, the worship of the heathen Gods to kill men or to send the devils to eat men in the other villages. Chief Qoqo led Bishop Patteson to that place and left him standing up while he himself was dancing around a cycad tree. He danced and sang and Bishop Patteson did not know what chief Qoqo was doing. But in fact chief Qoqo was dancing and singing to tell all the heathen Gods of Mere Lava that a new devil had come, and that with peace, they would all welcome him and would not hurt him in any way." (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 14/02/2011).²⁷

Then, later on, as Christianisation progressed on Mere Lava, his conversion was similarly presented as naturally following the process that characterised the rising of men in the

²⁶ Named Deacon Steve Turris, he was ordained priest only a few months after my departure from Mere Lava, on March 2012. At that occasion, a great number of dances were performed and the manufacturing of certain masks was revived (Anthony Turris, Gaua, 16/09/2012).

²⁷ For the full story, see Appendix I. Stories gathered during fieldwork were as much as possible recorded twice. Interlocutors were asked to narrate it first in Mwerlap and then to translate it in Bislama. All English translations of stories and interviews are my own. Unless stated otherwise, I established them from Bislama, with checking of specific terms in Mwerlap.

indigenous status alteration system. This chief thus killed a pig in order to become Christian in the same way he had previously killed pigs in order to enhance his status by acquiring higher ranks and titles:

"Chief Qoqo led the Bishop to his place in Tasmat, one place called Leurok. The history tells that he stayed there three days, during which he was preaching, but at that time the villagers did not understand anything of what the Bishop was telling them. He had a necklace with a cross on which Jesus was hanging and chief Qoqo asked him in the language of Mere Lava what it was. Bishop Patteson understood that Qoqo was asking about what was hanging on his neck, and he explained that it was the Cross, and that the man over it was called Jesus. (...) [Later on], in 1882, William Vaget [a native from Mere Lava] became Deacon and then in 1900, Bishop Wilson ordained him as a Priest. At that date, Christianity on Mere Lava was already strong and its quality was good, all heathens had become Christian, they were leaving all the practices they had before, all the Gods they worshipped. At that time, Qoqo too killed a pig for Christianity. He had been killing pigs until seven steps, the eighth was killed for Christianity. Thus, the whole island became Christian and they built churches all around it." (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 14/02/2011).

By contrast, the exogenous nature of the new religion was acknowledged through the sequence of the presentation of the necklace with the Cross, which gave rise to interrogations about its meaning and during which the Bishop did not seem to understand the language any more. Divergences and convergences were thus inextricably entangled into discourses about *kastom* and *skul*. They appeared to be fundamentally based on "situationally determined criterion of relevance" that "explain the ease and the pragmatic interest with which [people] approach and incorporate new ideas and changing conditions since what is at stake is not their entire world view but rather practice-complexes, which are more easily adaptable should new appealing structures be encountered" (Kolshus 1999: 3).

Similarly, while people always deplored the destructive influence of the arrival of the Church on practices and the manufacturing of artefacts considered as part of the *kastom/moëtup verē*, when questioned about the differences between Church and *kastom*, most of them would answer that it was the same thing, mobilising, for instance, similar metaphors of paths to be properly followed in order to reach either the pre-Christian high-ranking positions or the Christian heaven. Other parallels were made between the regalia associated with Church positions and those associated with the restricted male domain of the *salagor*. Headdresses and ornaments produced and displayed in the context of *salagor-*

related dances were considered equivalent to the headdresses and religious garments of the Anglican Church bishops, in that both kinds of things were seen as imbued with supernatural power. Both consequently necessitated a specific preparation, which aimed at increasing the capacity of people to support and manage the inherent power of those things. In turn, the very act of wearing these headdresses or religious clothes would also imbue people with increased energetic power. As it was explained to me, before entering the church, one had to pray and prepare oneself to be able to preach properly. This had an internal efficacious action. It was said to change the persons from inside by bringing into them the power of the Holy Spirit, in the same way as the bishop would imbue a new priest with the power of God during the ordination. This contingent preparation for an intimate contact with supernatural power, I was told, was exactly the same reason why men had to *velvel*, respect certain restrictions (especially concerning food and sexual intercourse), before entering the *salagor*. Doing so, one would be able to handle such situations where: "when you work on a headdress, or when you wear it and dance, you become friend with this spirit but if you fail, it will affect dangerously your wife and your children" (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011).

Rather than as discrete categories, *kastom* and *skul*, together with their strategic manipulation in discourses, were therefore embedded in a sphere encompassing the whole array of conceptions associated with the supernatural world and beings. Moreover, this sphere pervaded all aspects and experiences of life. Although a detailed study centred on this topic unfortunately lies outside of the scope of the present work, it seems nevertheless necessary to turn now to a brief description of the main characteristics and related conceptions associated with this world where energetic substances and spirits hold a prominent place. This will provide the reader with basic contextual keys to understand further developments of the thesis.

2.2 *Laklak bul re-temet*: relationships between people and supernatural entities.²⁸

Ever since Mauss established the notion of "a total social fact" (1950a: 76), it is common to re-iterate the absolute necessity not to separate such domains as the physical and tangible world and cosmological conceptions for these are generally domains enmeshed together in multiple ways. On Mere Lava, as elsewhere in the Pacific, the separation

²⁸ *Laklak bul re-temet* can literally be translated as 'dance with the spirits'.

between the everyday experience of the physical world and other realities that would lie outside of the limits of the immediately visible, appeared completely irrelevant as soon as one spent more than a few minutes chatting with people. Intimately linked to individual selves, sociality and places, invisible entities and substances were an integral part of people's tangible experiences. However, it was also necessary to acknowledge the important reflexivity that characterised people's appraisal of those experiences. The supernatural was thus well conceptualised and recognised locally as being connected to a set of places, identified entities and substances, associated with certain characteristics, some rules of behaviour and an array of causal and consequential inferences.

2.2.1 Places

As a meaningful and constructed landscape, the island aggregated different places at different levels, not all of them equal in the relationship they were thought to have with the invisible world. Broadly speaking, as an inhabited place, *ne-verē*, it was understood as standing inside a space defined by the sky, either called *na-maleg* if cloudy or *no-tok* if clear and blue, and the sea, today generally called *na-nag*, literally 'salt water'. The latter name came from the use people made of salt water while cooking, but it was also recognised that in the past the name used would have been *na-lam* (see also Vienne 1984: 68-69). As a matter of comparison, we shall here refer to the similar terms Vienne described in his study of the cosmological conceptions of the people on Mota Lava. According to him, the sky, *ne-tuka* in Mwotlap (corresponding to *no-tok* in Mwerlap), could be understood as a basket or a mat maintaining the proper order of the whole socio-spatial organisation (Vienne 1984: 66). Although on Mere Lava, the term *no-tok* was also the name of a specific basket, used to preserve and dry *nangae* nuts in kitchens, a direct relationship with the sky was not made so clearly during my fieldwork. Rather, both the sky and the sea were explained to me as permeable boundaries that linked and separated different spaces. As liminal areas, they allowed, in certain circumstances, access to what was situated beyond. This was, for instance, well expressed through the *kastom* story

recounting the crucial elements of the Maketuk matriline's origin that highlighted the liminal aspect of the sky:²⁹

"I was shooting birds on a banyan tree. One of my arrows got stuck into a branch of the banyan. The branch fell down and, when I went to look at it to search for my arrow, I saw a group of birds coming down to bathe. They were coming from beyond the sky. While they were bathing, I saw one woman of them, I took one of her wings (that she had removed to swim) and I hid it. Then when they finished bathing, they all came and took back their wings, one took his own, then the other one took his own, etc, until the woman took hers but she found only one. She cried and cried until the others asked:

- Hey! What is it?
- Ho, I don't know where is my wing!

She continued to cry, until the other birds went back and the man came and calmed her down:

- Hey! Why are you crying?
- I searched for my wing but I cannot find it!
- No, leave it!

But he was the one who hid it! Then, they both went to the house of the man, they married and time went on until the woman gave birth to children. That continued, continued until us today." (Willy Sovan, Auta village, 16/02/2011).

As far as the sea was concerned, its liminal aspect was notably expressed through the fact that deceased people would have, before the Christian era, crossed the sea in order to reach the volcano Geret, on the middle of the lake Letas, on Gaua. At that place, the dead spirits would have entered the world of the dead, called *bono*. Vienne described this world of the dead (*panoi* in Mota) as being conceived in the Banks Islands as a reversed image of the world of the living, where notions of definite spaces created through the respect of proper social and spatial distances, would be abolished. Thus what would characterise the world of the dead, according to him, would be its general undifferentiated nature (Vienne 1984: 72). Although people did not mobilise the same elements to describe the *bono* on Mere Lava, the undifferentiated aspect was an important characteristic of this space. The *bono* would thus be "at the same time nowhere and everywhere", an interlocutor told me with a large gesture of his arm encompassing the space that was

²⁹ A version of this story was also recorded by Florence Coombe (1911: 50-53). The name of this matriline was significant by itself: it was formed from the adverb *mak*, meaning 'over', 'on top of' and the name *tuk*, referring, as already noted, to the sky.

surrounding us, "it stays only like that with only a lot of wind everywhere, there is no light, there is no island, there are no houses, there is not anything in *bono*, everything is floating all over the place" (John Mera Bice, Tasmat village, 15/07/2011).

At another level, the island itself was also composed of various differentiated areas (Figure 2.01). It was conceived of as standing between two areas of water, the sea lying at the base of it while the small lake occupying the volcano caldera, *no-wo*, marked its upper limit. Surrounded by an area of sand, this lake was thought of as being somewhat equivalent to the sea. This was expressed through their similar condition. Numerous people told me that when the sea was rough, so too was the lake, or that when the tide was in or out, the lake level too rose or fell. The whole upper part of the island, constituted by uncultivated patches of forest, was then called *ne-etto*, from the adverb *to*, which was also used to qualify all the areas situated on the upper slopes of the volcano. Below *ne-etto* were spaces where people went on a daily basis, either old gardens, *ne-töltöl*, where yams had already been harvested, new gardens, *no-oñ* where yams were planted yet, or uncultivated creek spaces, *ne-qanñ*, mainly considered reserve spaces for trees and other plants particularly used in architecture (tree-ferns, sago palm trees, bamboos, etc.). This set of spaces was most of the time encompassed in people's informal chat under the generic term *no-won*, meaning 'the bush', and people would be more precise about specific spaces only when they had to further define which of their gardens or creek spaces they were speaking about. Next, the lower parts of the volcano slopes were constituted by the village spaces, *ne-verē*, which formed the upper boundary of an uncultivated patch of land, *lañ-vēar*, where pigs were left to wander about, separated from the garden areas by the stone terraces of the hamlets. Finally, the shore areas, characterised by piles of black volcanic rocks that dropped sharply into the sea, were designated generically as *no-lo*. Therefore, as a whole, the island appeared to be conceived of as a set of defined levels, even if, in practice, boundaries between different spaces and the way people behaved with respect to them were always situational and dictated by social contingencies.

As a spatial category, *no-won* contrasted in people's conceptions with village areas, *ne-verē*, especially regarding their relationships with the supernatural world. Understood as the place inhabited by human beings, *ne-verē* designated whole villages, specific hamlets or single stone terraces, *ne-gēt-eañ*. It was associated with places where one could build houses, i.e. secured spaces with respect to supernatural entities. However, in spite of their use as oppositional categories, *ne verē* and *no-won* were actually both related in multiple ways to, and encompassed areas diversely imbued with, supernatural

power. Inside of the villages, a number of places were linked to specific ancestors, *temet*, who were said to affect people's life either positively or negatively. The cemetery, old settlement places and especially spaces where matriline-related men's houses, *ne-gemel*, had once been built, were areas where human beings, and especially women, had to be careful not to behave improperly, lest the *temet* associated with these places could affect them. Similarly, among the various spaces encompassed by the *no-won*, the creeks *ne-qan* were also conceived of as imbued with the potentially dangerous power characterising the supernatural world and the entities living in it. Walking into creek areas, one had to restrain oneself from joking or speaking loudly, while food leftovers should be burnt or kept and given to the pigs back to the village.

Hence, on Mere Lava, persons and places were fundamentally permeable to each other. Human beings affected places as much as places affected human beings in an on-going relationship of mutual construction, which was developed through people's life-time experience (Bonnemaison 1996, Hess 2009). Together with the rules of sociality, relationships with the supernatural world appeared therefore as one of the modes in which people interacted with their spatio-temporal environment. *Kastom* stories allowed me to define more thoroughly the ways in which people formulated these interactions and understood how they functioned at different levels.

2.2.2 Supernatural beings

The mediation role between human beings and the invisible world appeared firstly to be played by various supernatural beings, grouped together under the polysemic term *temet*. Codrington, at the end of the 19th century, already noted the variability attached to this term in the Banks Islands when he remarked: "It is most important to distinguish between spirits who are beings of an order higher than mankind, and the disembodied spirits of men, which have become in the vulgar sense of the word ghosts" (1972 [1891]: 120, see also François 2013). On Mere Lava, the category *temet* similarly encompassed a wide range of beings, the specificities of which were implicitly understood according to the situation. The two following stories, related to me when I enquired about *temet*, exemplify this diversity:

1. "There was a man called Moēn. On a late afternoon, while he was hunting flying-foxes, he felt tired, lay down on a flat wood and fell asleep. However, five days before, one of his brothers died and according to the *kastom* on Mere Lava, other *temet* were passing around with the new deceased. Hence, while Moēn was sleeping, the party of *temet* found him. They lifted him up and carried him with them, intending to bring him to a place called Nelow, situated on the slope underneath Loluwor, from where *temet* flew off. When they lifted up the sleeping man, his recently deceased brother spoke in his ear and told him:

- Brother, you are already dead, but when we will go down, you will hear me telling to my friends that they have to lift you up a little bit more. When you will hear that, you will catch strongly all the vines that are entangled over you, and you will hang to them at once!

During their walk downward, some of the *temet* were asking:

- Where will we be eating the big piece of meat that we have here?

There are two rocks in Auta, the larger one is called Vatrañ Lap, while the smaller one bears the name of Vatrañ Rig. So, some of the *temet* were asking:

- On which rock will we eat this man?

Another answered:

- We will eat on the small rock.

But all the others told:

- No we will eat on the bigger rock!

They continued their road downward and suddenly the man that just died shouted:

- Lift him up a little bit!

They did so and the man then hung strongly to the entangled vines over him. The *temet* went on until the point where they flew off with the piece of flat wood on top of which the man had been sleeping. When they landed on the big stone called Vatrañ Lap, they put down the piece of wood and were very surprised not to find the man lying on it. They were furious and flew back at once, but they reached the point where the man had been hanging at dawn and therefore the man had been able to get down and go back home." (Norman Philip, Leqel village, Mere Lava, 26/01/2011).

2. "There were three men, staying in a special place where they were making headdresses. They were singing continuously because they did not want those hats to attack them. However, at some point they realised that they did not have salt water any more, so two of the men decided to go down to the shore in order to bring some back. At that time, the man staying with the *temet* felt tired. He knew that he had to stay awake, but his feeling was too strong and he fell asleep. The headdresses then came alive because the man had stopped singing and they ate the man's eyes. When the two others came back from the seaside, they heard a song coming out from the house and they knew at once that something was wrong. They entered the house and saw the blood and their companion who was dead." (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 23/11/2010).

Whereas the first story clearly linked *temet* with what Codrington called the "disembodied spirits" of deceased people, the second one enlarged the scope of entities that could be spoken of as *temet*. At a first level, beyond the complex rhetoric mobilised to make coherent together Christian and local indigenous beliefs, there is here a reminiscence of Codrington's two categories: entities that were once human, *temet*, that would be distinguishable from others that were never so, *vu*, which were incorporeal and could be sometimes related to natural elements (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 123). The complexity and polysemic aspect of *temet* were also importantly highlighted in the various discussions I had about this notion. According to the current Christian belief, after they died, all the human beings' 'souls' (*spirit* (B)) went to heaven. The supernatural entities *temet* said to be recently deceased ancestors, who come back and talk during the night in relatives' dreams or through the voices of young children or sick people, would in fact be other spiritual entities called *na-tañwanian*, who could be found in plants or animals and who tricked human beings into believing that they were the spirits of their deceased relatives. These *na-tañwanian* would actually be part of another category of entities generically called *vu*, associated with aspects of the physical environment, and to be contrasted with *temet* because of their ability to move by themselves, whereas those latter would need the intervention of human beings to make them move (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011). In contrast, the named ancestors also called *temet*, whose presence still imbued old settlement places, and to whom people very often attributed the failure or success of human enterprises, were said to have such a pervasiveness because they were pre-Christian ancestors, and therefore they did not go to heaven (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat Village, 17/06/2011).

Actually, the boundaries between categories defined by Codrington seemed rather unclear to people. When leaving the gardens or crossing a creek area, women always loudly called the name of the recently born babies or of young children, even if they were actually carrying them in their arms: "Such and such, you come, we are going back home now!" (for instance Gresline Mathew, 05/02/2011, Tasmat village, my translation from Mwerlap).³⁰ Asking the reason for that practice, I was told that it was because the spirits of babies and young children were still very fragile and insufficiently grounded in the place of human beings, so that they were at risk not to follow the actual body of the child and to get lost on the road. This spiritual entity that everybody possessed was called *natānwaniān*, thus relating at least one part of human beings to the category of entities that Codrington assumed to be characterised by their non-human nature. Similarly, in the Christian context, the Holy Spirit was called *nu-Vu nu-roñ*, 'the Vu spirit that hears/understands', and was perceived as a spiritual power inhabiting clergymen, the Church paraphernalia and Christian individuals when they gathered to pray.

The second story showed another set of elements to which the generic term *temet* was conventionally applied. The headdresses manufactured in the context of the *salagor* men's restricted dance groups bore this name, but in contrast to other islands of the Banks group, the dance groups themselves were never described to me as "*temet*" societies (Codrington 1972 [1891]; Rivers 1914; Vienne 1982, 1984; Kolshus 1999). The headdresses, together with the carved and painted patterns that once appeared on the front gable of the *salagor ne-gemel*, and on the houses of high-ranking women, featured a series of identified characters (see Figure 4.03, 4.04 and 4.06). Temet Lap, which corresponded to Codrington's and Rivers' Tamate Liwoa, meaning 'the big *temet*', was thus understood as the mother of the other *temet*. When represented in two dimensions, it often took the shape of a black lozenge surrounded by short radial strokes and separated vertically in the middle by a white line on either side of which circular eyes were figured. Other characters were Qorqorlap, 'the *temet* with big ears', that distinguished itself from Temet Lap only through that feature, Temet Worwor, of which the body was figured by a four-petal shape with legs, and Temet Görgör, the *temet* usually taken to be responsible for strong winds and cyclones. However, although classified as *temet*, the headdresses were further described as

³⁰ Gresline also used to laugh at me and at my newness to her gardens, calling me in the same way as her little daughter when leaving to go home: "*Matchén, Marie! Van mē, mwolmwol kel lēkē!*"

closely related to specific types of powerful birds and fishes, which ultimately associated them with uncultivated areas of the creeks and with the sea.

Therefore, on Mere Lava, as François also noted for the whole Banks Islands, *temet* appeared as a "cover term" designating a wide range of entities. His lexical map, based on a thorough etymological study, accurately conveys an idea of the scope of use associated with this word (François 2013: fig. 4). Beyond the diversity it emphasises, this diagram also reveals one of the most crucial characteristics shared on Mere Lava by the various *temet* entities. Whether having good or bad outcomes and influences on human beings' lives, they were all conceived of as imbued with a certain amount of supernatural power. In the same way as the *bono* was understood as a fundamentally undifferentiated area, *temet* entities' inherent power appeared as ontologically undetermined. As Tonkinson remarked, a wide range of effects, either benevolent or malevolent, could be obtained according to the various kinds of manipulations and relationships people would have or apply to that power and the entities imbued with it (1982: 77). On Mere Lava, *temet* appeared in most stories and exegesis as dangerous beings haunting creeks and forest areas, waiting in hunger to devour incautious human beings, or as rancorous ancestors willing to keep babies or attract young children to their invisible world. However, one of the first conversations I had about *temet* also featured them as helpful and benevolent entities. It was explained to me how it was possible to call *temet* for a large array of things to be done. For instance, before fishing, one could go to the cemetery and call a recently deceased person, then, continuing one's way, one would feel someone's presence: "when you walk, somebody walks with you, when you paddle, somebody paddles with you, when you fish somebody fishes with you, so that there is a huge amount of fish at the end of the day". Then returning home the man would have to tell the solicited *temet* to go back to his place in the cemetery, before going back home safely himself, loaded with a huge amount of fish (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 23/11/2010). Thus, beyond a mediation role, the supernatural entities were conceived of as repositories of a kind of undefined power that could be used for very different purposes.

2.2.3 Substances and the supernatural world

Interactions between human beings and the supernatural world were also played out on a second level. At this level, the primary actors seemed to be substances and senses that

mediated and modelled the mutual influence that human and supernatural power had on each other.

The name and the nature of this supernatural power has been the focus of numerous studies in the Pacific. First described at the end of the 19th century by Codrington, *mana* was originally conceptualised by reference to the Mota understanding of the notion. Already, the undifferentiated nature of *mana* was noted by the missionary when he remarked:

"There is a belief in a force altogether distinct from physical power, which acts in all kinds of ways for good and evil, and which is of the greatest advantage to possess or control. This is *mana*. (...). This *Mana* is not fixed in anything and can be conveyed in almost anything; but spirits, whether disembodied souls or supernatural beings have it and can impart it." (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 118-19).

Identifying this concept with "all Melanesian religion", Codrington (1972 [1891]: 119) further defined it as an energetic power recognisable in the effective and successful results that were imparted to its presence in persons and things. While *mana* has been broadly discussed as a relevant concept for the whole Pacific area, it seems nevertheless important here to acknowledge local variations characterising it (Kolshus 1999: 154-59).³¹

On Mere Lava, this power was expressed by the word *na-man*. Variously present in persons and things such as the stones used in magic, it was nevertheless defined to me mainly in the context of *salagor*. As a power obtained through the proper respect of rights and restrictions related to dancing and the wearing of masks, through eating the food of *salagor*, as well as through the actual dancing and wearing of the *temet* masks, *na-man* was said to be intimately linked to human beings' interactions with supernatural beings. Before entering the *salagor* space, men had to *velvel*, respect certain restrictions, especially regarding sexual intercourse. This action was said to be necessary in order to acquire a specific condition of the mind and lightness of the body, which would in turn allow men to dance and wear masks safely. Acquiring the rights related to certain dances or the manufacturing of masks, men were similarly enhancing their *na-man*. This power, gained through such actions and proper behaviours, would then be publicly expressed and validated through the very performance of masquerades. Generally speaking, men

³¹ For a more general discussion on the concept of *mana*, see Codrington (1972 [1891]), Handy (1927), Hogbin (1936), Firth (1940), Keesing (1984), Mondragón (2004, 2012).

possessing *na-man* were described as men of influence, whose speech and wishes other members of the community would respect.

Men and women appeared to have slightly different relationships with *na-man*. While men acquired that power through their contacts with the supernatural world, especially in the context of the *salagor*, women were less readily associated with *na-man*. Although it was acknowledged that there was a small amount of *na-man* expressed through women's dances, *ne-lian* and *no-bo*, because women had to pay for the right to wear certain leaves, *do-kerē*, of a masculine type (longer and thinner than the feminine type of *do-kerē*), their power or influence was generally not described using that concept. Rather, the significant substance empowering women was formulated in terms of their specific odour, *sagean* (*smel* in Bislama). Together with *na-man*, odour indeed appeared during my diverse enquiries as another crucial mediating substance between human beings and the supernatural sphere.

Smell was very often invoked as a self-explanatory reason why certain restrictions had to be respected. It was explained to me numerous times that men who were in close contact with the *temet* world while manufacturing masks or rehearsing for dances in the *salagor* would have to avoid contact with their wives and children, *velvel*, lest these latter would be affected and got sick because they would catch 'the wind', *ne-lian*, coming from the *salagor* through the intermediary of their husband or father. In other contexts, the same *temet*'s *ne-lian* was also often made responsible for collapses or other minor sicknesses implying weakness or tiredness. This was generally associated with an individual's improper behaviour while standing in or going through one of the numerous places thought to be imbued by the presence of *temet*. Finally, an inquiry into the ways this *ne-lian* actually affected people revealed that one of its most crucial qualities resided in its capacity to transport odours, *sagean*:

"*Na-sagean* is like a wind that blows on something, and which I can smell, like a man that passes, of whom the wind carries the odour. That goes inside of people, it can affect people. It can go inside and affect the food as well, and then if people eat this food they would get sick." (Jif Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011).

Therefore scenting elements were perceived as fundamental channels through which the power *na-man*, characterising the supernatural world and the entities living in it, affected or was transmitted into the world of living human beings. Fragrant items, leaves

or flowers, were also very frequently used in order to protect bodies against the influence of *temet*. During dances, people, especially women and children, would always cover their head with certain types of perfumed flowers to protect themselves against the power of the dancing entities.

But more than in any other context, the notion of smell took a primary relevance in the explanation of gendered restrictions and relationships. While walking together on a path, men and women organised themselves so that men would walk first in order not to be hurt by women's smell that could confuse them and make them weak. Women's clothes, considered "smelly" would have to be washed separately from those of their husbands, sons, fathers or uncles, and, ideally, even the buckets used for that purpose would have to be clearly separated and identified so that they would not be confused. This "strong-smelling" quality was particularly associated with menstrual blood and with women's bodily fluids, the conceptual importance of which has been largely shown for the whole Pacific region (Douglas 1966). Especially strong restrictions concerned the whole set of actions and material items associated with the production and consumption of food. It was therefore an absolute masculine task to regularly clean the shallow stone ovens from ashes that had accumulated in them. Similarly, no women would ever sit on the bigger stones forming the edge of ovens, nor would they step over any cooking stones or dishes.

2.3 *Sipos i nomo gat woman, i nomo gat tēgētēgē*: matrilines and social organisation on Mere Lava.³²

2.3.1 At the beginning were matrilines: the origins of human beings and matriliney

In the Banks Islands, early anthropologists such as Codrington (1972 [1891]) or Rivers (1914) recorded the fundamental importance of the local mythical hero Qet in the creation of the world and of human beings. The amount of stories relating to Qet's and his brother's adventures and travels is too large to be fully recounted here, but it seems nevertheless interesting to note how certain ideas, about social organisation and the importance of matriliney for instance, were situated at the very core of this cycle of stories. Said to be born in Vanua Lava from a rock-mother named Qatgoro or Iro Ul, Qet then had eleven brothers all called Tangaro, but further characterised by specific surnames (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 156).³³ Thus, ever since the mythical origins, a set of matrilineal relatives was emphasised as the fundamental creative agent in the world. According to Codrington, Qet fashioned, for instance, men and women, either from the wood of the Dracaena tree – according to a version recorded on Gaua – or from the clay (men) and rods used also to make headdresses (women) – according to a version recorded on Mota (Codrington 1891: 157-8). On Mere Lava, however, although Qet was clearly recognised as the "god from before", the creation of human beings was not attributed to Qet's generative powers (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011).³⁴ Nevertheless, the mythical story accounting for the origins of human beings, strikingly emphasised the importance of women and matriliney:

³² 'If there is not any woman any more, there is not any matriline, *tēgētēgē*, any more' (Jif Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, date). This section intends to provide key elements about social organisation on Mere Lava. However, a thorough analysis of kinship principles and social structure lies beyond the scope of this analysis.

³³ Whereas one can find in the literature diverse orthographic choices to write the name of this mythical hero, the most used being Qet or Qat, I choose here the orthography Qet that corresponds to the way people would spell it on Mere Lava.

³⁴ The only story recorded featuring Qet as a character was linked to red yams, which he was said to have brought to Mere Lava (see Monika Stern's recording, 22/07/2005).

"This is the story of the lines Rownēoluñ and Ondo: Before, when there was not any human being on Mere Lava, there was a rock at a place called Mak Wilgen. Seven women came out from this rock situated at Mak Wilgen, in the village of Levetmisē. Then they stayed at that place and they were marrying flying foxes. When the flying foxes were coming to see the seven women, they stood first over bamboo poles that the women had erected on the sides of their houses. They stood over the bamboos and from there; they entered the houses of the women. The situation continued, until one man came, floating on a *ne-tabēa*. This *ne-tabēa* is a dish that we use to make and eat the *no-löt*. He came from Santo, from one place called Port Olry. He was living in the bush at that place, then he came through the river, and down to the sea until Mere Lava where there was not any man yet. Once arrived at Mere Lava, he found a pig's fence in Mak Wilgen. That was the pig's fence where the seven women were feeding their pigs.

When the women were coming to throw food to their pigs, this man was chasing away the pigs and he was eating half of the food intended for them. He made that until the women realised that their pigs were loosing weight. They wondered:

- Hey! What makes that our pigs are loosing weight like that?

But they did not know that a man was hiding inside of the pig's fence, and eating half of the pig's food.

Once, one of the women came, fed the pigs and hid nearby. While she was hiding, she heard the pigs shouting because the man chased them away in order to eat half of their food. This woman said:

- Hey! You are the one eating half of the food of our pigs!

The man made a sign with his hand to tell her to stay quiet, because he was afraid that some men of this place would come and hurt him. He said:

- Hey! Stay quiet! I do not want a man to come and hurt me!

She answered:

- Hey! There is not any man here!

- Is that true? Is that true that there is not any man here?

- Yes, there is not any man. We are only seven women.

- But you stay like that?

- No, we are marrying flying foxes.

- You are a liar!

- No that is true! Come to my house!

Then the woman hid him inside of her house. At night, the flying foxes came back. They stood on top of the bamboo and entered the houses. The woman said:

- Here it is! He is my husband! You must kill him!

Then the man took a *nalnal* club, hit the forefront of the flying fox, and killed it. He then stayed with this woman. After a while, the other six women looked at their sister's body and found it good. They themselves had a lot of marks made by the flying foxes so they asked:

- Hey! What happened to your body? It is smooth, whereas the flying foxes mark ours!

- No, I am still the same! My husband the flying fox is still visiting me!

But that was a lie; she was indeed hiding a man in her place! Then the other women were surprised when they saw that their sister was pregnant. They asked:

- Hey! You are hiding a man at your place!

She answered:

- Yes, there is a man inside of my house.

- Ho! We must love this man as well so that he would kill all the flying foxes, which are giving all these sores to us!

Therefore, when the first woman was pregnant, the man stayed also with all the other six women, and after a while they were all pregnant because the man had killed all the flying foxes and married all the women. All the women went to settle around the island, so we can say that a lot of people on Mere Lava came from this man from Port Olry, on Santo. It also makes that there are several lines on Mere Lava today" (Luc Wokot, translated in Bislama by Janet Philip, Tasmat village, recorded by Monika Stern, 27/07/2005).

Beyond their place in *kastom* stories, the crucial importance of matrilines on Mere Lava also clearly appeared from the very beginning of the fieldwork research. Only a few days after my arrival in my adoptive family in Palon, as I enquired about the genealogical relationships of the various members of the family, I eventually found myself formally presented with the basic rules of social organisation. In compliance with the conceptions directing the transmission of knowledge, information was given to me by the man considered as the head of the matriline called *na-Saran-e-mmē*, *nu-sur na-Saran-e-mmē* (with the word *nu-sur* broadly referring to sharpness and compared to the sharpness of a knife blade), in which, as a foreigner, I had been integrated.

By contrast with other islands of the Banks groups, each individual on Mere Lava belonged to what was called a *laen* (B) or *tēgētēgē*, with affiliation obtained through one's mother.³⁵ Although kinship was an important topic of study for Codrington (1972 [1891]),

³⁵ On Vanua Lava during Hess' fieldwork, people were also affiliated to named *vēnēmw*, or exogamous subgroups of the two moieties. These subgroups essentially identified themselves as linked to "a place where people come out of" (Hess 2009: 21).

information on the specific social organisation of Mere Lava had to be searched for in Rivers's work. In 1914, as it has been noted above, he remarked especially the crucial importance of matrilines in the way people conceptualised the rules organising groups and behavioural principles (Rivers 1914: 24). This author identified ten matrilines, of which two were considered extinguished during my fieldwork. The reason being given was that there had not been enough women born into these *tēgētēgē* to ensure its transmission to the younger generations (Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 17/07/2011). In contrast, people recognised the twelve following *tēgētēgē*: Rownēoluñ, Luwe, Niumweu, Kerevea, Nabe, and Ondo, all classified as pertaining to the same side of the society, while the Saran-e-mmē, Makroro, Dulap, Vaslap, Maketuk and Saran-Nier-Gar were categorised as belonging to the other side (Adam Valuwa, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 07/12/2010). Thus, whereas Rivers (1914: 24) stated that Mere Lava had to be distinguished from other Banks Islands regarding the organisation of society into two sides, in 2010/2011 people readily acknowledged the importance of moieties as an organisational principle although they agreed on the fact that it was probably set this way only after Independence. Indeed, in speeches and discourses, the term *laen* was as often used to designate the whole set of relatives pertaining to the same side as to identify precisely members of a definite matriline. *Laen* was in fact to be related to the general idea of sameness in the context of kinship and descent, and was characterised by a very situational use.

Similar to the other islands of the Banks group, sides, or moieties, did not possess specific names but both respectively designated the other as *tavalsal*, 'the other side of the path'. While Rivers noted that the *tēgētēgē* "are not connected with any sacred objects such as animals or plants", the enquiries made during fieldwork showed that each *tēgētēgē* used a special species of leaves, *na-sas*, as a marker of identity during ceremonies associated with birth, marriage or funerals, and the origin of at least one *tēgētēgē* was told to be linked with an eel (Rivers 1914: 24-5; Adam Valuwa, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 07/12/2010). These significant groups *tēgētēgē* were also said to possess the land as well as a set of specific knowledge and definite patterns appearing for instance on certain masculine artefacts such as walking sticks, *ne-kēr*, *nalot* (B) pounders *ne-vetiglöt*, knives, *no-got*, or that were recognised on photographs showing the paintings made on the front side of an old high-ranking woman's house. The preferential marriage rule was subsequently explained according to these associations with land, artefacts and knowledge. It was said to be so in order to ensure the transmission and keeping of this body of possessions within the *tēgētēgē*.

2.3.2 On both sides of the path: marriage and collaboration between matrilines³⁶

As relevant exogamous organisational groups, moieties and *tēgētēgē* were especially described with respect to the ownership of ground. Thus, the preferential marriage rule according to which one should marry his/her cross-cousin, was always primarily justified by the fact that this would ensure that the land would remain in the same *tēgētēgē*.

Because they seemed to gather together characteristics of opposite organisational schemes, social structures and rules of marriage and inheritance in the Banks Islands have been the subject of many debates. Vienne noted that "despite the fact that descent is matrilineal, the consequences of it on formation and reproduction of social groups are masked by the undifferentiated transmission of land from the maternal or the paternal side" (Vienne 1984: 170, my translation from French). As shown in the following account, people on Mere Lava acknowledged the cognitive character of inheritance as resulted from manipulations and integration into a reflexive set of negotiations and potentialities, the aim of which was to ensure the *tēgētēgē*'s possessions integrity through time. The following explanation concerning rights on a piece of land reflected both what was broadly understood as the norm and common practical adaptations people made of it:

"We use this ground because the grand-father of the old man [the interlocutor's father-in-law] had only one daughter, she did not have any brothers. The old man's father was from this place here, so he should use the ground here only, but, as his mother did not have any brothers and gave birth to only one child, if the old man had used only his father's land, who would have taken care of his mother's ground? It would have remained useless like that? That is why we use this big ground now, because the grand-mother of my husband did not have any brothers and then had herself only one child, a boy, who in turn transmitted rights to his son, my husband." (Glenda Lois, Tasmat village, 16/06/2011).

Thus, according to acknowledged principles, while the affiliation to a matriline was inherited from mothers, ground and possessions were transmitted through fathers and residence was patri-virilocal. The agnatic heritage line was commonly expressed as 'the blood line', *na-dar*. Therefore, to keep ground into the same *tēgētēgē* entailed a thorough management of successive alliances over several generations and through both matrilines

³⁶ Collaboration is here defined as "the working and acting together in a common purpose or to achieve a common end" (Shah 2011: 65, my translation from French).

and patriline. A masculine Ego should thus marry his MBD, situated on his *tavalsal* and marriageable as such. He would thus belong to the opposite moiety and *tēgētēgē* with respect to his children. Then, those would have to marry back into the appropriate *tēgētēgē*, in order to ensure that land would eventually return to the same *tēgētēgē* group in the following generation (Figure 2.02).

Similarly to what Taylor noted for northern Vanuatu, kinship organisation seen through the lens of the processes of birth, marriages and death, could then be conceptualised on Mere Lava "in terms of a broad flow of departures and returns across discernible trajectories" (Taylor 2008: 112, for circularity see also Layard 1942: 107-113, Rivers 1914, Patterson 1976, Rio 2007, 2009). These trajectories were carefully managed through marriage prescriptions made by maternal uncles and fathers to the young boys and girls. Thus, when a young man reached the age of 18 to 22 years old, his mother's brothers usually discussed together with the boy's father which girl would be an appropriate bride for him with respect to inheritance considerations and *tēgētēgē* affiliations. Then, if the boy agreed to his fathers' and maternal uncles' choice, he would initiate the marriage process by visiting the future bride's parental place to express his wish and secure the girl for a future marriage by giving a small amount of money to her parents.³⁷ This process would ultimately be completed, often several years later, when the boy, helped by his maternal uncles, would be able to give the brideprice to the girl's matriline, or *no-wolwol*, 'to pay' for the bride.³⁸

Therefore, although the *tēgētēgē* were grouped into two exogamous moieties, the observation of practices during fieldwork also highlighted important privileged associations of paired matrilines over several generations, of which the relationship between fathers and mother's brothers were a main materialisation in practical terms (Table 1).

However, increasingly, young people were consulted and given room to decide whether or not they would agree with the choice of their elders. It was thus quite common for those youngsters not to comply with the advice given and either to settle with a partner considered as "not straight" or to look for other alliance possibilities on other islands.

³⁷ Nowadays, the usual amount of money given to the bride's parents for this occasion is 1000 vatu (6.8 pound, exchange rate of 11/2012) or a fathom of shell-money. Shell-money was nevertheless considered the proper valuable to be given at that occasion, as well as for *no-wolwol*.

³⁸ The amount of money expected for this *no-wolwol* is usually discussed between the bride's father and maternal uncles and the boy's father and maternal uncles. According to enquiries made during fieldwork it ranges today from 25000 to 85000 vatu (169.7 to 577 pound, exchange rate of 11/2012).

Improper alliances in terms of matrilines and inheritance were generally considered effective and recognised after all as soon as they had produced offspring. The maternal uncles and head of *tēgētēgē* would then be expected to be able to manage the situation afterwards and deflect the wrongly bent trajectories of *tēgētēgē*'s possessions at the following generation.³⁹ Other possibilities to manipulate the social order were given through adoption of children. Two types of adoption were recognised on Mere Lava. The first one, *na-rañrañ*, literally 'to pull out the root', implied that the child would change *tēgētēgē* affiliation. To this end, the adoptive parents-to-be brought cash money and basketful of crops to the biological parents of the child a few days after the birth. The same process marked the other existing kind of adoption, called *sirsirmelē*, which saw the adopted child staying with his/her parents but calling sister and brother the children of his/her adoptive parents, and forming with them a united set of siblings.

Beyond questions concerning land rights and their transmission, intermingled conceptions about land and sociality also imbued people's daily relationship to their physical environment. For instance, Tasmat village's territorial organisation echoed the two social sides or moieties of the society, and characteristics of the physical landscape usually mingled with a two-sided conception in people's discourses about places. As a centre separating the two sides of Tasmat village, the public place and dancing ground Sere was indeed conceived of as the meeting point where the two sides gathered at different ceremonial times. However, the two sides of the village were not named according to their orientation with regard to this place but rather in reference to a creek running down the volcano slopes, *ne-metqañ*, and which formed the major markers of physical landscape on Mere Lava. Therefore the upper side of the village was called *taval metqañ sigēlēg*, literally 'the other creek up', while the lower side, *taval metqañ silēg* or 'the other creek down' was conceptually opposed to it. During food distribution made on Sere at ceremonial occasions, people would gather and share food according to those distinctions, as piles of food would have been distributed respectively to *taval metqañ sigēlēg* and *taval metqañ silēg*. This demonstrated the irretrievably entangled way in which people conceived ideas of place and social relationships. Thus, expressions such as *taval metqañ* had to be understood as combining named geographical places, physical features of the landscape and social relationships in a manner that has been widely recognised and

³⁹ This can even ultimately lead in extreme cases to the formation of new *tēgētēgē*, of which the creation is generally only shamefully talked about because of their originating in a complex and difficult management of alliances.

discussed by scholars for the whole archipelago (Bonnemaison 1997, Patterson 2001, 2002, Bolton 2003, Taylor 2008, Hess 2009). On Mere Lava, generally, this two-sided territorial organisation, materialised by the two sides of the village, very clearly reflected social organisation. According to the study of marriages conducted from May to July 2011 in Tasmat village, and following patri-virilocality, women born in hamlets situated on one side of the village changed side when moving to their husbands' places at marriage. This drew then an ideal picture of a village in which the 'upper-creek' moiety intermarried with the 'lower' one. However, one should equally point out that, similar to the manipulations informing intermarriages between moieties and *tēgētēgē*, patterns of residence were always negotiated according to practical reasons and contextual situations. Couples, for instance, very commonly settled in the wife's father's hamlet of origin in order to look after the place when all the other siblings had migrated to other islands. Generally, the importance of keeping places and houses well maintained appeared as the most crucial driving reasons informing residential patterns (See also Bolton 2009).

Thus, in a similar way to what Hess, inspired by Strathern's conceptions of the relational individual and Wagner's principle of the fractal person, pointed for Vanua Lava, on Mere Lava as well individual lives and personhood were shaped through the overlapping of a variety of relationships, broadly organised around notions of sameness (e.g. intra-*tēgētēgē* bonds) and complementary differences (e.g. affinal relationships between the various *tēgētēgē*), and deeply anchored into places and landscape (Hess 2009: 42-66; Strathern 1988: 13; Wagner 1991: 163). These relationships eventually found their expression in the way kinship terms were used and associated with specific behaviours, to the examination of which we will now turn.

2.3.3 Kinship terminology and expected behaviours

Although one had to acknowledge the important specificities of each individual experience, embodied social relationships and "dividual" aspects of persons were nevertheless strikingly revealed through kinship terminology and associated behaviours. Indeed, the linguistic construction of the various terms employed in Mwerlap to define kin relationships emphasised the idea of persons as integrative bodies. As in other languages derived from proto-oceanic forms, the languages of the Banks Islands, including Mwerlap, distinguished two kinds of names. The 'alienable' ones were characterised by a possession

expressed through the addition of a possessive classifier separated from the name itself while the 'inalienable' names were related to their possessors through the attachment of specific suffixes to the name, then eventually followed by a complementary name. The linguist François studied the specificities of the expression of possession in Mwotlap, which generally shared with Mwerlap the characteristics of Banks languages.⁴⁰ Distinguishing the two kinds of possession, he stated that the second type of name must always be conceived of as linked to an owner whereas the alienable names were conceived of as autonomous (François 2001: 419-420). Indeed, he further noted: "the morphological independence corresponds to a form of semantic independence, in other words, the distribution of names in two classes roughly obeys a principle of iconicity" (François 2001: 422, my translation from French). On Mere Lava, kinship terms were put on the same level as parts of the body, and they were always to be associated with their possessors: similarly to *ne-limok*, 'my hand', *nu-muruk* would thus only be translatable as 'my maternal uncle', while *no-moroni* would be the correct way to express 'your maternal uncle'. Table 2 shows kinship terms as expressed by most people when asked about them, that is, using the first singular person. These constructions that reflected an "egocentric" general vision of sociality, as opposed to a "sociocentric" one which would consider kin bonds as a definitely fixed set, further enabled situational manipulations of kin relationships and hence allowed people to make sense of peculiar contexts. In this way, foreigners were easily integrated into a *tēgētēgē* and found themselves provided with a set of real or classificatory grand-fathers, grand-mothers and grand-children, *tubui*, fathers, *temei*, mothers, *veve*, children, *natui*, uncles, *murui* (and if the foreigner is a man, nephew and nieces *vonani*) and siblings, either *tesei*, *tuwei* or *tetei* as well as with affinal relatives such as brother-in-law, *welei*, sister-in-law, *rowel*, daughter-in-law, *tewerig*, and son-in-law, *welēg*. "What should I call her?" was thus one of the first questions people asked to members of my adoptive family, when seeing me for the first time, while people were generally introduced to me by the kinship term I should use to call them.

On a broader scale, the two-sides conception played an important organisational role in social relationships. At a certain distance from Ego, relevant relationships were mainly informed by moieties affiliations, rather than real known kin bonds. Thus, all the men of the generation of Ego's father belonging to the opposite moiety would become *temei*, while all the men of this generation belonging to the same side would be called

⁴⁰ Despite slight differences in the degree to which alienable and inalienable name categories are strictly separated from one another (see François 2001: 424-425).

murui. Similarly, men and women of the generation of Ego's children (ms) belonging to the same moiety as himself would be designated as *vonañi*, while men and women belonging to the other side would be *natui*. Contextual manipulations also operated when social distance came to compete with everyday life patterns of residence and collaboration. *Tubui* could be intentionally called *temei* or *veve* in order to emphasise the close bond existing between a real and classificatory grandfather or grandmother and his/her grandchildren. Similarly, one of my adoptive sisters-in-law, who did not have any children of her own, decided to call me *natuk*, as if I was her daughter, after I started staying in the same hamlet as her. With that designation, she simultaneously highlighted and strengthened the bonds created by co-residence, collaboration and friendship that had developed between us.

Among the various social relationships, one of the most crucial appeared to be the bond between a set of siblings. Broadly speaking, the kinship system of the Banks Islands was described as a Crow type by Keesing (1975: 148), with parallel cousins considered as siblings while cross-cousins were distinguished as fathers/mothers or children. This assertion did not apply on Mere Lava, where the FBC, belonging to the same moiety as Ego, were called either *tesei*, *tuwei* or *tetei*, while cross-cousins were recognised as potentially marriageable individuals and called *welei* or *rowel*. The various terms employed to refer to one's siblings emphasised both relative age difference and sex. Same sex younger brothers or sisters were thus called *tesei*, and same sex older brothers or sisters *tuwei* while opposite sex siblings called each other *tetei* regardless of their relative age. The sibling relationship was generally characterised by mutual support, solidarity and conceptualised as a unit, sharing especially land rights obtained from their father. Given the fundamental importance of place in defining the self in Vanuatu, siblings have often been analysed as possessing the same place-substance (see for instance Patterson 2005: 106, Taylor 2008: 116, Hess 2009). On Mere Lava as well, siblings were conceptualised as the fundamental unit with respect to places (Figure 2.03), and, as it will be examined more thoroughly in the first part of the thesis, this importance was notably highlighted through the various *moëtup verē*.

The centrality of sibling-relationships was also marked by the specific relation of a man to his sister's children, both male and female. Mother's brothers were indeed said to hold the first role among one's relatives. From birth to death, those *murui* were the advisors to which one had to refer constantly and it was not possible to act against the advice given by one's *murui* without being greatly criticised by the whole community. Whereas fathers

were recognised as playing a role in the transmission of land rights and knowledge, the *murui* were nevertheless the relatives instantly identified as the main source of knowledge and possessions: "The fathers give some things. This is the blood. But the uncles, they are the most important, they give everything, they teach from inside *ne-gemel*" (Adam Valuwa, Palon area, Espiritu Santo, 29/11/2010).

Consequently, physical distance, restrictions and specific rules of behaviour were to be respected with regard to *murui*, which marked the very peculiar character of this social bond and differentiated it from the relationship between fathers and sons. Largely shaped by the concept of *no-domdomwēn*, 'respect' or *rispek* in Bislama, defined as "the appropriate distance or social space between agents (people and place)", and "encompassing all aspects of action: speech, thought and deeds" (Hess 2009: 28), the *murui/vonāni* relationship implied spatial and bodily behaviours such as not taking anything situated above the head of one's *murui*, not sleeping in his bed, not wearing his clothes, not crossing his way while walking on a path or going around his house, as well as a general respect for his words and advice, and joking avoidance.⁴¹ So, although relationships between siblings generally matched Taylor's assertion for North Pentecost that "relations within the moiety are broadly characterized by solidarity and the lack of any other restrictions of avoidance and deference", the relationships with maternal uncles on Mere Lava also crystallised other aspects of sociality. Together with relative age, those rules were explained to me as mainly resulting from the fact that, according to the preferential rule for marriage, one's uncle was also a potential father-in-law, *qalēg*. Therefore, besides behavioural rules associated with the belonging to *tēgētēgē* and moieties, given through birth, this relationship also revealed and contained the importance of prospective aspects in the way people conceptualised sociality.

In a general way, avoidance, mostly expressed through name prohibitions, could be regarded as "an extreme form of respect" (Hess 2009: 30) and characterised the relationships one has with one's in-laws, in order to maintain a proper social distance. By contrast, joking relationships, *borbor* or *tokplei* (B), served rather to abolish social distance and create a sense of proximity that was either given from the very beginning of one's life, or needed to be created in order to overcome an existing gap such as the one separating people from both moieties. Thus, *borbor* appeared as the main mode of communicating

⁴¹ Joking relationships here are to be understood as defined by Radcliffe-Brown: "...a relation between two persons in which one is by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of the other, who, in turn, is required to take no offence" (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 195).

both with one's siblings and with people belonging to the opposite moiety, who were not identified as direct affinal relatives.⁴² However, similarly to the situational manipulations appearing in the practical use of kinship terminology, behaviours were also very commonly shaped by personal experiences, reflecting the continual dynamic relationship between conventions and adaptations people made of it. As a foreigner, I was for instance permitted a lot more freedom in joking than other women of my generation.

These constant negotiations of one's position and status with respect to one's various relatives were also a striking aspect of the everyday organisation of work. Indeed, although their composition was fundamentally informed by kinship ties, working groups appeared as major means by which people negotiated their bonds to others.

2.3.4 Working groups and collaboration

As it has often been noted for other areas of Melanesia, the relationships and ties between people were also strongly created and maintained through ongoing collaboration between extended family relatives. Lindstrom remarked that this remained one of the most crucial issues in relationships between urban migrants and their family members staying on the home island:

“Physical presence is an important component of everyday social relationships on Tanna. Being there for people, whether this involves attending dispute-settlement meetings, joining gardening or house-building work groups, meeting to drink kava together, or unplanned daily shared interaction in general, symbolizes the depth of one’s connection. Absence, conversely, signals social distance, detachment, and even hostility.” (Lindstrom 2011: 264)

On Mere Lava, ongoing collaboration was similarly described as a fundamental element lying at the basis of sociality. Although these working groups were not designated by a specific name, the term *undi*, translated as *famli* (B), was usually used to explain the links between the different members of these groups. Most often, people gathering to work together on a daily basis were also members of the same households or neighbouring hamlets. Some activities particularly called for strong collaboration involving *undi* co-members. This was for instance the case of the planting of garden, *voësig ne-gen*, ‘plant

⁴² Between opposite-sex siblings however, if the *borbor* relationship is recognised, it is said nevertheless that no insulting or sexual joke should be exchanged.

the food'. Whereas the operational sequences of the planting will be looked at more thoroughly later in this thesis, an enquiry about the timetable and groups working at the planting of gardens, made during two weeks in September 2012, will give an example of the high level of collaboration involved during this period of the year. Based on the timetable of the household of my adoptive sister, Lois and her husband, Matias, situated in Qorqas hamlet in Tasmat village, Table 3 summarises the organisation of their work and collaboration with other people at that time.⁴³ Its analysis revealed first that the people gathering together to work in the different gardens were always already linked by kin relationships, either of siblings, parents–children or affinal kinds with regards to Lois or Matias. Similarly, some people whom activities were described did not directly take part in the work but were nevertheless conceptualised as being part of the group, even if staying at home. This generally concerned older people and children.

The higher level of collaboration appeared to bind members of the Qorqas hamlet together. Thus, over the fourteen days of my enquiry, ten saw Lois or Matias working together with at least one of Matias' sisters Eirin and Rina, either preparing or planting one of their gardens, spending the day together fishing or resting when heavy rain did not allow them to work outside. On the other hand a strong collaboration pattern also appeared between members of the Qorqas hamlet and Lois's classificatory sisters residing in the immediate neighbouring hamlet named Bulurig. Importantly based on the fact that Lois's mother had been raised together with Sandrela's, Rosalyn's and Roler's mother by the old Luisa Rosep (Lois's MFZ) and her husband John Hubart, who did not have children of their own, their links were tightened by the feeling of 'love', *na-tam*, they expressed toward the two elders and by the help they all gladly gave them on a daily basis. Moreover, due to this specific family history of care and adoption, Lois and her classificatory sisters all had rights on patches of gardens situated in the same area, close to the hamlet where the two elders lived. Finally, a third level of collaboration seemed to link people on the basis of both kinship bonds such as those of Matias and Lois with Lois's father and classificatory children living on the other side of Tasmat village, and the sharing of rights on close patches of gardens, such as the relationships between Lois and her classificatory sister, Gresline, as they shared food, slept and spent days off together fishing in the Gafsara area.

⁴³ Due to the impossibility to reach Mere Lava at the time, this information were gathered through phone calls made from Gaua every evening during two weeks.

Pre-existing kin social bonds thus seemed to be strengthened through everyday collaboration and shared work. These close relations also appeared to be more ‘officially’ shown and performed during what were described as *biriñbiriñ* occasions. This term encompassed a set of celebratory feasts characterised by the gathering of members of an extended family (two matrilines linked by affinal relationships) in order to help, work for and/or celebrate one of its members. Whereas working purposes were often noted as reasons underlying such family gathering, emphasis was put on the fact that it should include a shared meal. Privileged occasions for *biriñbiriñ* were said to include some of the steps of the house-building process, as well as marriage, death or birthdays and feasts organised to celebrate the departure of a family member towards other islands (Edward Baddeley, Leqel village, 14/06/2011). Thus, *biriñbiriñ* reaffirmed the social ties linking the participants together by actualising them publicly. In the case of people leaving the island to go work in urban centres or other islands, the importance of organising such a family gathering was also linked with the necessity to reinforce social connections in anticipation of the physical distance to come, which would separate the person leaving from those remaining on the island. It was said to ensure that neither the person leaving nor those remaining would forget each other, and that relationships of mutual help and collaboration would be kept as strong and lively as they would be kept between members of the extended family residing together on Mere Lava.

Therefore, Mere Lava people constructed themselves as individual beings through a mesh of intricately entangled relational dimensions and categories. Both conventionalised behaviours and social attitudes, as well as situational manipulations and negotiations, served to maintain and regulate sociality in a way that further revealed the crucial importance of places and landscape as a constitutive part of people's identities (Hess 2009). Houses, and especially kitchen houses, *n-eañ kuk*, as privileged places for food production and consumption as well as lived spaces, materialised this intricate mesh of relations to people and land while at the same time revealing their tight links to conceptions about time. Before exploring how these two kinds of artefacts, houses and food dishes, articulated together these conceptual domains, the final section of the current chapter will give a general overview of Mere Lava houses and food material specificities.

2.4 Houses and food: an overview on Mere Lava

2.4.1 Mere Lava architecture: a general perspective

Before looking at the technical characteristics of buildings and especially kitchens, *n-eañ kuk*, I will first situate them into a broader vision of housing patterns on Mere Lava and in the Banks Islands. Drawing upon a sketch map of Tasmat village and the associated enquiry on architecture and household composition conducted during fieldwork, we will now turn to a description of the main features of dwelling on Mere Lava, in order to highlight the specificities of *n-eañ kuk* as a bounded corpus, suitable to anthropological study.

2.4.1.1 Mapping Mere Lava architecture today

In May 2011, Tasmat, as the biggest village on the island, gathered thirty-six named hamlets, some of which extended over several different stone terraces situated close to each other (Map 2.01). The hamlets were related to each other and to the gardens by different paths, allowing people to choose their ways and sometimes avoid paying time-consuming visits to certain relatives. Hamlets tended to gather closely related kin in smaller co-residential units. As Rodman noted for Ambae, looking at housing, one needs first to locally define what a "co-residential unit" encompasses for a specific area (Rodman 1985: 58). Numerous scholars have looked at this concept in an attempt to find a broadly operable definition of it. Rodman followed Yanagisako, who noted that it is not possible to "construct a precise, reduced definition for what are inherently complex, multifunctional institutions imbued with a diverse array of cultural principles and meanings" (Yanagisako 1979: 200). However, she also highlighted the accuracy of Goody's analysis of dwelling, reproduction and economical production as fundamental aspects of these units, and notably of his statement that they should be understood as separated aspects informing the shaping of various groups in which individuals could gather at precise moments and locations (Goody 1972). Such an approach, emphasising the processual and creative ways in which co-residential units are formed and transformed, seemed also the most relevant way to speak about housing in Melanesia and Vanuatu. Scholars often relied on vernacular terms and local moralities in order to define co-residency, usually highlighting strong connections between kinship terms and co-residency 'emic' definitions. However, on Mere

Lava, people did not identify co-residency with a specific term. They spoke about these units as being a composite, continuously shaped by recurrent eating in the same kitchen house, sleeping and storing possessions in the related sleeping houses, as well as collaborating to produce food from the gardens. Households were thus on Mere Lava highly changeable units, which were transformed by and testified for the important moves of individuals from one house to the other. One important aspect of households nevertheless appeared to be the sharing of the same kitchen house. When working on the mapping of Tasmat village, I was thus always directed toward the kitchen houses, as identified to the different units of the hamlets. I consequently gathered data about Tasmat households on the basis of the occupation and use of the same kitchen house.

At the time of the enquiry, Tasmat village was composed of sixty-one households, corresponding to an average number of 1.69 households per hamlet (Table 4). However, a significantly large number of households, fourteen of the sixty one counted, were not occupied, their inhabitants having migrated to Gaua, Santo, Maewo or Port Vila for more or less long periods of time. This reflected in fact the general cyclical pattern of population movement throughout Vanuatu that sees every year people going to live and work on other islands during most of the year and coming back to spend Christmas and the summer months on their island of origin. The kitchen house of the household was generally, but not always, associated with one to three sleeping houses. At the time I made this enquiry, with an average number of 4.87 persons per household, the Tasmat village demographic situation matched approximately the results of the last general census for rural areas in Vanuatu, which gave an average number of 4.8 persons per household (Vanuatu National Statistic Office 2009). It was nevertheless slightly below the number of 5.2 persons per household obtained for TORBA province. However, this could be explained by the high number of persons who could have been staying in other islands at the time of the census.

Although the sleeping houses represented ninety-one buildings, or 52.9%, of the one hundred and seventy-two houses counted and thus exceeded the number of kitchen houses, *n-eañ kuk* (seventy two or 41.8% of the total amount of houses), the latter nevertheless appeared as the basic architectural unit settled on the terraces, some households being composed of this building only (Table 4, Lañgreg for instance).⁴⁴ By

⁴⁴ One counts also 9 buildings which are not to be classified as sleeping house or kitchen house, namely the 2 classrooms of the school, 2 small stores, the Church, 2 smaller buildings to be used to serve the interests of the community and the 2 *ne-gemel* associated respectively with men and women, situated on the central place of the village.

contrast, sleeping houses, *n-eañ bë moëtur* figured as extensions added afterwards, made for people who were already specifically related to a *n-eañ kuk*.

Among the different kinds of buildings, the *n-eañ kuk* all showed a remarkable unity in shape and materials used for their construction. They were all without exception of a kind described as *n-eañ do-taqor*, or house made with a thatch roof of sago palms (literally 'house-sago palm leaves'). Like the Palon area kitchen, they were conceived of as the proper *kastom* architecture of the island. *N-eañ bë moëtur*, in contrast, displayed a great variety of materials. They were also the very locus of architectural innovation, either in the shapes or in the combination of diverse materials. Although 38.5% of them followed *kastom* ways, using materials gathered in the island's creeks and upper slopes of the volcano (35 houses), 45% were built of imported materials, with cement floors, appreciated for their cleanliness by contrast with earthen floors, and corrugated iron walls and roofs, which had the advantage to allow gathering rain water into water tanks (41 houses). This latter type of house was called *n-eañ kap*, literally meaning 'house corrugated iron'. Even when built with *kastom* materials, the shapes of most of the *n-eañ bë moëtur* differed significantly from *n-eañ kuk*. A lot of them were built on the terraces edges, raised on poles, half or more of their surface standing a few meters over the pigs' fence while the other half was set on shorter poles set over the terrace edge. The heightened floors of these houses were subsequently made of a strong, thick plaiting of split bamboo straps, which gave them their generic name of *n-eañ woqoqë*. In addition, 16.5% of these *n-eañ bë moëtur* were made using mixed imported and local materials (Table 5). Whereas most of these houses respected the common square or rectangular plan characteristic of most Banks Islands houses, some of them showed circular, cross or semi-cross plans which were the result of innovative ideas of their commissioners. Increasingly, hamlets tended to also have small, roughly made toilets of screening coconut palm leaves or plastic covers, *n-eañ tes*, shared by men and women. Some households also had *n-eañ bë suwsuw*, 'house to take shower', allowing people to hide when washing themselves after their working day (Figure 2.04 to 2.08).

Two types of buildings were nevertheless more tightly linked to *n-eañ kuk* in people's descriptions of architecture. The first was called *n-eañ lenledu*, and was applied to all houses used to store yams once they had been harvested. They were described to me as smaller *n-eañ kuk*, being built from the same materials and using the same techniques. These storage buildings were usually located outside of the village's inhabited area, closer to the gardens, either alongside the main path going around the island or alongside other

important paths leading to the gardens. Conversely, the *ne-gemel* and the women's meeting house were described as built according to the same techniques as *n-eañ kuk*, but in a bigger scale. The next sections will examine the different characteristics of these buildings in the past, before describing their main technical features.

2.4.1.2 *N-eañ* and *ne-gemel* in the past

Due to the relative scarcity of the available documentation, on Mere Lava, recovering the past characteristics of the different buildings appeared a difficult task. The reflexive vision of people on what should have been the *kastom* ways of the past will thus be compared with the little information that could be found in literature and archives in order to draw as accurate a picture as possible of past architecture patterns on this island. However, due to the limits of this study, the section will focus on *n-eañ* and *ne-gemel*.

2.4.1.2.1 Past architectural patterns in written accounts

Only a few detailed descriptions of houses on Mere Lava were available among historical documents. In the main published source for the end of the 19th century, Codrington stated that "the typical Melanesian house requires very little description" (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 298). He nevertheless wrote a short and quite stereotypical overview of Banks Islands houses, which, at the exception of the full bamboo walling, corresponded to the main characteristics of *n-eañ kuk* on Mere Lava at the time of fieldwork. Because none of them focused specifically on Mere Lava, writings of well-known anthropologists such as William Halse Rivers or Felix Speiser were only poor sources for tracking the changes in the architecture of this island during the first half of the 20th century. While being a major ethnographical work about the region, Rivers' *History of Melanesian Society* gave only a short account of housing patterns and architectural forms. The material characteristics of buildings were mainly considered for the purpose of distributing their various shapes among the betel culture area and the kava culture area the author tried to define in a diffusionist trend. Despite a certain difficulty in clearly assigning forms of dwellings to these groups, he concluded that oblong, piled-dwellings would form a more constant element of the betel-culture of the northern part of Melanesia, while oblong houses situated directly on the ground would be more specific to the southern Melanesian kava-culture. The Banks Islands would thus correspond to the northern fringe of the kava culture area,

where some influences of the betel culture could be sensed (Rivers 1914: 454-455). Speiser in a much more detailed account of Melanesian architecture, dedicated a full chapter to habitations, but nevertheless noticed only the even distribution of houses on Mere Lava, having "never landed" there and because "there is a lack of information" concerning this island. He relied nevertheless on a picture from Beattie, reproduced in Florence Coombe's account, for a very brief description of the architecture (Speiser 1996 [1923]: 96 and 110, Coombe 1911). In the second part of the 20th century, Christian Coiffier provided a general study about architecture in Vanuatu (Coiffier 1988). The current characteristics of the *n-eaīn kuk* on Mere Lava matches roughly the generic description Coiffier's description of Banks islands "traditional" houses. To the exception of slightly divergent techniques used to make the roofing and the importance of stone base for the bamboos or reeds side walls, this description could have been made from a Mere Lava house (Coiffier 1988: 15-16).

However, in all these accounts, surprisingly little was said about past *ne-gemel* architectural features with regard to other types of houses. Descriptions by Rivers (1914: 61-62) and Vienne (1984: 137-138) rather focused on functional details of the status alteration system and only generally described the related architectural patterns from Mota and Mota Lava examples. *Gamal* (in Mota), would thus have been mainly characterised by its compartments, delineated by logs or stone steps and marked by a fireplace used for cooking (Rivers 1914: 61) corresponding to the men's different status alteration ranks. On Mere Lava, Speiser noticed from Coombe that: "Beside the dance square were several men's houses, only one of which seemed to be used. Opposite this dance square was the chief's house with the family homes on either side. They were often scattered in small groups, but there were also villages" (Speiser 1923: 105, 121, quoted in Coiffier 1988: 23-24). Eventually, compared with current accounts of past architecture that emphasise the difference between two types of buildings respectively linked with men and women, Coombe's brief description drew a more nuanced picture, which accurately pointed out the variety of building types. Thus it corresponded to what Coiffier remarked later for Gaua architecture: "A whole hierarchy of buildings existed which represented the social diversity of the village: *gamal*, ancestor's house, house of a man of rank, family home, cooking house, etc." (Coiffier 1988: 23). It seemed also to echo the architectural diversity on Mere Lava as observed during fieldwork. As far as Mere Lava was concerned, Coiffier also reproduced a photograph by H. Nevermann showing a "house and a *gamal*" on this

island (Coiffier 1988: 24).⁴⁵ Whereas the house showed a fence made of wooden branches, probably intended to protect its inner space from pigs, the *ne-gemel* in the back present a front stone platform and an open front side which very much resembled present-day *ne-gemel* of the central place of Tasmat village. In order to appraise the differences between *ne-gemel* and the buildings called *n-eañ kuk*, we will now turn to the description of both types of building, taking as an example buildings of this latter village in 2010-2011.

2.4.1.2.2 The reflexive vision

During fieldwork, the distinct names given to kitchens and sleeping houses reflected the changes that had occurred through time and which impacted on the way people built, lived in and conceived of their architectural environment. If sometimes the term employed for the kitchens *n-eañ lap*, the 'big' or the 'important house', denoted the crucial importance of the 'kitchen' among other buildings, the name *n-eañ kuk*, with *kuk* being borrowed from the English-related Bislama term *kuk* ('cook'), indexed those changes. It kept traces of a time when the term *n-eañ* was more related to the dwellings of women while *ne-gemel*, *nakamal* (B), was instead associated with a male place where men and boys of the same matrilines usually gathered and stayed at certain times, especially during reclusion moments connected to the transmission of knowledge in the context of the status alteration system:

"Before, the women were sleeping in this kind of house [nowadays designated as kitchen houses], and men were sleeping in their *ne-gemel* with their male children. At that time, women could not enter the *ne-gemel*, but after the arrival of Church, the white men told that this situation was not correct and that men should sleep and eat in the same house as their wives. Then a woman named Roselbemweg entered the *ne-gemel* of Leurok [one hamlet in Tasmat village] and thus showed to all the men that they should change their ways. Consequently, men started to live in houses with their wives." (Luk Wokot, Tasmat village, 13/01/2011).

Thus the differentiation between 'sleeping' houses and 'kitchen' houses appeared to be a consequence of contact with Europeans, and of the influence of the Melanesian Mission, in the last decades of the 19th century. Before, it was considered that *n-eañ* were rather opposed to men's houses, *ne-gemel*. On Mere Lava, the latter were situated in the hamlets

⁴⁵ See also Speiser (1996 [1923]: 98).

and corresponded to specific matrilineal groups. It marked and mediated the control of the various *tēgētēgē* over land and places onto which they possessed rights. In 2010-2011, none of these *ne-gemel* buildings still existed, but older men easily remembered their locations. Trespasses or misbehaviour relating to these places were most commonly identified as causes of sickness, death or difficulties in childbirth for women.

However, the name *ne-gemel* was still much in use. It designated on the one hand the chiefs' meeting houses situated on the central public place of villages, where community issues were discussed. This building, also called in Bislama *nakamal blong ol man*, was associated by extension with the men, but women were nevertheless allowed to enter it. They did it mainly in order to cook, for instance when the preparation of food for ceremonies necessitated numerous stone ovens to be filled in. On the other hand, secrecy and restricted aspects, previously encompassed in the concept of *ne-gemel*, were expressed through the use of this term to refer to the main building of the highly restricted male areas, *salagor*. Indeed, only men who had been initiated to the dance groups related to these spaces were allowed to go there, and this only at the time of manufacture of the masks and/or rehearsal before dance performances. While some of the restrictive and transformative aspects of the *ne-gemel* in relation to the *salagor* and more generally the status alteration system will form the specific topic of Chapter 4, the physical characteristics that differentiated the *ne-gemel* situated on the public central place and *ne-eañ kuk* during fieldwork will be examined in the last section of this part.

Another early source, a series of 18 photographs taken in 1906 by the Hobart-based photographer John Watt Beattie, also elicited comments from Tasmat inhabitants (Figure 2.09 and 2.10). Several of them showed terraces and houses in Tasmat village at that time. Looking at them, people especially insisted on the raised threshold marking the doorway of houses as being a characteristic of past architecture. Together with the full-bamboo walling, these two features were the most discussed and explained to the younger generation during the sessions organised to show the pictures in the different villages. The raised threshold was notably related to the fact that in the past, pigs were not kept down the stone walls of the terraces or in fences as they were during my fieldwork, but rather allowed to wander about among the houses. The threshold thus prevented the pigs from entering the houses but allowed people to throw food leftovers or other kind of detritus directly outside for those animals to eat. This was a necessary preventive action in order to avoid any use of these materials for sorcery purposes.

2.4.1.3 *N-eañ kuk* and *ne-gemel* nowadays: the example of Tasmat village

Similarly to the picture from Nevermann, besides the size of the building, the main element marking the difference between *ne-gemel* and *n-eañ kuk* was the raised stone plateform that stood in front of the first and the fact that the *ne-gemel* did not have any front walling, opening directly towards the public central place. Other architectural features and techniques were said to be similar to those used to build kitchen houses.

Both were based on a rectangular plan. In the case of kitchens, their size, and subsequently the number of posts used, could vary greatly according to the size of the household for which it was built, but the house structure generally did not vary (Fig. 2.11). Two rows of short posts, *ne-rēmtiñ*, were erected first and formed the outermost long sides of the house. They would support the lower beams of the roof, *ne-selgasēg*. Two other rows of higher posts called *ne-bēr* stood on both sides of the inner area defined by the *ne-rēmtiñ* posts. They marked the front, middle and back parts of this space and supported the two *ne-sigsig* middle beams of the roof. The ridgepole, *ne-qeti* (also *ne-qet-eañ*), was in turn supported by the two highest posts, *ne-seniep*. These latter were erected at the centre of the front and backside of the house. Put together, these posts, always made of tree-fern trunks, *ne-quōr*, and the main wooden roof beams usually made of Casuarinas, *no-tor*, that they supported, formed the fundamental structure of the house. It was completed with a stone wall, *ne-birsīñ*, that was described as originally constituting the entire side wall, but was then merely the base for plaited reeds or split bamboo walls. Indeed, as Margaret Rodman also noticed for Ambae (Rodman 1985: 59), the current use of split bamboo walling seemed to be of rather recent introduction. People on Mere Lava readily acknowledged as well the external origin of this technique, but they did not remember exactly when it started to be adopted or where it came from. The thatched roof was made out of tiles, *ne-vean no-mor*, obtained by pinning together sago palm leaves, *do-taqor*, on reed sticks, *no-mor*, which were then fixed on an underlying truss of bamboo canes, *no-woras*, with some vines, *na-garias*. Those latter were specifically said to ensure the solidity of the building, as they would not easily rot. While the back side was usually designed in the same way as the roof, though sometimes including a back door opening, the front side of the *n-eañ kuk* was often made of reeds or split bamboos, using the same technique as the walling. However, whenever possible, wooden planks taken out of previous *n-eañ kuk* were recycled. This latter technique was indeed always privileged and described as *kastom*, or *moëtup verē*. Finally, the last feature characterising both *n-eañ kuk*

and *ne-gemel* was a shelter created by the protruding roof on the front side of the buildings. In the case of the *ne-gemel*, this shelter covered its specific raised stone platform. While people generally knew the names of the posts and beams of the house structure, most of these terms would only be explained as self-referents with the exception of the ridgepole recognised as 'the head of the house' and the lower roof beam, *ne-selgasēg*, said to signify 'the path for the rats'.

This elementary structure highlighted internal divisions, which characterised the otherwise open inner space. Thus it evoked an organisation already stated by Bernard Vienne in his work about the Banks Islands (Vienne 1984). On one hand, he noted the lengthwise separation into a "dormitory area" and a "kitchen area", which in Mere Lava could be similarly marked by the two *ne-senīep* posts, with people "sleeping at right angles on the widest parts between the two doors" (Vienne 1984: 134-143). Beds indeed could occupy part of the space in the widest half of certain kitchen houses. However, only a small number of the *n-eañ kuk* still had two doors and whereas people usually recognised this as being an old feature of the houses, they associated it with the differences of status which generally informed the circulation in and around houses. In the past, high-ranking women or men were then said to enter houses through one door while lesser people entered the house through the other side. Following the same idea of status differentiation, the two doors were also related to a number of spatial behavioural restrictions related to maternal uncles. Thus a *vonañi* would enter the house of his/her uncle by the front door while a *muri* would use the back door.

On the other hand, the two central *ne-bēr* posts marked a horizontal division, also figured by the central cross-beam, *no-wolwol*, that linked the two *ne-sigsig* roof beams. Although Vienne argued that this "horizontal boundary" was "dividing the masculine and the feminine part of the house", this association did not seem present on Mere Lava (Vienne 1984: 134-143). Similarly, the stone oven position that Vienne situated "at the intersection" of the masculine and feminine areas with the cooking and sleeping areas, did not correspond to its location in most Mere Lava *n-eañ kuk* where it was rather situated at the rear of the building. Moreover, in contrast to Vienne's account, there were no pre-determined orientations for the houses with regard to the position of the public dancing space on Mere Lava. Houses' orientations were rather to be understood inside of the smaller unit of the hamlet's terraces or according to the position of the paths going through the village and linking the different hamlets.

Although showing the same basic structure, *ne-gemel* and *n-eañ kuk* were nevertheless quite different regarding their inner furnishing. The *ne-gemel*, as a meeting house situated on a public place, showed a relatively empty inner space, ready to be used diversely as a meeting place for the Village Council of Chiefs or a cooking space at ceremonial occasions. Only a set of wood carvings used to make *no-löt*, two stones placed at the bases of the middle *ne-bēr* posts for sitting on and a stone oven *nu-um* in the left back corner usually formed the furniture to be seen in it.⁴⁶ By contrast, the *n-eañ kuk* inner spaces were usually more furnished areas, corresponding to an everyday-lived place.⁴⁷

Differentiated from other types of buildings such as *n-eañ bē moëtur*, *ne-gemel* and *n-eañ kuk* were thus, at the time of fieldwork, related constructions associated with *moëtup verē* and past times. They were almost similar in terms of structure and techniques of construction used, but their inner furnishing and organisation revealed different levels of agency. Whereas they were both meeting and cooking places, the agency of the first was situated at the community level while the second concerned rather individual households and matrilines. In both kinds of buildings, the fireplace and the stone oven were central and meaningful elements. Either produced to be shared among members of the whole community or among individuals belonging to a household or related matrilines, food was an essential product shaping people's experiences of those buildings. Consequently, we will turn now to an overview of the general patterns of food processing on Mere Lava in order to further characterise how both food and houses were tightly interrelated artefacts, of which the respective social efficacies were also entangled.

2.4.2 *Stael blong aelan ia*: the basics of food production on Mere Lava⁴⁸

Food, on Mere Lava, like in Vanuatu more largely, possessed a fundamental importance that certainly extended beyond physiological necessities. In the same way as their connections to kinsmen or body parts, the singularity of the connection between persons and food was revealed, for instance, through the use of specific possessive classifiers in the Mwerlap language. Whereas food names were treated as alienable names, their peculiar relation to persons was marked through the use of the possessive classifier *ga-*, which

⁴⁶ The inner separations linked to ranks in the "status alteration system" that were characteristics of *ne-gemel* in the past were not observed any more at the time of fieldwork. However, they were said to be still indexed by stone foundations of past *ne-gemel* marking the ground in the two *salagor* areas of Tasmat village.

⁴⁷ See Introduction for a description of a quite common inner space of a *n-eañ kuk*.

⁴⁸ 'The style of this/our island'.

designated any edible relation, attached to possessive suffixes. 'My *laplap*' would thus be said *no-gok lok* and any food piece left asked for as *no-gok kē!*, 'this is/will be mine!'. According to François, in Mwotlap, this specific classifier should in fact be seen as connecting food to sensations affecting the inner body. Consequently, that would give to its possession an affective value (François 2001: 591, 593). To ingest food would thus be associated with feelings and would connect in a very specific way people to their sensory and social environment.

2.4.2.1 Mere Lava diet description

On Mere Lava, feeding bodies, as crucial as it was for the creation of physical individuals, also meant constructing strong social persons, grounded in places, in this case the dry and salty volcanic ground of this island. If the basic meal frame did not differ strikingly from that of the neighbouring islands or even of the archipelago as a whole, people nevertheless pointed out some specificities and expressed them as characteristics of *stael blong aelan ia* (B). Thus, the ideal meal was composed of a staple food, either yam, *no-dom*, wild yam, *no-qor*, manioc, *ni-miniak*, sweet potato, *nu-butēt*, or breadfruit, *nu-bōtō* according to the season and availability of crops, together with what was generically called *ni-mit*, a term derived from the English 'meat'. Crops in general were called *ne-gengen*, 'the food', and described as the main part of the meal (indeed they were often the only part) while *ni-mit* could refer to the flesh of a wide range of complementary food such as pig, *na-ratva*, chicken, *nu-vaol*, fish, *ne-nēag*, crabs, *nu-wōrō*, various seafood, eggs, *nangae* nuts, *ne-niē*, or various greens, the most common being *na-sarop* or *kabis aelan* (B). The classification of those various foods called *ni-mit* into one single category was further expressed by the fact that the act of eating them was itself distinguished from the general verb meaning 'to eat', *gen*. Thus, 'to eat meat' was expressed by the verb *big* followed by the name of the given *ni-mit* concerned. Unlike in many parts of Vanuatu, taro did not figure as an important staple food on Mere Lava. The reason given was that it did not grow anymore because of a spell cast on the top of the volcano a few decades before.⁴⁹ In addition to the disappearance of taro, this spell was also held responsible for the decrease in the general size of crops and their less palatable taste. Both yam and manioc constituted the main staple food, although the latter was strongly denigrated compared to the more

⁴⁹ See also Speiser's quote in Introduction (Speiser 2009 [1913]: 180).

valorised yam. Distinguished as *no-dom*, domesticated yam, planted in gardens, and *no-qor*, wild yam most often found growing in the bushy creek areas and sometimes intentionally planted, yams were also given the generic name *sinag*. Sweet potato, *nu-butēt*, also figured as a secondary food, as well as breadfruit, *nu-bōtō*, and plantain bananas, *ne-vitēl*. Among other specificities that were repeatedly pointed out to me was the extent to which people used *nangae* nuts instead of coconut milk to cook various sorts of dishes or the fact that they ate a wider range of green leaves than in other areas. Finally, one of the main characteristics of Mere Lava *stael* for food was said to be the importance of fish or seafood in the diet. Being surrounded by deep sea, the geographical position of this island indeed allowed people to have access to one of the best-stocked areas of northern Vanuatu in terms of fish, and both men and women regularly spent the day or part of it collecting produce from the sea. Although every household raised some of them, pigs and chickens were only occasionally eaten, usually kept for ceremonial purpose or eaten at family celebrations. Generally speaking, the variety of food dishes prepared from the available food on Mere Lava was described to me as being greater than elsewhere and their taste as better, especially in the discourses of migrants residing in Santo, Gaua or Efate. Table 6 sums up this variety and gives an idea of the richness of Mere Lava resources considered as edible. In addition to these different food defined as *aelan kakae*, imported items such as rice, corned beef, canned fish or noodle soup were regularly added to the general diet when cash money was available to buy them.

Whereas the quality and general abundance of food on Mere Lava made people proud of what they call *ne-gen ta migean*, 'our food', they sometimes bemoaned the fact that prices and the infrequency of trading ships made rice more difficult to obtain. As an imported good, rice generated ambivalent comments, as in Vanuatu generally. It was valued as a quickly cooked and expensive food that had to be bought from the little shops or stores existing in the villages. As such, it could be processed in order to honour a guest by showing him or her that cash money had been spent to prepare the meal. Moreover, rice consumption also typified a certain image of modernity, importantly linked with paid employment and urban life. Young people often formulated their will to discover the capital of Vanuatu, Port Vila, and to find a wage paid job, with the expression: "I want to eat rice every day, at every meal!" (for instance Masten Philip, Tasmat village, Mere Lava, 12/02/2011). However, rice was also considered as a weaker food in comparison with food grown locally. People living in urban areas and eating rice on a more regular basis were often pitied in discourses as being more susceptible to get sick and die, lacking the strength

given by island-grown crops and island-caught fish. In that, Mere Lava people's appraisal of rice and foreign food in general, including canned fish and corned-beef, joined with Jolly's statement about South Pentecost: "Eating foreign food is linked to displacement, with the weakening dislocation of being away from one's place. It is not so much that these foods are inherently soft, but that they are not strengthened by the invigorating effects of home production. Similarly, the human body is thought to be strong when it is rooted in its own place and to be weak when it is transplanted" (Jolly 1991: 59). Even previously introduced crops such as manioc or sweet potato were attributed the same kind of negative effect if eaten in too large quantities. According to a chiefly decision, manioc was thus forbidden for children to eat before they were four years old, lest they would stay weak and not grow strong. Sweet potatoes, although allowed to little children, were similarly said to give insufficient energy to the body when high levels of physical effort were required, and I often heard men joking, complaining about their plate being filled up with too much sweet potato compared to yam pieces. They said that they would only demonstrate their weakness afterwards. These comments revealed the extent to which food, places and persons were conceptualised on Mere Lava as intricately enmeshed entities, mutually affecting each other in various ways.

2.4.2.2 Food and the organisation of time on Mere Lava

Spatiotemporal realms, integrated into people's bodily experiences of their environment, were mediated through food at different levels. Meals punctuated daily rhythms both by opening and closing daily active working times and because most of the planned activities were actually related to raw food production or gathering and subsequent cooking. Everyday, the main meals were taken in the morning, before starting the daily activities, and in the evening, after all the daily tasks had been completed. At lunch people generally ate leftovers from the morning or quickly roasted a tuber on a small fire lit for the occasion. Generally speaking, activities associated with the collection of raw food or firewood and cooking occupied the larger part of people's time and work. Informal gatherings, generally occurring during meals themselves in the evening or early morning, allowed people to discuss and organise the tasks to be done. Plans ranged from the consideration of daily supplies to prospective organisation of work in order to gather the necessary food-related materials in relation to a future feast or ceremony. As such, it linked with a vision of ritual that did not radically distinguish celebratory times from everyday practices, but rather saw "ritual as the meaningful, or poetic, aspect of all experience" (Sutton 2001: 20). Food-related organisation of time on Mere Lava showed that ordinary and extra-ordinary times were prospectively thought of together and integrated into a fluid set of negotiations about the appropriate working timetable. This is well illustrated in Table 7 that summarises daily activities undertaken by the residents of the hamlet of Wortawtaw, situated in Tasmat village, during two weeks. Despite the general inapplicability to Mere Lava of Douglas' conception of ordinary meals as "metonymically" figuring the structure of celebratory meals, one would thus nevertheless acknowledge the relevance of her work when she asserted that food could be part of cycles that can stretch out over days, weeks, months, years or even a life span (Douglas 1984).

Indeed, food also appeared, as in many of the Banks Islands, as a crucial aspect of the way seasonal time was conceived of, ordered and expressed. As such, it gave a further insight into the ways in which technical knowledge and praxis linked to food mediated the overlapping of social and ecological temporalities. The calendric cycle on Mere Lava was most generally expressed through a framework divided into months inherited from the colonisation era, but some people nevertheless claimed to remember the names that identified the different periods of the year in the old times. Although the association between the Gregorian calendar and the local one was different in the two versions

collected, one could nonetheless identify a set of similar names repeated by both interlocutors (see Table 8). As one of the names of the first period seemed to indicate, and corresponding to what had been recorded for other parts of the Banks Islands, the conception of these periods was most probably linked to lunar cycles. Indeed *tivol* was explained as coming from the term *vol*, 'moon'. What appeared clearly, however, was that rather than corresponding to length of time determined and fixed, the conception and succession of these periods were related to actual ecological events, food production and horticultural practices. Therefore, it recalled Mondragón's analysis about the Torres Islands: "The calendrical cycle (...) is an informal framework; it constitutes neither a ritual construct (because it is not structured around fixed ritual cycles) nor a systematic or specialised device for timekeeping. [It] might be described as a syntagmatic construct - that is a framework that is dependent on a chain of (ecologically-driven) events -, rather than a paradigmatic (that is a coherent and self-standing) 'system' for timekeeping" (Mondragón 2006: 5). The two important elements of reference seemed then to be something that was hypothetically interpreted as either the arrival of the Palolo worm or periods of collective gatherings, and the cycle of yam planting and harvesting.⁵⁰

As far as the Palolo worm was concerned, its significance in the Mere Lava calendar appeared quite odd to me for I spent those months when it was supposed to appear on the island without hearing a single mention or seeing a single trace of it. This question would remain unanswered, as people were not able to explain why those names had been attributed to those periods. As a hypothesis, one could perhaps argue for a remaining trace of Mere Lava population's foreign origins, importantly linked, according to Rivers, with other islands of the Banks group (Rivers 1914: 24) and with Maewo. Palolo worms were indeed an important aspect of time expression in the northern islands of the Banks group such as Mota and Mota Lava, and in the Torres Islands (Vienne 1984: 151, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002: 245-247, Mondragón 2006: 5). In contrast, the significance of the yam cycle largely matched the broad cultural emphasis put on this crop on Mere Lava. The next section will thus focus more precisely on that crop.

⁵⁰ The Palolo worm (*Eunice Viridis*) is a sea invertebrate living in coral reef areas of the Southern hemisphere. It appears generally during a given period of the year between October and November. During their reproduction period, the terminal parts of their bodies detach and come to float at the surface of the sea, while releasing sperm and eggs. These reproductive parts of the worms are then gathered and used raw or cooked as a seasonal food resource in the Banks and Torres Islands as well as other places (Mondragón 2004: 291, see also Palmer and Goodenough 1978).

2.4.2.3 Yams as privileged crop

As an element of reference to define the various states of gardens (either new gardens, *no-oñ* – when yams were planted but not yet harvested – or old ones, *ne-töltöl* – when yams were already harvested), preserved in special small storage houses, *n-eañ lenledu*, as the main expressed recipients of misbehaviour and cause of behaviour restrictions for men and women, as main ingredients of the everyday and ceremonial diet, and as crucial exchange items during ceremonies such as funerals, the importance of yams pervaded every aspect of life on Mere Lava. On a classificatory plane, both men and women generally recognised about 25 different varieties of yam (either *no-dom* and *no-qor*). The elements given as criteria for this classification drew upon ecological characteristics as well as characteristics of taste when the crops were cooked. The colour of their leaves, size of their tuber, and colour of the tuber's skin and flesh were the usual criteria indicated for recognition, together with density and level of sweetness of the cooked tubers. To be able to appropriately identify the kind of yam one had in one's hand was part of the knowledge transmitted to children from an early age. They were thus taught yam names and characteristics (and so was I) in a very informal way during working sessions in the gardens or even more regularly during meals shared with relatives. It was for instance a very common scene to see children asking for a specific variety of yam they would prefer to eat, being corrected regarding which were the ones available. Asking for the proper variety of yam was also a means for children to demonstrate their knowledge and their appropriate learning attitude. Similarly, adults discussed at length the rarest varieties of yams, identifying their qualities and ways to recognise them. During these informal chats, which occurred often while harvesting the gardens or during the preparation of food dishes, people usually discussed the origin, transmission, and cultural values associated with the various types of yam. As summarised in Table 9, this information could be of various sorts, ranging from the name of the man who introduced the variety on Mere Lava to the different persons he successively gave some pieces to plant, through to the association of certain tubers with *kastom* stories, gender attributions or titles in the former status alteration system.

Therefore, although in different ways, food production and house building on Mere Lava were both closely related to the passage of time and the ways people conceptualised it. If the preparation of meals marked the rhythms of daily and ceremonial life, *n-eañ kuk* construction and reconstruction defined larger timespans that could extend

over 20 or 25 years. Both kinds of artefacts were highly relevant elements people could call on in order to situate their souvenirs or memories of events. Thus, it was most common to hear people remembering events while showing eaten fishbones or pig's jaws, exhibited on the front wall or fixed to the inner roof truss of their *n-eañ kuk*, and related to meals shared at that time. In the same way, reconstructions of houses were used as time markers to situate more or less distant events that occurred in hamlets (see Chapter 7). However, besides their connection to temporality, both food and houses were also associated with social and supernatural realms and were important agents shaping people's experiences of these. As hosting places and feeding elements, houses and food dishes were indeed intricately linked to the continuous formation of Mere Lava persons in relation to their social and physical environment.

Before analysing further the relations between houses, food and the temporal notion of *histri*, the two next parts will turn first to the analysis of the transformative agency of both kinds of material constructions. It will do so in Part I through a focus on such articulations of individuals' lives as births, marriages and deaths, which interlocutors reflexively presented as key moments when people were said to undergo personal changes. This will be followed by the exploration of the transformations of individuals that occurred in the past in the context of the status alteration system on Mere Lava. Although it had importantly changed at the time of fieldwork, people's exegesis about it allowed to further define the transformative agency of houses and food, as well as to question how certain ideas related to leadership gained through the status alteration system were nowadays invested in some specific contemporary contexts, associated notably with kitchen houses and food production. This will lead us in Part II to interrogate the means by which these artefacts achieved such transformative agency, or efficacy, through the analysis of the technical processes of their making.

PART I

HOUSES AND FOOD AS TRANSFORMATIVE AGENTS



Figure I. 01: Funerary rite for the old Rosmond, Lekurañ hamlet, Tasmat village, 01/01/2011.

Sheltering, sustaining and protecting oneself and one's belongings undoubtedly deserve a prime position in the list of human beings' common preoccupations but it is equally obvious that multiple agendas inform the ways different people practically achieve these goals. On Mere Lava, the attention with which houses and food were considered and their prominence in social discourses or comments forced consideration. Indeed, kitchen houses, *n-eañ kuk*, were places where babies would be born, where sick people would be brought to be taken care of, where old people would die and where women would gather to prepare

food at any celebratory occasion. *N-eañ kuk* were also everyday gathering, resting and meeting spaces, where one could drop in to find food or shelter, places where the daily meals were cooked and which would often contain the bed of at least one of the household members. Food cooked inside the *n-eañ kuk*, however, would continuously move between household members, neighbouring hamlets, extended families and even foreigners. Shared and circulated, cooked dishes and raw food crops would appear constantly in comments made about social and collaborative relationships.⁵¹ As such, both food and *n-eañ kuk* appeared as important items contributing to the shaping of persons and of their relationships to the social and spatio-temporal environment. This part aims to demonstrate that these artefacts indeed possessed a specific kind of agency that could be formulated in terms of transformative efficacy on persons and their relationship to land.⁵² On the one hand, the agencies of houses and food were continuously shown through both everyday social interactions and more publicly marked events of the life-cycle such as birth, marriage and death. On the other hand, their transformative power also made them crucial elements that shaped hierarchical relationships between persons. These, achieved in the past in the context of a specific status alteration system, were indeed still importantly expressed at the time of the fieldwork through *n-eañ kuk*, and through food. The consideration of houses' and food's transformative agency respectively in the context of a circulation network encompassing both everyday social relationships and life-cycle events, and in the context of leadership achievement and expression, will allow the two next chapters to characterise the place and role people gave to these two kinds of artefacts on Mere Lava. Finally, this part will also contribute to define precisely which specific aspects constituted the notion of transformation on this island and more largely in the Banks Islands.

⁵¹ Although it is acknowledged that exchanges have formed the substrate for a most dynamic trend of research inside anthropology, especially in the Melanesian context (see for instance Malinowski 1922, Mauss 1950a, Lévi-Strauss 1949, Sahlins 1972, Weiner 1976, Gregory 1982, Strathern 1988, 1992b, Battaglia 1992, Humphrey and Hugh-Jones 1992, Rio 2007, among others), it lies beyond the scope of this thesis to present a full review of the different theories that have been developed on this issue. 'Exchange' in the context of this thesis is thus generally used to qualify all prestations based on an expected reciprocity, either of short-term kind or of more long-term one.

⁵² The term transformative is here defined as characterising the agency of houses and food as performative artefacts, that is, artefacts which at the same time materialise social and spatial relationships and transform them through this very process of expression.

Chapter 3: Houses and food as transformative agents in a circulation network

Whereas sacred and profane, ritual and everyday life have sometimes been appraised as incommensurably differentiated, if not opposite, aspects of people's general life experience (Van Gennep 1909), in the Mere Lava case, it would be more proper to distinguish the actual rites performed at specific moments of an all-day celebratory occasion from everyday social interactions between persons.⁵³ Rituals encompassed thus predetermined and organised rites, but also preparation times and *a posteriori* formulated comments (Goffman 1959, Enfield 2009). Therefore ritual and everyday life overlaid one with the other and appeared as quite enmeshed realms. This, I observed numerous times during fieldwork, as I took part in the everyday activities of the household in which I stayed. Coming back down on a steep path, on the middle afternoon of a sunny day, loaded with *ne-gēt* baskets full of crops, local cabbage leaves, *na-sarop*, spiny branches of tree ferns, *na-vatras*, and firewood, *ne-leat*, it was for instance explained to me rather self-evidently that although half of the crops were intended to feed the family until the following day, we had also gathered the necessary *na-sarop* in order to make a *rumrubus lok miniak* (specific kind of Mere Lava *laplap*) because they really wanted me to taste and document it. Moreover we had gathered large amounts of *na-vatras* and *ne-leat* in anticipation of the funerals that would occur a few days later. Here, the everyday feeding preoccupation of the household's inhabitants was thus entangled with both ritual preparation purposes and the even more extra-ordinary event of my presence among them.

While acknowledging this overlapping of ceremonial and everyday activities, people nevertheless also reflexively identified a series of *moētup verē* that had to be performed in the course of an individual's life in order for him to gain full social presence and be defined as a person (Strathern 1988: 273). Numerous scholars in the past have attempted to organise rites into comprehensive and analytic typologies, but as Bell noted

⁵³ A rite is here defined as a set of defined actions and attitudes repeated at times that demand its performance in order to achieve a predefinite purpose. Therefore, rites are to be distinguished from rituals or celebratory moments or displays. If they are often the climax of these, they nevertheless must not be considered as summing up the whole process and performance (Smith 1991: 630).

they all tended to be either too exhaustive or too reductive.⁵⁴ She then proposed her own classification into six categories, noting that some rituals could be placed into more than one category while others would hardly fit clearly into one (Bell 1997: 94). On Mere Lava, a large number of actions performed as *moëtup verē* could be analysed as broadly entering the category of 'life-course' rites (Van Gennep 1909), that mark individual's changing status and social position during the course of their lives (see Table 10).⁵⁵ Houses and food as artefacts were important elements linked to these performances. However, it should be acknowledged that whereas the category *moëtup verē* also encompassed other performed actions more clearly related to the growth of crops in the gardens or the healing of sick people⁵⁶, Christian baptism, marriage or funerary blessings, which were not categorised as *moëtup verē*, were by contrast fully integrated into the set of rites marking individual's lives'courses and social achievements. Moreover, discussing the purposes of the different *moëtup verē*, casual relationships shown through exchanges of goods, services or food were also regularly pointed out as being crucial actualisations of the bonds tied through more 'official' *moëtup verē* moments. Drawing upon the specific emphasis put on *n-eañ kuk* and food during 'life-course' related *moëtup verē*, this chapter will focus on these artefacts' roles as well as on the continuous exchanges said to be both originating in, and actualisation of, them in people's everyday lives. Therefore, the complex set of actions and behaviours associated with a person's changing status and social position through the course of his/her life, will be looked at as a circulation network in which human beings and artefacts were all differently imbued with agency, moving according to contextual negotiations of internalised conventions. As a device for analysis, the chapter will be divided into sections concerned respectively with the rites performed as *moëtup verē* linked to birth, marriage and death, and finally with the casual circulation of food and services that linked individuals together on a daily basis. The role and place of houses, especially *n-eañ kuk*, and food, as transformative agents will be explored through these four sections.

⁵⁴ Mauss and Durkheim for instance proposed to distinguish negative rituals from positive ones, to which the latter also added affliction rituals (Mauss 1950a, Durkheim 1965 [1915]). Gluckman differentiated inversion rites from conversion ones (Gluckman 1962) while Turner opposed affliction rituals performed when unexpected events occur to life-crisis rituals that punctuate individual's lives (Turner 1969).

⁵⁵ Rites of passage encompass rituals that accompany and dramatize major events of individual's lives. This kind of rituals were theorised by Van Gennep as a three-stages process. Through separation, the individual leaves behind his previous social group and enters a latency period, before being finally aggregated to a new social group and provided with a new identity (Van Gennep 1909).

⁵⁶ These rituals lie beyond the scope of this thesis and will not be looked at in this study but they undoubtedly should make the object of full research on their own.

3.1 Birth, *no-wot*

Despite the existence of a medical dispensary situated in Leqel, a significant number of women gave birth to their children at home. Between December 2010 and March 2011, of the five babies born in Tasmat village, none were born in the dispensary, the main reason being that the nurse was visiting her native island of Ambae during Christmas break. Indeed, even when given the possibility to go to the dispensary, a lot of women would choose to give birth at home, helped by the village midwives from fear of not being able to complete the two-hours' walk to the Leqel dispensary.⁵⁷ In this case, the kitchen houses were said to be the appropriate places for the parturient woman, *no-wotoktok*, because ashes taken from the fireplaces situated inside of it would cover afterwards the strong smell of the women's delivery substances, *nu-bon sagean mu revet vaven*. However, the relationships between the *n-eañ kuk* and birth process extended beyond this simple role of covering smells.

3.1.1 Pregnancy, birth, food and *n-eañ kuk*: description of the birthing process

According to Mere Lava conceptions, birth as a process extended far beyond the delivery moment and included preliminary operations and behaviours as well as rites and restrictions observed afterwards. These were said to link pregnant women, newborn babies and young mothers to their kin and to anchor them into the land of their matrilines as well as to ensure their safety during the delivery itself and the following days. Both *n-eañ kuk* and food appeared as important agents throughout this process.

Initially, when a woman noticed she was pregnant, she would discreetly inform her husband and mother but would withhold disseminating the news further out of fear of poisoning or attracting jealousy. Then during pregnancy, women had to restrain from certain activities or food dishes and they had to be especially careful not to visit certain places. Such restrictions, summarised in Table 11, demonstrated the conceptual continuity between persons and environment (Hess 2009). They highlighted a pregnant women's specific state of fragility as they were said to be especially vulnerable to the various

⁵⁷ For this reason, the following description will be based on observations made about birth that occurred in *n-eañ kuk*. For comparison purposes, the same observations should be conducted as well at the dispensary during a later research fieldwork.

influences coming from social and spatial surroundings. Analogically, they could be easily affected by characteristics of places, actions or their metabolism influenced by animals that they would eat, of which people knew well the various ethologies. Similarly, in order to ensure a safe delivery, along the course of the pregnancy, the midwife administrated several treatments to the future mother.⁵⁸ In 2010-2011 however, a lot of young women no longer called on these medications, an attitude that elicited strong criticism from older women who attributed their difficult deliveries to this lack of respect towards *moëtup verē*.

As soon as the pregnant woman felt the first labour pains, *na-taqan megep*, literally 'her belly is aching', she called the midwife and close kinswomen who would assist her during the delivery (real or classificatory M, Z or D as well as HM or HZ).⁵⁹ They gathered into her residential hamlet, deserted by its men's residents, bringing food for the pregnant woman, the midwife and themselves. When contractions became stronger and more frequent, all these women went inside the *n-eañ kuk*, carefully closing the door and masking the window with calico curtains in order to conceal the inner space and women inside of it. During labour, the door would remain closed as much as possible, for the parturient woman to be safe and hidden from the outside. In order to tolerate contractions when they came, the parturient leaned her hands on either one or the other of the two *ne-bēr* posts, while one of her helpers rubbed the lower part of her backside. Then, when the birth was imminent, the parturient lay on a layer of pandanus mats spread on the earthen ground, with her head and both folded legs supported by other women, while she herself grabbed the neck of the woman at her head. Helpers would enjoin the baby to come home, *mwol* or *mwolmwol*, a word also used on an everyday rate to express the action of coming back home from any other place in the island.

Again, several treatments could be administrated if the birth was judged to be late, accompanied with specific speeches intended to the ancestors who could be affecting it. Indeed, long labours were most of the time attributed to those *ne-temet* associated with places where the parturient woman could have been gone by mistake during her pregnancy. In this case, it was usually asked to the *kastom jif* or to any older and influential member of the parturient woman's matriline to throw a length of shell-money, *no-som*, to

⁵⁸ These treatments were usually based on certain leaves mixed or grated with liquid. Regarding the restricted aspect of the knowledge of these recipes, the names of the different leaves and their use will not be discussed here, although they were part of the data collected during fieldwork.

⁵⁹ While all of the pregnant woman's kinswomen could request to assist her during the delivery, she could nevertheless choose who she would allow inside the *n-eañ kuk* at that time. Usually from the age of 14 or 15 years old, adolescent girls were encouraged to take part in the deliveries of their kinswomen, as it was said to prepare them for their own first pregnancy.

these ancestors. This would straighten the road, *ne-metsal*, for the baby to come by compensating *ne-temet* offended ancestors and persuading them to allow the birth.

Once the baby was born, his umbilical cord, *na-buton*, was cut with a bamboo splint. A fire was lit inside the *n-eañ kuk* and a series of two *moëtup verē* took place before the baby was presented to his father, brothers, sisters and more widely to the extended family.⁶⁰ Immediately separated from his/her mother in order to be washed and clothed, the newborn was put in the arms of one of the mother's sisters by the midwife, after she had positively answered the latter's call:

"This child came down from the upper hill [volcano], from places like To-Qetvar or To-Lekurañ, he brought a lot of things with him, he brought firewood, graters and ropes to fasten the *laplap*, he brought all these things on his back, now I have to put him in the arms of one sister for her to keep and protect him, so who would take on this charge?" (Rosalyn Mary, 22/01/2011, Tasmat Village).

Thus, the baby was tied to his/her *tēgētēgē* as soon as life began. Furthermore, while the new mother was taken care of, being washed, clothed and fed, the midwife usually performed another *moëtup verē*. She heated her index finger over the fire before dunking it into salt water, *na-nag*, contained in a small, emptied, *ne-geär* seashell. Then she removed the baby's throat and mouth mucus in order to clean him from the last remains of his/her mother's womb substances.

Once these two *moëtup verē* had been completed inside the *n-eañ kuk*, the door was opened and the baby introduced to his/her closest kin (usually his/her father and siblings first). However, the young mother and her newborn child would have to stay for five days inside of the *n-eañ kuk*, preferably sitting on a *no-tok* pandanus basket in order to avoid affecting the places where she would sit. Indeed birth substances were considered as especially powerful and dangerous to other persons, especially men, who might be affected if they sat on the same places. For similar reasons, the mats and textiles related to the birth were immediately taken away by one of the female helpers, buried in places of the bush known to be associated with women, or thrown into the sea to be taken away. Shortly after the birth, some leaves *na-balak* were put on the front wall of the *n-eañ kuk* and a post *no-tom* was erected in front of it. Whereas this *no-tom* was said to make the birth public, the leaves were more specifically associated with the protection and safety of both the mother

⁶⁰ Although those two *moëtup verē* were not specifically named, they were nevertheless both recognised as being typical *moëtup verē* associated with birth.

and her child. They were intended to prevent bad influences from *ne-temet* either coming themselves under the shape of known kinsmen, intending to affect the mother and child through their odour, or present through their 'wind' called *ne-lian̄ nu-siet*, that people coming from bush areas, creeks or gardens could unintentionally bring back with them. At the end of the five days of postnatal seclusion, the mother had to wash herself with saltwater. She was accompanied by her closest kinswomen (usually some classificatory and real Z, M and other women from her husband's hamlet). This was said to complete the mother's genitals drying, to help her to come back to a less dangerous state for her male kin and to heal the sores that could have been caused by the delivery. Through these diverse rites, both the newborn's and his/her mother's social and personal safety were emphasised in a way that also highlighted their passage from one state of being to another. During these vulnerable transitions, both the kitchen house and the food brought by kinswomen were described as important artefacts linked to the transformation that contributed to ensure the safety of this move.

Then, the most important rite linked to birth was designated as the *moëtup verē* made shortly after the birth to some of the child's mother's brothers. The young parents gave a small amount of money to them in order to ensure that they would take care of the child, teach him/her and advise him/her, especially at the time of his/her marriage. This payment was called for a girl *wol-eañ*, literally 'to pay the house', and for a boy, *wol-gemel*, 'to pay the *nakamal*'. It was most often given to the chosen maternal uncles of the child informally and bound the newborn baby to his or her future life in a way that used the metaphors of the *n-eañ kuk* and the *ne-gemel* to express ideas about expected gendered destiny. Social bonds between the mother, the baby and their extended family were also secured and strengthened through specific food gifts made to them during the first weeks after the birth: diverse sorts of cabbages having a lactogenic effect, sweet potatoes and dried coconut as well as matches and firewood were thus regularly offered to them by visiting family members. Those same products were also considered the appropriate gifts to be offered by the Anglican Church Youth group that usually visited mothers and their newborn child after the end of their seclusion period. Here, in the same way as their kinship bonds had been secured during the first weeks following the birth, the new mother's and her child's relationship to Church was reaffirmed through this visit. Significantly then, the last rite to be conceived of as part of the birth process was the Church baptism occurring between one and three months after the birth and during which the child's names were publicly announced and godfathers, *metagisgis*, designated. Most

often, the young mother's father and husband took also this opportunity to thank and compensate, *ne-veoret* or *pem* (B), the midwives and women helpers who had been assisting during the birth. They gave to each of them small amounts of money during a *moëtup verē* occurring in front of the Church building or in the husband's hamlet. The baptism day then ended with a shared meal provided by the young mother's husband and his family to the whole extended family of both new parents.

Therefore, as a crucial space in which the birth occurred and as gifts or shared substances eaten, *n-eañ kuk* as well as food played important roles, notably securing the safety of mothers and babies in the context of birth. This safety was fundamentally conceptualised as originating in strong and proper social bonds, especially at risk at a moment when both the baby and his/her mother went from one state of being to another. The next section, looking at the attributes associated with *n-eañ kuk* and food in relation to ideas about birth and fertility, will allow us to further refine the analysis of the concept of social transformation on Mere Lava and how these artefacts related to it.

3.1.2 *Ne-lē*, safety and containment

Generally, the inner part of kitchen houses was called *ne-lē*, a term that was also used to describe the inner human body of a pregnant woman. As Waterson accurately noted for south-east Asian houses, the simplistic association of two spaces, the house and the human body, otherwise recognised by people as two different entities, while not necessarily wrong, prevents seeing more significant patterns of relationships between them. Body imagery should thus be seen as "an organizing metaphor" but it does not imply that the house would be considered alive in the same way as a human being would be (Waterson 1990: 121).⁶¹ Other associations indeed called for attention on Mere Lava. It seemed that the common term used to describe both the inside of the house and of the body related more accurately to efficacious attributes of these two spaces. Furthermore, it linked them with a third one, namely the inside of pandanus baskets, *ne-gēt*, manufactured by women. This was expressed for instance in the two following remarks:

⁶¹ Compare for instance the Maori meeting-house and its fundamental significance as an embodied ancestor (see Salmond 1987, Van Meijl 1993, Neich 1993).

“The meaning of the house is that it provides protection for all the things that are inside. It provides protection and it allows hiding as well! If you put your things inside, you can keep it safe; you can hide it from the people that would be badly intentioned. If you do not have any house, you are not safe, you cannot come back from your garden and put your things in a safe place, you cannot sleep safely, you are a floating person only, the wind can catch you and make you sick.” (Jif William Sal, Luwör, Leqel village, 03/01/2011).

“The basket, *ne-gēt*, the good basket that does not break, if you go to your garden and you fill it up with food, when you come back to your house, it will keep the food safe, and it will hide it from other people's view when you are on the paths, people would not be able to see what is inside. If it breaks, all the food will be scattered all around the place and people will see what you have, rat will eat it and spoil all the good things. Thanks to the baskets, you can carry back all the good things into the house. When you have a good idea, you can put it inside the basket, it will preserve it. This is the meaning of the empty baskets we offered to the Province Public Education Officer when he came, so that his good will and ideas would not go and float all around the place.” (Hilda Roñ, Matliwar, Auta village, 15/06/2011).

Considering the above description of birth, these ideas of protection, hiding spaces and containment to avoid things to being blown away or be influenced by supernatural bad winds, *ne-liāñ nu-siet*, seemed also emphasised during and after delivery. The carefully closed house not only secured the safety of the mother and child but was also the main place where the first two *moētup verē* gestures that harboured newborn babies into their social groups were performed. Either made inside the house, directly on its front wall (leaves *na-balak* intended to protect the mother and child from *ne-temet*) or immediately in front of it, these and the following *moētup verē* actions also revealed the importance of this building as it grounded people into the world from their very first breaths. Similarly, food brought and shared was a major element actualising and further strengthening social bonds.

Finally, analogy between the mother's womb as protective space and baskets was also expressed through the fact that the placenta was designated as the basket of the baby, *ne-gēt te bē luñwer*. Furthermore, the same general geospatial reference system was used to talk about the woman's inner belly and Mere Lava landscape, suggesting continuity in the ways both spaces were conceived of. Birthwaters were called *na-nag*, the sea, and identified with the sea immediately surrounding the island while the vagina, or path, *ne-metsal* could be considered as clear, or good, *nu-wea*, or bushy as creek spaces, *ne-metsal*

nu-vösuswon. Moreover, expressions relating to the relative height of places in the landscape, with respect to creeks situated upward or downward, *sigēlēg* and *silēg*, were also used to express the moves of the foetus inside the womb. Several interlocutors suggested the idea that babies were in fact coming from the same undifferentiated space as their ancestors, of which they were usually given the same names as a matter of commemoration, and who could retain them in case of prior improper behaviours of the child's mother or close kin.

Through a path paved and made safe thanks to the straightening of his/her social bonds as well as appropriate initial confinement into *n-eañ kuk*, both mothers and their newborn babies thus went through the transformation that brought a new human being into existence. It also revealed how the concept of transformation in Mere Lava was tightly linked to ideas about containment, seen as possessing protective, concealing, and grounding attributes, and public display, always bearing the threat of letting things going out of control, floating all around and wandering as winds.⁶² Yet, through an efficacious social control, of which the maternal uncles, *nu-sur ta bë tēgētēgē*, 'the sharp blade of matrilines', and fathers, *na-qaton*, 'one's head', were the guardians and masters, persons went through their lives following the appropriate road, *ne-metsal nu-wea*. These maternal uncles and fathers particularly had an important role in advising their nephews or nieces on the proper groom or bride they should choose. Again, through this stage of the life-course, houses and food appeared as important artefacts conveying and performing ideas about sociality, space-time and the transformation of persons.

3.2 Marriage, *ne-legleg*

Whereas young people were considered relatively free to have sexual intercourse with each other, around the age of 18 to 20 years old, maternal uncles and fathers would start advising boys about the proper bride they should choose in order to 'follow the appropriate road', *ne-metsal nu-wea*, and girls about not going along too much with inappropriate boyfriends. Boys were thus expected to agree on the choice proposed to them among the daughters of some of their *murui*. Then after an unofficial enquiry made by the boy, to check if the girl would receive his proposal positively, he would visit the girl's parental

⁶² Mondragón also emphasised the importance of containment and revelation in the northernmost part of Vanuatu, Torres Islands (Mondragón 2003). For a comparison between Mere Lava and Torres conceptions of those notions see conclusion of Part I.

place in order to give them a small amount of money, 1000 VT, to 'block' her. Marriage itself occurred usually several years after that initial *moëtup verē*. It was indeed explained to me that years of common life would allow both the boy and girl to appraise their mutual ways of being, *ne-moëtup*, and would also allow them and their family to gather the amount of money, garden produce and pigs necessary for the marriage to be performed. In 2010-2011, people identified the bride price giving, *no-wolwol*, and the Church marriage, *ne-legleg le-werlo*, as the two important phases linking the two spouses and their respective matrilines together. During all these celebratory occasions, *n-eañ kuk* and food appeared as important transformative artefacts.

3.2.1 Past and present *ne-legleg*: people's reflexive description and contemporary observation

In the past as well as nowadays, marriage preparations were said to be thought of long in advance, usually two or three years, in order for people from both the groom's and the bride's matrilines to be able to present the appropriate amount of food and other valuables at the celebratory day. A number of prerequisite actions also had to be completed beforehand. One of the most important ones was said to be the construction of a house for the boy and his future wife to sleep in. Even if a *n-eañ kuk* is not necessary nowadays – most young couples share the kitchen of the man's parental household – the building of a house nevertheless anchored in a specific way the new social unit in their hamlet, physically showing the bonds between the boy and the girl. Gardens were also planted to be harvested for the wedding and pigs raised or requested in order to make the *moëtup verē* and/or feed people during the diverse ceremonies.

In the 1980s, as part of a short-lived revival of past *moëtup verē* initiated by some chiefs, a marriage ceremony was organised according to information about *ne-legleg le-moëtup verē* that had been gathered from elders. This kind of wedding had long been abandoned, only a simpler bride-price exchange and the Church marriage being performed. The following account of *ne-legleg le-moëtup verē* on Mere Lava is consequently based on memories of the 1980s event. Thus it is doubly partial, being based on the selective memory of what was already a reconstruction judged appropriate by these chiefs of the 1980s who supported the revival of *moëtup verē*.

On a date that had been chosen by the two *tēgētēgē* involved, the boy's matriline came first to the village's central public place, bringing food, shell money, *no-som*, and

pigs, *na-ratva*. The bride's matriline followed, carrying shoots of island cabbage, *na-sarop*, coconut trees, *na-mato*, hibiscus trees producing the leaves used to make the *laplap* bundles, *no-do-va*, sago palm trees *ne-taquoēr*, canarium trees, *ne-ñiē*, as well as shoots of breadfruit, *no-bōtō*, cutnuts, *na-watag* and pandanus trees, *no-vow*, to be planted on the groom's land in order for the bride not to miss anything she could need during her future life. After all these land valuables had been piled up at the centre of the public place, the groom assisted by his maternal uncle and his father stood in front of it, holding one or more pigs and lengths of shell money that the bride's maternal uncle and father came to receive. Immediately after, the groom's party acknowledged the presented plants by touching the pile of shoots. This was thought to have been the appropriate way to perform *no-wolwol*, 'pay the brideprice'. Then, the two matrilines exchanged the food they had been preparing and respectively ate the dishes prepared by the other matriline. A coconut-leaves tray, *ne-tebēr*, had been put on the ground at the centre of the place, and the groom and the bride ate together, sharing the food brought by the two sides. Finally after a few dances made to mark the celebratory occasion, the bride was led to the house of her husband and parents-in-law by her maternal uncle and close kin, accompanied by much grieving and sorrow. That would complete the *kastom* marriage, *ne-legleg le moëtup verē*.

During fieldwork however, the *no-wolwol* consisted mainly of the exchange of a shorter length of shell money, *no-som*; most of it being constituted rather by cash.⁶³ Pigs were not always part of it, although pig's meat was said to be the privileged meat to be served to the attending kin during that occasion. The *no-wolwol* was usually performed at a different date from the Church marriage, *ne-legleg le werlo*, and involved the gathering of the two matrilines in the groom's maternal uncle's hamlet. After a *kastom* post, *no-tom*, had been erected in front of the *n-eañ kuk*, showing different leaves and branches associated with the two concerned matrilines and marriage events, the *moëtup verē* itself would take place. The groom's matriline would gather behind him and form an informal rhizomatic line, so that they would publicly associate themselves with his *moëtup verē* act. In a similar formation, the bride's matriline would come, gather behind her father and maternal uncle, and acknowledge the length of shell money and the wad of banknotes offered by the groom, by lightly touching them with their hands. After the *no-wolwol moëtup verē* had been performed, the celebratory day usually finished with a shared meal and kava drinking for men and women who expressed their wish to drink.

⁶³ During fieldwork, both shell-money and cash were called *no-som*, and payment for goods purchased at the stores, like certain *moëtup verē* were designated as *no-wol*.

Whereas *no-wolwol* events were primarily for grooms' and brides' matrilines, Church marriages tended to attract larger groups, often entire villages plus kinspeople coming from other places. This indicated the crucial influence of the Anglican Church on Mere Lava ritual life. The following account is based on a Church marriage that occurred in Tasmat village in December 2010. At a date that had been announced in Church during a previous Sunday liturgy, people of the village gathered together on the central public place and in the two meeting houses of men and women in order to prepare the significant amount of food to be consumed the following day. If not all the village members joined in that preparation, most households had sent at least one relative, and everyone had brought raw crops, firewood as well as metal dishes, tree-fern graters, or other tools and necessary utensils. While women were primarily busy with the preparation of *laplap* intended to be consumed the day after, men and boys took care of the grating of coconut and preparation of *no-löt*, to feed the whole party of workers that day. A group of young men and women also built a small ornamented shelter and decorated the entire place with coconut fronds and flowers. The following day, villagers gathered in the Church for a morning ceremony celebrated by the Mere Lava Anglican priest. Whereas the audience sat according to the usual spatial organisation, men and children on the right side, women and the Youth group on the left side, the groom, the bride and their respective parents and witnesses sat in the front right aisle, on benches and floor covered by mats and calicos. While the bride and groom were wearing the European white dress and black suit, their witnesses and parents wore green island dresses and shirts made of the same calico. The marriage liturgy was then performed according to Christian principles and closed with Holy Communion, before the entire assembly went out onto the central place of the village. The couple and their closest kin took their place under the shelter built the previous day and a cake, made from imported dried preparation, was brought and displayed in front of them. After having been blessed by the priest, the cake was cut into small pieces by both spouses and put aside, to be eaten with the general meal afterwards. The participants, gathering in line all shook hands with the newly married couple and their parents, throwing into a *ne-tebēr* tray some small gifts for the newlywed couple's house such as 20 VT coins, soap, matches, pieces of calico or clothes. Although accompanied by Christian songs, the overall atmosphere was sad as the bride's family expressed its sorrow at the idea of their daughter or kinswoman leaving them to go live with her new husband's family and eating from other *n-eañ kuk*. Then, a break was signalled and everybody went home to rest and refresh. The bride, the groom and their closest kin and witnesses changed into pink island dresses and shirts,

again demonstrating their unity through the display of their similar clothing. The ambience was then much lighter and, around midday, piles of food and *laplap*, prepared the day before were taken out of the stone ovens and displayed to be distributed in piles spread over the dancing ground. Specific baskets full of food were offered to compensate the priest and catechists for their work as well as other persons who had helped with the marriage preparation. Then, one of the *kastom jif* of the village gave a speech to remember that through the unity of two sides, *ne-leg*, achieved through marriage, the newlywed couple would ensure a 'good road', *ne-metsal nu-wea*, for themselves and their offspring. This signalled the time for everybody to pick up his/her part of food and eat it, chatting happily with family and friends. In the afternoon, several dances and sketches were performed: *ne-temet* spirits masquerades, *na-mag*, interspersed with more casual dances accompanied by guitar and imported songs, *ne-kita*, or short comic plays, *ne-konset*, to the delight of the entire audience. Finally the day ended with the symbolic transfer of the bride to her new residential house, *n-eañ tavalsal* or 'the house of the other side of the path', as her matriline lined up with her on one side of the central dancing ground and gradually accompanied her, walking slowly, singing, and crying, to another line constituted by the groom's matriline, standing on the other side of the dancing ground. After another break and kava drinking, at night, a sound system was set up and people continued dancing on to electronic remixes brought from other islands on mobile phone memory cards.

During both days of feasting, most bursts of laughter and excitement were provoked by specific jokes, called *no-koskos*, made between the respective members of the two sides. Explicitly made between *welei*, in-laws, it consisted of rubbing the face or head of one's *welei* with raw food, usually *laplap*, or food preparation waste, such as liquids remaining in dirty saucepans or dishes before they were washed. As jokes exchanged between real or potential husbands and wives, this *no-koskos* was mainly said to be a didactical device, especially intended for young people to mark the joking relationship, *no-borbor*, that should exist between respective members of the two *tavalsal*, but it also demonstrated further conceptions about the ways they related together and the expected outcomes of these fundamental bonds.

3.2.2 The collaboration of the two sides: *n-eañ kuk* and food in marriage

The ever-presence of *n-eañ kuk* both as physical spaces and metaphors, and of food, either in the form of shoots to be planted, dishes prepared, shared and consumed, or joking devices, renders the analysis of their diverse agencies during marriage a difficult task. However, the examination of their place at some of the crucial moments of the process nevertheless helped me to understand which conceptual ideas people associated with them at that time. These ideas were, in the case of the *n-eañ kuk*, partly expressed through the very physical qualities of the house. Indeed, the transversal wooden beam that linked the two sides of the truss, each one called *tavalon*, was equated with the link between two matrilines achieved in marriage: "this [the beam] is like a man that goes with a woman. They marry, there is a *kastom*, then they become one" (Jif William Sal, Lequel, 03/01/2011). Moreover, both as a construction that should be completed before the wedding, and as an image used at the last stage of the Church marriage to designate the new social and residential group of the bride, houses, and especially *n-eañ kuk*, seemed to stand as metaphors for the social unity created out of the collaboration of the two exogamic sides, *tavalsal*. This idea was also visually expressed through the bride's and groom's sharing of the food brought by their respective matrilines in the account made of *ne-legleg le moëtup verē*, while the *kastom* post *no-tom* erected nowadays for marriage had to be ornamented with leaves *nu-bulbul*, which signified *ne-leg*, 'unity, the two parts that are making one now' (Manlē Turris, Tasmat village, 19/02/2011).

The post further suggested ideas about the expected outcomes of social bonds created through marriage. In addition to the *nu-bulbul* leaves, it was also composed of a *na-ñwēlē* palm, associated with the notion of peace, of a branch of *no-tor*, evoking strength, of *na-sas* leaves corresponding to the respective matrilines of the groom and the bride, and *nu-qier* leaves, whose growth on stones was said to be related to the idea that the relation created would never dry. Beyond the union of individual people, marriage was thus conceptualised as the durable association of their two *tēgētēgē*. Furthermore, food use during marriage, either in past or recent practices, also seemed to emphasise the role of children, seen at the same time as the main benefactors of the collaboration between matrilines and the very mediators by which it was achieved and made durable.

In the *ne-legleg le moëtup verē*, the various plants or tree shoots given by the bride's matriline to be planted in the gardens cultivated on the groom's ground, were intended to ensure that the bride would be able to properly play her role in the newly

created unit. Linked to the nurture of children (island cabbage), as well as to the production of houses' roof tiles, baskets and food (sago palm, pandanus and hibiscus trees for instance), the shoots evoked the role of women in the couple:

"She has to take care of the children inside the house, she has to feed them so that they would become strong, she has to feed everybody from the family who comes to the house, to show love so that the family would stay united and the children would have a straight road afterwards, both parents have to work in the gardens to raise their children and make the *kastom* to the uncles, so that they [the children] would then marry following the good road" (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/06/2011).

Offspring, as a result of marriage, i.e. as a result of the collaboration of two matrilines but also as a key element ensuring the durability of this association, were even more directly evoked through *no-koskos* jokes, for sexual interpretations were clearly made by people when looking at whose faces were being rubbed with *laplap*, and by whom. As an old man told me laughingly: "I rubbed again the face of the old woman [his wife], it is to remember her of the time we were not together yet, we did not have house yet, we did not have children yet." (Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 29/12/2010).

Therefore, in the context of marriage, houses and food appeared to relate to sociality both physically and metaphorically. Diversely materialising the new unit created out of the collaboration of the two sides of the society and linking it to ideas about place and the reproduction of *tēgētēgē* through time, the house as well as the food exchanged and consumed were affirmed again as being imbued with a crucial transformative agency. It is therefore appropriate to look further at the role of *n-eañ kuk* and food during funerary rituals and analyse why these two kinds of artefacts appear as privileged items associated with people's transformation through their life-course.

3.3 Death, *na-matē*

As in Vanuatu in generally, death on Mere Lava involved a mourning period. Usually every five days after the death, a family gathering and shared funerary meals occurred, with more emphasis put on the commemorative feast held on the fifth, tenth, fifteenth, fiftieth, hundredth day and after one year. Interlocutors expressed that the main purpose of funerary ceremonies was related to land transmission, but as Hess also argued for Vanuatu Lava, this was merely expressed in social terms, through commensality and specific

moëtup verē (Hess 2009: 97). During this period, the *n-eañ kuk* in which the death occurred was given a special emphasis, especially as the central food-processing place for funerary meals. The following description of a death combines an account of a death that happened in December 2010 with information given at several other funerary occasions attended during fieldwork.

3.3.1 *Da-matē*: a brief description of funerary rituals on Mere Lava

Immediately after death had occurred, the same-sex siblings or children of the deceased took care of the body, laying it on a pandanus mat, which was spread lengthwise in the house, and carefully washing and clothing it, before covering it with various calicos.⁶⁴ Once those first gestures had been completed, relatives started to come into the house in order to cry for the deceased. Yams and calicos were piled up either under the shelter or directly inside the house. They were brought in *ne-gēt* baskets and dropped off by those coming from other hamlets before they sat and cried around the corpse. The first *moëtup verē* usually occurred a few hours after the death, when it was judged that all the people who should come and cry had done so. It consisted of the compensation of those who cried and of the real sisters and/or brothers of the deceased for carrying the corpse out of the *n-eañ kuk* to put it in the coffin in front of the house. This was called *nu-tula loqöt*. A number of layers of calico, brought by the deceased's siblings, had been spread in the coffin before the *moëtup verē* took place. The deceased's children then lined up together, with relatives of their matriline gathering behind them, and gave a small amount of money to those who cried and then to the deceased's siblings, calling them one after the other. Once this *moëtup verē* had been completed, the corpse was carried out of the house, laid in the coffin and wrapped in calicos. The coffin was finally carried to the cemetery situated below the Church and the central place of the village, where the catechist pronounced the Christian blessings before it was buried. The day was completed with the sharing of the first of the funerary meals, cooked in the *n-eañ kuk* where the death had occurred.

After a death, the fire of the stone oven situated inside the *n-eañ kuk* should be kept alight at all times. Specific meals were cooked every five days to be shared with the deceased extended family. Said to be necessary in order to strengthen and actualise the

⁶⁴ The position of the body with regard to the house, lying in its length was itself significant and served to clearly separate death from sleeping state, as people sleeping in *n-eañ kuk* always do so lying in the house's width.

kinship bonds and the relationships to the land of the living, these meals had to be accompanied with a special *moëtup verē*, usually made on the tenth day after the death. At that time, a large call was made to the relatives of the deceased to come and attend the feast. Early in the morning, women from the deceased's extended family gathered in the *n-eañ kuk* where the death occurred and started to peel and grate the crops, mainly yams, each of them had brought. Men were in charge of the firewood supply and killed pigs, whose parts would constitute main elements of the *moëtup verē*. While food was being processed inside of the *n-eañ kuk*, cut pig's parts were displayed on fresh coconut palms spread on the ground in front of it and *no-dom* yams piled up close to it. Then, following a call made by the ceremonial chairman (usually an elder of the deceased's child's matriline), people gathered to perform and acknowledge the *moëtup verē*. Generally called *da-matē*, this customary prestation was in fact composed of three differentiated moments, all performed one after the other. The *da-matē* itself saw firstly the children of the deceased compensating this latter's brothers and sisters in order to secure rights on land and trees for themselves, *nu-tula matē*. This was followed by the *ne-veoret matē*, during which the same actors thanked the deceased's relatives who helped taking care of him/her before death occurred. Finally, simply called *ne-veoret*, the last compensation went to those men and women who helped during the celebratory day, bringing for instance crops or firewood. Although distinguished through their names, all these *moëtup verē* took the same form. Specific pieces of pigs with one yam *no-dom* and a small amount of cash were given as compensation to each person, individually called forward by the chairman. The latter was also in charge of the speeches made during the different *moëtup verē* to explain and justify what was being performed to the audience. In these speeches, the biography of the deceased and his/her matriline was exposed and linked with the places where he/she had lived, such as house locations, garden areas or sea fishing sites, while the legitimate rights of his/her children to perform *moëtup verē* and secure these resources were underlined.

With the exception of the *moëtup verē*, only performed on the tenth day, all funerary gatherings followed the same pattern. This was said to ensure that they would possess a strong commemorative power. Food processed inside the *n-eañ kuk* where the death had occurred had to be shared by women between the deceased's relatives, parts being attributed very carefully even to those who did not attend the funerary feast. Individual bundles were then made, taken out of the house and publicly attributed to their benefactors with a loud call of their names by the chairman.

Houses and food during funerary rituals appeared therefore imbued with strong commemorative dimensions, and were tightly linked to the perpetuation of bonds between the remaining livings and between those and land through time. However, the examination of the place of these two kinds of artefacts during funerary rites also shows the crucial importance of public acknowledgment that indeed legitimated the transformation of kin bonds and the passing on of land rights.

3.3.2 Revelation: *n-eañ* *kuk* and food in the funerary context

In the same way as the *no-wolwol* transversal beam evoked the collaboration between the *tēgētēgē* situated on the two *tavalsal* of the society, the front wall and particularly the door, called *ne-met-tam*, elicited specific comments in the context of funerary feasts. This term includes the prefix *met-*, which refers to all kinds of openings in space through which one could pass (*ne-met-sal*, the path, was for instance built on the same prefix) and thus enhances the importance of people's circulation into and out of the house.

This part of the house was particularly present as a metaphor in speeches made at the occasion of funerals, and expressed ideas about the fundamental transformations of social relationships at that time. At the funeral organised for the death of an old woman, for instance it was explained to the attendees that:

“At the very basis, she [the old woman] has made the basic exchange, *ne-tultula*, she has made *ne-wol-gemel kastom*, she has made *no-wol-eañ kastom*, then later she has made the funerary *kastom* for her father and her mother, finally, we will make now the *kastom* for her death, we will tie and finish the work, [*sigit no-wok*], we will block the door properly, [*ñware gorgor ne-met-tam*].” (Judah Tula, Lekurañ, Tasmat village, 07/02/2011, my translation from Mwerlap).

To 'block the door' appeared as a powerful image conveying the necessity of actualising and rebinding social relationships after death, drawing upon threads that had already been tied through the lives of the ancestors. The house and the right to enter it thus provided an enduring image of the perpetuation of those relationships and of the legitimacy of the resource right's transmission. Funerary exchanges were therefore seen on Mere Lava, similar to other parts of Melanesia, as central articulations around which the social and spatial organisation revolved. Yams, pork and cash money given by the children of the deceased to the latter's brothers and sisters ensured

“that they (the children) could then live from everything inside of the house or outside in the gardens and from all the fruit trees. Hence it ensures strong foundations for them and their offspring because they are in the land” (Philip Gen, Tasmat village, 06/06/2011).

However, the crucial point was that the *moëtup verē* was publicly witnessed for the transmission of rights and the continuation of social bonds to be effective – as the following example showed. In January 2011, a *da-matē moëtup verē* was performed for an old woman who was in fact still alive and even attended her own funerary rite. The reason given to this was that most people of the concerned matrilines had come specifically for Christmas, and would leave the island again to go back and work either in the capital Port Vila or other islands in Vanuatu. One of the old woman's sons thus decided to perform the *moëtup verē* in order that it would be properly witnessed before the actual death of his mother. During the feast itself, the food processed inside the *n-eañ kuk*, going through the door *ne-met-tam*, and being publicly distributed to the not-yet-deceased's kinsmen and women made visible to all the social bonds that would link the remaining living after the death.

Therefore, through the set of events related to death and funerals, *n-eañ kuk* appeared again as most crucial and performative places. Both the house and the food processed in it and publicly distributed among people attending the feast expressed how the transformation of social relationships was conceived of as drawn upon past sociality, grounded in landscape and directed towards a prospective future. In this way, birth, marriage or death of individuals seemed to punctuate the larger life-courses of matrilines, in circulation network, which made matrilines efficacious entities only as far as they interacted in a collaborative way with each other. Matrilines' life-courses, shaped by those crucial moments of transformation affecting individuals' 'road', *ne-met-sal*, appeared therefore importantly based on mechanisms of containment and above all public revelation shown in such rites as those surrounding birth, marriage and death. In this context, houses and food could be understood as imbued with specific transformative agency since they played an important role in both containment (birth or death occurring inside the house, food processed inside of it) and revelation or public display (the various *moëtup verē*, food being shared and publicly distributed at all ceremonial occasions).

While the idea of transformation as involving both containment and public display will be further explored in the next chapter, a last section will first consider how houses and food also stood as an on-going materialisation of matrilines' collaboration through everyday practices and life. Indeed, social and spatial bonds created and transformed

through the performance of ritual actions and during celebratory moments made sense only in their day-after-day reaffirmation, through casual visits given to kinsmen and women and the informal sharing and circulation of raw and cooked food between hamlets and households.

3.4 Circulating persons and plates: hosting guests and the everyday circulation network.

"On the afternoon, as we were coming back from the gardens in Gafsara, our backs loaded with *ne-gēt* full of various crops, island cabbages and the fishes Morian and Matias had caught on the morning, Lois stopped in Aunen. She picked up some crops, island cabbage leaves and one or two of the medium sized fishes in the *ne-gēt*, wrapped them in two banana leaves she had asked Janeti to cut on the path back, and put the obtained bundles on the flat stone marking the beginning of the path going upward to Leteniok. Then she loudly called her father and brother staying in Leteniok, shouting from the path, '*Mam oh! Masten oh!*' and when they answered she explained to them: '*No nu-momtu ne-gen mak voët gom!*' ['I just put the food on top of the rock!']. Then we left to go back home to Qorqas. Once arrived there we started to cook yams and fish, simply boiling the skinned crops in a saucepan while fish was fried on a pan with coconut oil. Then, before we shared the food in plates between us and the children, Lois removed some pieces of fish and a few yams from the dishes, filled a plate with those and sent Janeti to give it to Eirin, Rina and the old Basil, who were cooking in the other *n-eañ kuk*." (Quote from my diary, 12/06/2011).

As a matter of fact, raw and cooked food very casually and continuously circulated between Mere Lava people. Either in the form of shoots or seeds sent to kin from other islands through copra tradeships, raw food offered directly when coming back from the garden or seashore, snacks given to relatives along the road, meals offered to visitors arriving in hamlets or plates sent to the other hamlet residents or kin residing in nearby hamlets, food-related gifts appeared as circulating items in one broad network. In contrast, the diverse *n-eañ kuk* as places seemed to constitute centres from and to which the food moved. As such, houses and food importantly contributed to the on-going actualisation of social relationships.

3.4.1 The informal ways of everyday exchanges

Food-related products constituted the major part of everyday exchanges observed on Mere Lava during fieldwork. While none of these presentations were specifically given a name characterising them as reflexively classified types of *kastom*, they were nevertheless generally designated with the term *na-tam*, love. As such, they were conceptualised as being at the core of the care one should give to one's kin and clearly distinguished both from foodstuffs purchased from the store, a type of transaction defined as *nu-wol*, 'to pay',

and from the different *moëtup verē* that punctuated people's life-courses. They were separated from the first because of the continuity and direct return they involved. Thus, people would easily complain if they waited too long for the return of a plateful of food they had sent to relatives living in another hamlet. They would expect it to be returned with another cooked dish on it as soon as possible, showing that love, care and concern were shared by the two parties. On another level, all the prestations qualified as *na-tam* were conceived of as being interchangeable, raw food from the gardens, cooked dishes or seeds simply being the major part of a larger network of collaboration and support between relatives, of which the dynamism (i.e. the frequency and density) was indeed the important aspect. Letters were for instance sent to relatives living on other islands, most usually featuring a list of diverse items, including mobile phones, clocks, cameras, clothes as well as seeds or raw crops that were asked for. Similarly, a significant amount of the information given and received during phone calls concerned mutual asking for help or request for food-related items or other goods.

Highly related to the formal *moëtup verē* prestations which were described as their basis, the everyday circulation of food, among other goods, and the fact of being hosted into specific households were therefore always very situational and informally performed. People would intentionally plan to stop offering part of their products to relatives of other hamlets or would suddenly decide that they would send a piece of food to a person they had just thought they would like to strengthen the relationship with. When travelling, one could expect to be hosted in kin houses situated along the way without any advance notice required, while it was also not rare for people to be specifically asked to go and stay for a while in a household whose residents wanted to reinforce their relationships with them. Persons would thus continuously move between different households, especially children and young people, diversely constructing and strengthening their relationships with their hosting relatives. It was for example considered a good thing for maternal uncles, *murui*, to host their sisters' sons, *vonanī*, for a few years or for grand-daughters and grand-mothers, *tubui*, to stay at the same places. Usually involving close kinspeople, *na-tam* relations created out of exchange and mutual care could nevertheless easily extend beyond the sphere of kinship. They could concern for instance newcomers and foreigners, such as school teachers, NGO workers, Peace Corps volunteers or me. In certain cases, even pieces of land or houses would be provided as a way to initiate the relation, always intended to be one of future mutual collaboration and help.

3.4.2 Hosting and the state of socio-spatial relations

These uses and everyday casual circulation of food and care were part of a general emphasis put on hosting as a crucial axis through which socio-spatial relationships between persons and between persons and land, were appraised. The first question people generally asked me when arriving in a household would mostly be where I stayed and, when coming as an already well-known person, what I had eaten at breakfast, and if I would like to have something more to eat. Most comments made on the appropriate feeding or hosting of visiting relatives were in fact standing as broader moral judgments about people and their behaviours. A woman thus explained:

"Sometimes, people come and we invite them inside the *n-eañ kuk*, we always feed them when they come, even if it is not cooked yet we tell them to wait a little bit for them to taste the food, but some of them, when we go to their place, they always tell us that they are sorry, that there is no food cooked so far and that they cannot feed us. Look, if somebody asks me to think about him for that [talking about crabs she had been hunting a few nights before], because he knows I am going to search for some, then I will think about him and send some. But sometimes, after, when you ask for something else like fish because you heard that the same person went fishing, he would tell you that there were not any fish, that he did not catch any fish. These are not good ways, people should behave properly, if we are doing well but other people do not, the relationships will fade, people could decide not to feed these people anymore, they could come but people could choose not to invite them anymore in the *n-eañ kuk* or feed them. (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 16/05/2011).

Therefore, being able and willing to properly host visitors, either members of the same family or foreigners, or to return appropriately the food offered, constituted an important part of the social recognition one could achieve. Reversely, when social relationships were disturbed, people often expressed the fact that the people concerned would not be visiting each other any more. Furthermore, the ways members of a household would welcome visitors also demonstrated, for those who could read the signs shown in attitudes and gestures, the level of proximity in relationships involving members of the household and the visitor. A very close family relative, coming to express disagreement or anger, would thus stop before entering the *n-eañ kuk* and wait to be served food, while it would usually be expected of him that he would enter without being invited and directly go to the saucepan to look at what was available to eat. In the same way, being late with or

postponing the return of a plateful of food could ultimately be understood as the expression of a latent conflict to be solved.

Being hosted for long periods of time in the same household, to the contrary, reinforced the strength of social relations linking the guests and their hosts. Sometimes, when extending over several years, this relationship could overcome existing real kin bonds. A young woman, studying in Port Vila thus explained to me that she was residing with the brother of her mother and his wife, and that she did not call the latter 'uncle' anymore but rather 'dad' because she had shared house, food and care for a long time with him. She added that she would very probably act as his daughter at his death, despite her disinterest in inheritance questions. In this context, houses, especially *n-eañ kuk*, and food, produced out of the gardens, processed inside the house and informally circulated outside, acted as central transformative spaces and substances not only for social bonds but also for the relationships of people to places and land.

Hence, either in a celebratory or an everyday context, both *n-eañ kuk* and food's ever-presence and agency characterised the continuous circulation of human beings all along their life-courses. Through the performance of the various *moëtup verē* and the constant re-negotiation of the bonds initiated this way, individuals ensured their matrilines' durable strength and dynamism. *N-eañ kuk* and food, materialising the intimate collaboration of the two sides of the society, demonstrating the close entanglement of social, spatial and temporal realms, and allowing both containment and public revelation, appeared as privileged artefacts associated with the on-going reproduction of individuals and matrilines. This, particularly stressed at such moments as *moëtup verē*, was no less negotiated in people's everyday life. *N-eañ kuk* and food were thus *de facto* related to the whole range of changes and various actualisations of the social order that were dramatized during *moëtup verē*, and continued informally in everyday life (Turner 1982).

Chapter 4: Houses, Food and gendered leadership

Forms of leadership in the Pacific area have been discussed at length (Sahlins 1963, Godelier and Strathern 1991, Feinberg and Watson-Gegeo 1996, White and Lindstrom 1997, Feinberg 2002) and for Vanuatu specifically (Guiaut 1956, Rodman 1973, Allen 1981, 1984, Lindstrom 1990, Jolly 1991, Kolshus 1999, Tabani 2002, Rio 2007a, Taylor 2008, 2010).⁶⁵ The majority of these studies focused on male leaders, for in the Pacific men have often been considered as the only figures of authority over social groups. However, without denying the accuracy of men's prominent position as leaders in the region, one has to acknowledge that women have specific decision-making powers too (Weiner 1976). Complex and continuous negotiations with external influences over time have also resulted in changed gendered patterns of power and leadership. Hence, in the past, as well as today, as Bolton pointed out, the "classification of all women into a single, disadvantaged group is a misinterpretation of indigenous systems in which a person's role and actions were determined by their kinship location and rank or status" (Bolton 2009: 7).

A main focus has been the invisibility and under-representation of women in Pacific political spheres. Following Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks' statement that "anything in a society having to do with power relationships, not simply formal politics or organised groups, is political", Samantha Rose argued for example that, in Kiribati, women's decision-making in the private or domestic sphere was as effective a political expression as the men's participation in public political institutions (Wiesner-Hanks 2001: 146, Rose 2006: 1). In this argument, however, Rose drew upon distinctions between public and private or domestic spheres, which corresponded mostly to Western ideas of such domains.

⁶⁵ Leadership has a wide range of definitions in the literature. Watson-Gegeo and Feinberg (1996: 5-6) grouped these "around four organizing concepts: position, behavior or performance, subjective orientation and power". However they also concluded that the 'leadership' category has to remain 'fuzzy' in general but needed to be specified for each given case. While the figure of the leader in the Banks Islands has changed through time, it still seemed to correspond to all of the four "organizing concepts" described by Watson-Gegeo and Feinberg. In the past, leaders were characterised by a specific position, a named rank, while also being defined by their attitude (care for the well-being of his group, oratory skills, generosity, ability to eat large amounts of food quickly and fighting skills) and the links they performed between local groups. In addition, they were legitimised and recognised by their groups during special feasts and were generally recognised as powerful in terms of *mana*.

Indeed, from the beginning of the colonial era, Western expatriates strongly identified men with public and political domains while the women were related to the positions of mothers and wives, and linked to the household, especially to kitchen houses, food and roles of feeders. This latter identification was notably enhanced by missionaries who sought to create for women a place that complied with their ideal vision of a Western household (Jolly 1991: 32). Those views were inspired by the traditional spatial separation between men and women existing in many Pacific communities. Yet a number of scholars have since shown how irrelevant this public:men against private:women dichotomy was to indigenous realities. Margaret Jolly and Martha Macintyre asked for instance if the men's houses in Melanesia could not be seen "as much as a domestic locus as the houses of women and children?", while Alice Aruthe'eta Pollard asserted that in the Solomon Islands "women were involved in decision-making in various ways in families, communities, and tribes" (Pollard 2003: 46).

This chapter intends to look at the question of male and female leadership in the Banks Islands through the lens of the transformative agency of buildings such as *n-eañ kuk* and *ne-gemel*, as well as of food, in the context of both sexes' leadership achievements. While the past situation will be evoked through the analysis of the accounts available in literature and through people's memories, a picture of the contemporary routes to leadership will be based on observations and interviews made during fieldwork. Before considering Mere Lava's local specificities concerning leadership, a first section will draw a general picture of the "status alterations system" of the Banks Islands, as described in written sources.

4.1 The status alteration system of the Banks Islands: a brief overview of the literature and archival sources.⁶⁶

While recognising the problems posed by the distinction between big-man and chiefly systems, in the Banks Islands scholars generally identified a 'pre-colonial' system that leant toward a 'big-man' one (Allen 1968, 1984, Vienne 1971, 1984, Kolshus 1999).⁶⁷ Throughout the area, wealth was converted into prestige and authority by means of a

⁶⁶ Political anthropology in the Banks Islands has been the focus of various studies, this section therefore intends to give only essential data that will feed into the discussion on Mere Lava "status alteration system" and achievement of leadership in the past and present.

⁶⁷ For a more general discussion and critique of the concepts of big-man and chiefs, see particularly Sahlins 1963, Strathern and Godelier 1991, Watson-Gegeo and Feinberg 1996 and White and Lindstrom 1997.

complex status alteration system (Bolton 2003: xxxiii). In the past, it comprised a hierarchy, generally named *suqe* in the literature, that was materialised inside the villages by the centrality of the men's house *nakamal* (B) (*ne-gemel* (M)), a set of men's special, restricted groups based on knowledge about the ancestral world, called *tamate* societies in Mota language (or *ne-temet* (M)), linked to specific places *salagoro* (or *na-salagor* (M)), and public feasts called *kolekole* in Mota.⁶⁸ This system, relatively well described in the work of Codrington (1972 [1891]) and Rivers (1914), was more recently discussed by Vienne and Lanouguère-Bruneau (Vienne 1971, 1982, 1984, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002, see also Durrad 1920). According to the latter scholars, details of past practices, notably concerning the *suqe*, were still very well remembered by people at the end of the 20th century on Vanua lava, Mota or Mota Lava, even if the system had not been in place for over 50 years. In Vienne's description, the *suqe* had to be understood as a hierarchical order that transcended local group divisions rather than as an institution in itself. It was based on the progressive acquisition of pre-determined and named ranks associated with special fireplaces to cook and eat from in *nakamal*, specific objects or plants, privileges and restrictions. The number of ranks could vary with regard to place and time. Vienne thus highlighted the contextual nature of the *suqe* hierarchy. Some ranks appeared or disappeared according to social, economic and historical situations, since those had an effect on whether there were men able to acquire them (Vienne 1971: 25-26).

Men were generally initiated into the first ranks of the *suqe* in their childhood, but few of them could afford to rise beyond the middle stages. The acquisition of a rank was indeed based on the capacity to mobilise at the right time sufficient quantities of food, shell-money and pigs to be circulated during the ceremony. It was specifically achieved through the giving of a fixed quantity of shell-money to all the previous holders of this rank and the sharing of food cooked from the specific fireplace associated with the given rank in the *nakamal*. Whereas the lower rank initiations were attended by a limited circle restricted to the immediate kin (F, M, B and Z, MB and FZ in particular), the higher the rank taken, the broader spatial and social network it concerned, with highest *suqe* ceremonials even attended by people from other islands of the Banks group. The power acquired by high-ranking men, conceptualised in supernatural terms and notably expressed

⁶⁸ Many early studies have used Mota language following the fact that until the 1920s it was the official language of the Melanesian Mission and consequently broadly spoken in the archipelago. There are nevertheless a number of other denominations for those terms depending on islands and villages. When names were used on Mere Lava, they have been specifically indicated. However, names such as *suqe* or *kolekole* did not have any equivalent term remembered by Mere Lava people.

through the notion of *mana* in Mota, was legitimated and transposed into leadership by what Vienne called a political economy, revolving around the manipulation and circulation of three crucial elements: food, shell-money and pigs (Vienne 1971: 29). If leaders were not necessarily the men of the highest rank, called in Mota *tavusmwele*, or 'the man who killed pigs for the *mwele* (Cycad leaf) rank', the figures of authority for local groups were nevertheless always of high rank, their authority following from their position into the status alteration system.

The *suqe* was closely linked to other types of restricted men's groups, called *tamate* societies and essentially based on shared knowledge about the supernatural world.⁶⁹ These societies were grouped under the name *salagoro*, which referred to the name of the place in the bush near villages, where their members gathered, strictly excluding women. Codrington, Rivers, Vienne and Lanouguère-Bruneau all noted that certain positions in the *suqe* were accessible only after a preliminary initiation into certain *tamate* groups (Codrington 1972 [1891], Rivers 1914, Vienne 1971, 1982, 1984, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002). Contrary to the *suqe*, initiation into these groups could be undertaken on an individual or a collective basis and was not ruled by an absolute hierarchical order. Men could mostly choose to be initiated in one or the other society, thus expressing different strategies to achieve knowledge and status. Individual choices were nevertheless limited by a relative ordinance of the groups, the initiation in some of them being restricted to men that had been already initiated in other specified ones. The various societies were not equivalent, some of them gathering a great number of men whereas others were less numerous. They gave to their initiates rights and knowledge to wear specific headdresses during dances, use certain kinds of leaves as marks of ownership and restrictions, or to produce special sounds associated with supernatural beings (Vienne 1982).

Generally speaking, *suqe* and *tamate* groups were closely linked with specific items, dances and music. Food, shell-money and pigs were as crucial for the initiation to these groups as they were for acquiring a new rank in the *suqe*, and both organisations were also closely related to particular kinds of objects, such as carvings, masks, headdresses or ornaments. These had to be acquired with pigs and shell-money by initiates during special feasts called *kolekole*. According to Vienne, those feasts partly occurred in

⁶⁹ For a detailed study of *tamate* societies in the context of Vanua Lava, Mota and Mota Lava, see Vienne 1982.

order to legitimate the status of newly initiated men by demonstrating publicly their wealth. They created the conditions for the establishment of a social consensus on the effective power of the man who sponsored the feast (Vienne 1984: 327). More generally, *kolekole* feasts occurred in relation to every important event leading to a change of status (Rivers 1914: 130-131, see also Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002). These were highly competitive events by which individuals reaffirmed and transformed their social positions.

Most of the studies concerning leadership in the Banks Islands highlighted the exclusion of women from the male status alteration system. Spaces such as men's houses *nakamal* and *salagoro* were strictly restricted to men. However, instances of women's agency in this context also existed. While early scholars such as Codrington, then followed by Rivers and Speiser, posited the existence of a women specific status alteration system, Lanouguère-Bruneau described the part taken by women in the past status alteration system on Mota Lava (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 110, Rivers 1914: 131-132, Speiser 1996 [1923]: 181, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002: 201-202). On the one hand she emphasised their crucial contributions in accumulating food, shell-money and pigs. On the other hand, she also documented the important role of the father's sister (*titamas* in Mwotlap) in the life and rise of the status of her brother's son (Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002: 201-202). Another crucial role of women in the context of the status alteration system followed from their very exclusion from certain parts of it. As an audience kept respectfully silent and prevented from being too close to *tamate* dancers for example, they took part in the performative nature of the dances, reaffirming the power of headdresses and dance groups. Hence, if gender differentiation patterns revealed the fundamentality of male and female categories in the context of the status alteration system, it seems important to notice that it also crucially emphasised patterns of complementarity between the sexes. In his study of the structure and function of *suqe*, Vienne noted:

"It has to be noticed that in the Banks' culture, food – money – pig have a complex economic status. According to the point of view which is chosen, production, consumption or circulation, their symbolic value is situated either in one or the other side of the fundamental opposition pairs femaleness/maleness, secular/sacred, matrimonial/political, *mwet/vanua*, *vui/tamate*, etc." (Vienne 1971: 33, my translation from French).

Besides the very grounded aspect of this analysis in a certain moment of the history of anthropology, it nevertheless stated the multiple and the situational character of the status alteration system-related items' relations to conceptual ideas. However, even if,

according to specific contexts, food, shell-money and pigs could be variously associated with the conceptual ideas pointed out by Vienne, simultaneously, it is also appropriate to highlight that 'maleness' and 'femaleness', for instance, would be both present in the food exchanged and consumed at the moment of a *suqe* rank acquisition, for the processes of its production implied a close collaboration of both men and women (Kelly 1999, Caillon 2005).

The importance of men's and women's collaborative work was indeed importantly pointed out by interlocutors on Mere Lava when talking about both past and contemporary systems of leadership achievement. The place of houses such as *n-eañ kuk* and *ne-gemel*, as well as the agency of food were strikingly emphasised as items demonstrating this collaboration, but also allowing a separation to take place so as to create higher individual statuses and positions. Therefore, these artefacts appeared again as imbued with specific transformative agencies. The next sections will consequently consider past recollections of the status alteration system and contemporary ways in which individuals achieved leadership on Mere Lava, especially focusing on the role of houses and food in this context.

4.2 Mere Lava: Social control, balance and the leadership of men

4.2.1 Past recollections of the male status alteration system

Similarly to the picture of the status alteration systems of Vanua Lava, Mota Lava or Mota that could be gathered from written accounts, past achievement of male leadership on Mere Lava depended on both a hierarchical system materialised by matriline's men's houses *ne-gemel* and on individuals' rights of performance in dance groups in the context of the restricted space called *na-salagor*, 'the restricted path'. Although the accounts of the various ranks of this system gathered during fieldwork were generally divergent, all of them emphasised the crucial places of matrilines-related *ne-gemel* and *ne-salagor ne-gemel*, as well as of food, as main agents for the status transformations. Indeed, if people did not seem to remember any generic name applied to the hierarchical system of rank acquisition, they nevertheless came up with what the Island Council of Chiefs retrospectively thought would be an appropriate name for it. That should be called *nu-gen*

tabu, 'eat the taboo food', they said, because men were acquiring their status in it through eating the restricted food from inside the *ne-gemel*.⁷⁰

Until the 1960s, sponsored by both their fathers and maternal uncles, young men could thus progressively go through the diverse steps, physically materialised by separated sections dividing the inner spaces of *ne-gemel* of the *tēgētēgē*, acquiring gradually new ranks, related titles, and thus political authority. Although various versions of the successive steps were given during fieldwork (see Table 12), they all mentioned the existence of a first step that should be reached by boys through simply eating the food cooked inside the *ne-gemel*. At that time, older mentors would publicly show that these young men had gained their support, and that, among all their fellow relatives, they would consequently be the ones who would later kill pigs to enter the *ne-gemel* and achieve high-ranking statuses. This first step underlined the importance of food-related images and practices in the Mere Lava status alteration system. Food was generally described as one main transformative agent allowing individuals' status transformation, as shown for instance in the following exegesis:

"Before you enter the *nakamal*, when you want to become a big man by killing pigs, you must think about it strongly, your heart must be strong in order to be able to eat the food coming from inside the *nakamal*. Why? Because this food is totally different from the food that you see and eat everyday. This kind of food, when you look at it, you decide if you will be able to eat it or not, if you will be able to finish it or not. If you want to climb the steps, you will have to eat it fully, if you do not do so, you won't succeed to go up. (...)

This food is a *kastom* food. It is a very secret thing inside of the *nakamal*. It is not a kind of food coming from the gardens, or coming from fruit trees or elsewhere. I could put it this way: this food is charcoal or ashes from fire. You must eat this food from inside if you want to go inside yourself. But if it is hard for you to follow what your father told you to do. If you are not eating, you are not following the rules to go inside the *nakamal* to go up the steps, you will fail at that point." (Leo Swithun, Palon area, Espiritu Santo, 27/04/2011).

Hence, being able to eat the same food as other men possessing ranks and status inside the *ne-gemel* appeared as a main element determining individuals' strength and abilities to transform themselves and enhance their social positions.

⁷⁰ However, it is also plausible that, as a woman myself, I was simply denied access to that very name because they considered it part of restricted knowledge, although this was never explained to me that way.

Once they had eaten the food from the *ne-gemel*, boys and young men, helped by their fathers and maternal uncles, gradually rose from one rank to another by the successive killing of pigs, *na-ratva*, the value of which depended on the growth of their tusks, accompanied by presentations of shell-money, *no-som*, made to higher-ranking men.⁷¹ After shell-money had been given by the young men willing to be initiated to their ranked elders, and when these prestations had been accepted, initiates entered periods of seclusion (they *nu-velvel*) during which they exclusively ate the food cooked on the specific fireplace of the rank they were being initiated to. These moments, when male relatives of matrilines gathered together inside their *ne-gemel*, were considered as teaching periods, during which young men were taught to fulfil appropriately the roles associated with the ranks they were aiming to. They were said to go through inner body and mind transformations which finally left them imbued with a new and more powerful agency, *na-man*. A final bath with salt water would eventually end those seclusion periods before the newly ranked men appeared publicly to claim their rights, killing pigs and making final compensations in shell-money for the status achieved. By doing this, they presented themselves as fully in charge of the responsibilities related to the new positions they had acquired.

Therefore, during the male initiations associated with matrilines *ne-gemel*, both food and the buildings were characterised as crucial elements ensuring at the same time the identification in substance and power, *na-man*, of initiates with other ranked men, and their separation from previous states of being. Raising progressively their status, materialised through their eating from the fireplaces of higher-ranking sections of *ne-gemel* and the growing efficacy of their oratory skills, young men enlarged progressively the scope of their political and social control over other members of the society.

In the context of *na-salagor* too, both food and *ne-gemel* were said to hold major roles during young men's initiations into specific dance groups. Similarly to the *ne-gemel* of the matrilines, divided in sections corresponding to the various ranks, *na-salagor ne-gemel* inner spaces were separated according to the respective dance groups into which men were initiated - each of which comprising a specific fireplace. Supported by their fathers and maternal uncles, boys who were willing to obtain rights to perform a specific dance and to wear the associated headdresses had to compensate those already possessing

⁷¹ Although on other islands in Northern Vanuatu, tusker pigs are attributed different names according to the growth of their tusks, such names were not collected during fieldwork, either because they were forgotten or because the restricted aspect of this knowledge prevented me from collecting these.

the right with shell-money, *no-som*, before undergoing through a restriction, and seclusion period, *nu-velvel*, inside the *ne-gemel*. Once that period was completed, newly initiated dancers were deemed able to hold the powerful headdresses *ne-temet* during dances performed at ceremonial occasions. Their personal status was increased through such engagement with the supernatural orders.

If correspondence between the hierarchical order associated with *ne-gemel* of matrilines and the various affiliations to *ne-temet* groups in relation to the past status alteration system was not fully remembered, people nevertheless mentioned that the ways in which maternal uncles, with fathers, chose to support some young men above others, were the same. This implied that in both cases, the collaboration between the two sides, *tavalsal*, of the society, personified through fathers and maternal uncles, was judged absolutely fundamental in the process of leadership achievement. From an early age, male children were carefully observed. Those showing the appropriate marks of respect towards their male elders as well as liveliness, good memory skills and humble attitudes were privileged, as they were said to possess the qualities of good leaders:

"Respecting others, they would know how to make themselves respected. They would be able to maintain balance, for other men would pay their rank properly. They would talk, they would be listened and their demands would be satisfied. This is why ranks were good, for they ensured the balance. Now, with *jifs* (B) today, everything is unbalanced because they do not kill pig anymore." (Adam Valuwa, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 21/04/2011).

The idea of balance, expressed through the verb *nu-ttareas*, or 'being appropriate', was an important notion in discourses retrospectively made on past status alteration system and high-ranking leaders on Mere Lava. To act *nu-ttareas* was said to especially characterise men of the highest rank, called *no-wotok*. As already noticed by Coombe at the beginning of the 20th century, this ability to ensure a certain balance of the society was a fundamental aspect of *no-wotok* authority, that extended over the entire island (Coombe 1911: 43). This broad influence was often evoked by interlocutors using the number of women those *no-wotok* had married. Said to possess up to seven wives, they consequently kept affinal relationships with a large number of people and gained authority and social control over those people's matrilines. Eventually, this large network of relationships and achieved authority was based on their ability to collaborate appropriately with other high-ranking men, and allowed *no-wotok* to keep the sides, *tavalsal*, balanced, *nu-ttareas*, and ensure the peace, *na-tañwat*.

Although rank acquisition was described as being grounded on the youth's skills and perceived authoritative potentials, matrilines were indeed said to play an important role in high-rank achievement. Thus, it was often pointed out that the matriline of the na-Saran e-mmē was in fact the only chiefly matriline. People from other matrilines could have acquired ranks, but real *jifs* would have belonged to the na-Saran e-mmē line, because when they originally came from the Maewo neighbouring island, they had brought with them the power of their status alteration system, to Mere Lava which was said to have faced at that time a general authoritative weakness. Indeed, the legitimacy of this matriline was still recognised at the time of fieldwork. In March 2012, the ordination of one Anglican priest, belonging to the na-Saran e-mmē matriline, was for instance marked by the revival of a specific dance and its related headdresses, of which one was specifically associated with *no-wotok*, and whom manufacturing and wearing rights were said to belong to the na-Saran-e-mmē 'head' of matriline, *nu-sur* na-Saran-e-mmē.

This last example also showed how complex the entanglement of the different systems and patterns of leadership and authority became during the colonial and post-colonial eras. Ideas and conceptions of leadership associated with past status alteration system mingled and were modified with the implementation of colonial and post-Independence figures relaying the government and Church presence in the islands, but at the same time, the ways in which the new administrative and religious positions were adopted on the island strongly borrowed from previous understandings of leadership. However, despite these important changes, *ne-gemel* and food seemed to have kept their transformative agencies all along, as will be demonstrated in the next section, considering the current main male figures of authority on Mere Lava.

4.2.2 Contemporary achievements of leadership and authority

In 2010-2011, neither *ne-gemel* associated with matrilines nor *ne-gemel* of the *na-salagor* still existed on Mere Lava. While the first were said to have gradually disappeared in the 1960s at the same time as the rank-taking system, the second were described as still being there in the foundational stones, which marked the restricted spaces of men's *na-salagor* in villages, and waiting only to be re-built. Following the post-war reorganisation of colonial administration, Mere Lava people evoked the nomination of an assessor, *asesa* (B), as a

striking rupture in the specific patterns of the island's political organisation (see also MacClancy 1981: 145, Lindstrom and White 1997: 213). Where authority had been the prerogative of a few high-ranking men whose positions were maintained through political competition in the context of the status alteration system, the colonial administration placed it into the hands of a single assessor, whose scope of action covered the entire island. A knowledgeable interlocutor, residing on Gaua at the time of fieldwork, thus remembered:

"Everything changed when the two governments put assessors in every islands. Then the *kastom* began to disappear, the high-ranking men were left behind while assessors came to the forefront. That happened in the 1960s. (...). So the *jifs* stopped to get ranked. Since then, the assessor looked after the entire island. The killing of pigs finished at that time. (Marsden Harris, 18/09/2012, Barvēt, Gaua)

Because of the disappearance of the rank system, the last *ne-gemel* of the matrilineal still existing in the hamlets were left to decay. In contrast, the *na-salagor* system and related *ne-gemel* persisted and, in 2010-2011, young men distinguished themselves through their ability to dance according to *moëtup verē* and through their rights to wear certain headdresses. This demonstrated powerfully the contextual nature of the status alteration system on Mere Lava that, similar to the systems of other islands in the Banks group, always showed a strong tendency towards change, innovation and creativity. Indeed, in this area, from the pre-Independence period, authority was increasingly found in the hands of various figures such as high-ranking men, Church clergymen, businessmen who ran cooperatives or plantations, or representatives of the colonial government administration, called *jifs*, or 'chiefs' (cf Durrad 1920, Vienne 1984, Kolshus 1999, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002).

In the same way, in 2010-2011, several figures appeared to possess authoritative positions on Mere Lava, demonstrating the entanglement of Church-related powers, government positions and *moëtup verē* associated status and knowledge. In Tasmat village for instance, the Deacon and the Catechist, representing Anglican Church authority, were also linked to other recognised 'roads' towards leadership. The Deacon was also the leader of the *na-salagor*, having acquired the rights on the manufacturing of headdresses, while the Catechist was also recognised as being one of the two *nasara jifs* or chiefs in charge of the different public events occurring on the dancing ground and concerning the whole village community. Keeping this enmeshed reality in mind, we will now for

analytic reasons concentrate on the government-implemented system of authority and on the acquisition of power and status in the *na-salagor*.⁷²

Nowadays, introduction to the *na-salagor* spaces for young men was said to occur most often at a relatively young age. Status achievement inside of this male restricted space and its dance groups was described as being crucially shaped by the collaboration of both fathers and maternal uncles:

"The uncle is the key, he shows the road, but the father shows ground or what comes from his family. If my uncle has right in the *ne-gemel* of *na-salagor*, my father will carry [support] me to go inside, if my father has right inside, then my uncle will carry [support] me to go." (John Norman Turris, 11/07/2011, Tasmat village).

Initiations, supported by those two figures, were achieved through the 'payment', *nu-tula*, of a small amount of cash money and a length of shell-money distributed among men already possessing the rights corresponding to a dance group. This could occur during any rehearsal periods preceding a dance to be performed for a festive occasion. Children or young men being introduced either individually or collectively in the *na-salagor* were said not to remain secluded anymore, although they still had to follow certain restrictions, *nu-velvel*, during the rehearsal period. They would be taught the knowledge related to specific headdresses they acquired the rights on, as well as the associated dance moves, and they would eat specific food dishes cooked exclusively on the *na-salagor* fireplaces. These were considered to be highly imbued with supernatural power, which affected the initiate's bodies and contributed to their transformation into potential *ne-temet* dancers:

"The food inside the *na-salagor* is mainly roasted crops. This kind of food resembles the food for hurricanes. You have to *velvel* for it because the devils *ne-temet* eat with men in the *na-salagor*. Men cannot see them but they are present too. If half of the food remains, you will have to throw it away, it won't be good because *ne-temet* would have been eating it as well. You would recognise that from the general appearance of the food (the fish for instance will look as if it was overcooked). *Ne-temet* affect the food, then the food affects men. In the *na-salagor*, we call brothers to these *ne-temet*, they eat with us, we go along with them as if they were living relatives." (Deacon Steve Turris, 17/06/2011)

⁷² Although the acquisition of status through Church positions should be included in a full study of contemporary patterns of leadership on Mere Lava, the present study will not develop this thread, as it should make the object of further research.

After the rehearsal period, young initiated men appeared publicly during the dance performed on the village's dancing ground. Although they did not fully take part in the dance yet, their introduction to the dance group was publicly announced and legitimated through their standing in the middle of the circle formed by *ne-temet* dancers. Once this first dance was performed, the newly initiated young men, together with other dancers, had to shower with salt water in order for them to be able to return to their households without affecting other members who did not possess rights to enter the *na-salagor*.

Although most of the men entering the *na-salagor* would acquire rights to one specific dance only, some individuals reached a higher status through the acquisition of manufacturing rights concerning the various headdresses as well as rights on musical rhythms and songs related to the various dances. Leaders of the *na-salagor* were indeed designated as being the few men performing those latter. They would also be in charge of the manufacturing of the headdresses themselves during the few days preceding the performance, and they would attribute them to individual dancers. More generally they were the ones exerting control over the rights-acquisitions processes. Significantly, on Mere Lava in 2010-2011, all leaders of the various *na-salagor* were also at the same time important characters in the Anglican or other Church contexts, either as Priest, Deacon or Catechists.

In addition to the status achieved inside of the *na-salagor*, men also had the possibility of increasing their status and subsequent authority through taking positions as *jifs* relaying Vanuatu national policies at the island and village levels. Hence, in each village, one or several *jifs* would be elected by their predecessors, on a voluntary basis, and mainly according to their capacities as mediators and public speakers. Their authority would be called upon by heads of the matrilineages, *nu-sur te bē tēgētēgē*, in order to settle conflicts arising between matrilineages, in cases when their own authority over specific members of their matrilineages had proven insufficient, or most often simply as official witnesses for family affairs and argument resolutions. Various domains of competency, often being constructions inherited from categorisations rooted in Vanuatu colonial and postcolonial history, were contextually defined according to the current necessities of local communities (Tabani 2002: 10-11, 198-199, Hess 2009: 177-78). In Tasmat village for instance, two *kastom jifs* represented the two sides of the village and were considered in charge of all *moëtup verē* related issues (magic and sorcery, land transmission and taboos, etc...), while two *nasara jifs* were designated as in charge of other problems (social misbehaviours, casual land trespasses or thefts, material degradations, etc...). Again, food

and *ne-gemel* situated on the public dancing grounds appeared as important elements associated with the authority of those leaders. When elected, a new *jif* would thus be introduced into the village's central *ne-gemel* through a public ceremony, most often performed on a Sunday morning, after the Church liturgy. Accompanied by a speech made by one of the *kastom jif* that conferred him specific power, *na-man*, and imbued him with his new chiefly authority, the new *jif* would step onto the stone platform marking the front side of the *ne-gemel* before being fed inside it with food cooked on the *ne-gemel* fireplace by his peers. Although acknowledged as being an active part of the Village Council of chiefs, the *nasara jif* status, as a position open to every willing male individual, was thus distinguished from the *kastom jif* status, conferred generally to older men whose vast knowledge of *moëtup verē* and of the supernatural world imbued them with important *na-man*. Evoking considerations developed by scholars looking at authority figures in the Pacific, *kastom jifs* and *nasara jifs* on Mere Lava thus appeared as two figures of a contemporary bureaucratisation of high-ranking male, that had been reflexively constructed on the exegesis about past status alteration system (White and Lindstrom 1997, see also Tabani 2002). As such, during fieldwork, government-related positions were still linked to *na-salagor* dance groups. Indeed, although most often not dancing themselves, *kastom jifs* were for instance the figures sollicited during *ne-temet* dances to control the headdresses' power and guide the dancers, making sure their *na-man* would not hurt the general public attendees.

As official figures, village *jifs* were integrated into the hierarchically organised system uniting islands on a national scale (White and Lindstrom 1997, Tabani 2002 among others). They gathered into a specific Area Council possessing authority on the whole island and named *Qet Varē*, or 'the head of our land', of which the members met on a regular basis in order to discuss and solve general island related issues. Those local *jifs* also elected one of them to be titled *Paramount jif*(B) for a variable period. As the head of the Area Council *Qet Varē*, he would be the one representing Mere Lava interests at the Torba Province *Qet*, 'head', Council level. Local island and provincial *jifs'* authority were eventually relayed at the national level by two *Paramount jifs* (respectively in charge of the Gaua, Merig and Mere Lava area, and of the Torres, Ureparapara, Vanua Lava, Mota and Mota Lava area), members of the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs.

As far as the role of women was concerned, they seemed to be generally absent from the description of national and provincial leadership achievement made by Mere Lava people. Local accounts seemed thus to give an echo to Bolton's remark:

"The colonial government enhanced existing gender divisions by excluding women from roles in the new contexts of church and government. (...). After Independence, women continued to be largely excluded from government and from other contexts of decision-making. The exclusion of women from decision-making at a national level is nowadays assumed by both expatriates and ni-Vanuatu to reflect the exclusion of women from decision making at a local level." (Bolton 2009: 7)

However, describing leadership patterns of the past "at the local level" as well as talking about the contemporary situation, interlocutors on Mere Lava pointed out the place of women and their collaborative association with their male folks as being crucial. In place of *ne-gemel*, here *n-eanī* as well as food were reflexively conceptualised as artefacts linked to female leadership, showing women's valued abilities as feeders and hosts.

4.3 Mere Lava: Hospitality and the leadership of women.

"Though women are completely excluded from the *suque* of the men, they have something of the sort among themselves, which is called improperly by the same name. They admit to grades of honour on payment of money and the making of a feast, and so becomes *tavine motar*, women of distinction. By their *suque*, they become rich in money, with which to help their husbands in their steps in ranks, and they plant their own gardens for the feasts. Thus they advanced to be tattooed, to wear shell-bracelets, to put on an ornamented *pari*, the woman's scanty garment, to decorate their faces with red earth, in all which glories, the *tavine worawora*, the common woman, can have no share. But this is in the way of *kolekole* rather than of *suque*" (Codrington 1972 [1891]: 110).

Despite being mainly based on observations made in the context of Mota, Mota Lava and Vanua Lava at the end of the 19th century, Codrington's remark found a surprising contemporaneity in the 2010-2011 interlocutors' accounts about Mere Lava's past high-ranking women, *ne-ñweter*. Despite some minor differences, their role as *ne-metsal te bë som* or 'road for money' for their husbands was stressed by interlocutors, as well as their tattooing and the fact that they were to be greatly respected. The next subsections will examine *ne-ñweter* characteristics and associated values in the past, in order to compare it with contemporary observations and enquiries made during fieldwork while staying and working with the one woman still holding the Mere Lava *ne-ñweter* position at that time.

4.3.1 *Ne-ñweter* high-ranking women in the past

On Mere Lava, in contrast to the numerous ranks identified for men, a single ranked position was recognised for women. Called *ne-ñweter*, high-ranking women were always associated with *no-wotok* titled men, of which they were said to be the wives and supporters. As such, their roles in providing food from their gardens, raising pigs, accumulating shell-money *no-som*, and generally as hosts for visitors were emphasised as main characteristics of their position. Helping *no-wotok* to strengthen their authority by providing some wealth they would further invest in the context of the male status alteration society, *ne-ñweter* would thus ensure their own position as most respected and powerful female figures. Similarly to the matrilines *ne-gemel* for men, *ne-ñweter* houses were also specifically associated with these women's position. This fact was already

pointed out for other islands of the Banks group by Rivers at the beginning of the 20th century. He noted that men reaching a high rank by rising both in the *suqe* and the *tamate* societies were expected to help increase the rank of their wives or daughters. They did so by sponsoring a *kolekole* feast for their female relatives. Rivers also indicated that houses were the major objects that women had to *kole*, or more exactly that were objects of *kolekole* feasts on behalf of them. According to him, there were two levels of *kolekole* for houses, which gave them a more or less restricted character. The first one was called *gavur lava* (in Mota) and "a woman who has not herself performed such a ceremony would be prohibited from entering or even approaching a house of this kind" (Rivers 1914: 131). The second level gave the house the name of *tamate woroworo* in Mota and here again only women having performed a *kolekole* of this type for their house could enter or approach it. More recently, Lanouguère-Bruneau documented such past practices in Mota Lava.⁷³ Unlike Rivers, she only noticed one ceremony linked to houses. She reported that a man having reached the grade of *ne'mel* (in Mwotlap language) had to build a big feminine house called *no-kole'm* (from *kole* and *e'm* = house) for his wife or daughter. These female relatives were secluded in the house during a length of time, joined by the man's sisters and sister's daughters. During this period the man had to supply food for all these women. At the end of the seclusion period, the women for whom the house had been built went out for a ritual bath in the sea and a taboo was put on the place where it occurred.⁷⁴ Then, a week later, the ranking-man had to sponsor a feast. On that occasion he killed a tusked pig and gave shell-money to other *ne'mel* and higher ranked men in order for his wife or daughter to wear the pig's tusk around her arm. Later on, the new ranked woman would be tattooed by the high-ranking man's classificatory sisters and/or mothers (Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002: 345-346). Similarly nowadays, the VCC fieldworker Eli Field, on Vanua Lava, interviewed by Hess during her fieldwork, recollected "high-ranking women, called *meter*, who had achieved their rank by killing a pig on top of their houses" (Hess 2009: 179).

According to Mere Lava accounts, *ne-ñweter*, sponsored by their *no-wotok* husbands or fathers, also achieved their rank in the past by killing a pig while standing on

⁷³ She was informed by a woman whose father sponsored the building of a *no-kole'm* house, high-ranking house, for her.

⁷⁴ The notion of *tabu* is known generally in the Pacific to be linked with the notion of *mana*. Simply stated it characterises places, persons or objects that are strongly imbued with *mana* and are consequently submitted to restrictions. However, this notion is as complex as the notion of *mana* and should be considered with respect to the local conceptions of the various islands.

top of their houses. Described as associated with the throwing down to the ground of *nodom* yams, in reference to their role as greatly skilled gardeners and food providers, as well as to the quality of their hospitality, this public *moëtup verē* was followed or preceded by a period of five days seclusion during which the future *ne-ñweter* was tattooed by the women of her *tavalsal* group:

"When the *ne-ñweter* were tattooed, it was a taboo day for all people inside of the village, they had to stay quiet inside of their respective houses so that they did not disturb what was going on. The *ne-ñweter* too must stay inside of their house, *nu-velvel*. If she did follow that, her body would not be sore afterwards. They also had to kill a pig and throw yams and they got tattooed." (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/02/2011).

The women were fed throughout by their *no-wotok* sponsor: "At that time, men were feeding the women, it was not like everyday when women cook to feed everybody but it was the other way around, men feed their wives", and the *ne-ñweter* house, *n-eañ ne-ñweter*, walls were painted and/or carved with powerful patterns. These showed *ne-temet* supernatural beings and diamond-shaped patterns and lines said to be characteristics of *ne-ñweter* tattoos (Luc Wokot, 13/01/2011, Tasmat village).⁷⁵

Whereas people's retrospective memories formed the fundamental data on which to rely upon during fieldwork, several archival documents seemed to confirm the picture built up of the different enquiries made on the island. A photograph taken by Speiser at the end of 1911 on the neighbouring island of Gaua showed a high-ranking woman's house with a ladder on its roof that might evoke the practice of a rooftop killing of pig (Speiser 1996 [1923]: pl. 89, fig. 4).⁷⁶ Another picture from the Beattie collection was identified by all interlocutors as the painted walls of a *n-eañ ne-ñweter* situated in the hamlet of Leurok in Tasmat village.⁷⁷ Its forefront was characterised on either sides of the door by painted planks that showed patterns recognised as powerful patterns of *ne-temet*. This, according to

⁷⁵ According to my interlocutors, *ne-ñweter* women could be tattooed on the legs, arms, back, breasts as well as on the face. Figure 4.03 and 4.04 present the drawings made during fieldwork of two *n-eañ kuk* front walls covered with tattoo-related patterns as well as some of the patterns said to be characteristic of past *ne-ñweter* tattoos.

⁷⁶ Basel Museum für Völkerkunde photographic collection Vb 1902. Whereas the caption in Speiser's book notes that the photograph represents a "man of high *suque* rank in Gaua, statues, paintings; there is a ladder to the roof where pigs are said to be sometimes sacrificed. On the right fireplace", the two individuals standing in front of the house clearly appear to be a woman and a child, which would support the hypothesis of this house being associated with a high-ranking woman.

⁷⁷ Beattie catalogue n° 303 "Mere Lava Art – Decorations on a Native House" / SOAS Archives MM 025929.

people, was not only showing the position of the *ne-ñweter* living inside, but also her matriline and it was thus a source of pride for co-members of this matriline (figure 4.06).

In addition, these documents seemed to demonstrate the fluidity and changeability of features related to the status alteration system. Although the Leurok house photographed in the 1906 Beattie's picture was of the small type, raised on posts and situated on the edge of the stone wall, which during fieldwork was said to be a typical *n-eañ bē moëtur* or sleeping house, the constructions defined by contemporary interlocutors as living places of the last known high-ranking women were rather large *n-eañ kuk* that would have been characterised by a restricted stone platform dividing their inner space. In the 1980s, two of these *n-eañ kuk* associated with past *ne-ñweter* had indeed again been decorated with patterns associated with high-ranking women, even if no woman had taken a rank since the 1930s. This was said to have been realised by a few knowledgeable men of Tasmat village who had decided to commemorate some of their *ne-ñweter* ancestors and to ensure the transmission of the powerful patterns linked to them, for they were frightened that the youngest generation would forget them (Deacon Steve Turris, 05/01/2011, Tasmat village). These two *n-eañ kuk* still wore those patterns associated with *ne-ñweter* high-ranking women in 2010-2011. Situated respectively in Leverē hamlet, Leqel village and in Litebē hamlet, Tasmat village, they were both shown to foreigners with pride by people as a mark of their legitimacy to the places and of their ancestors' authority (Figure 4.03 and 4.04).

Similarly, some ornaments of distinction most probably linked with the *ne-ñweter* position, seemed to have been very rapidly abandoned in the last quarter of the 19th century, probably due to the early influence of the Anglican Church on Mere Lava. In 1877, the missionary Charles H. Brown sketched on Mere Lava an "old lady [that] distinguished herself by wearing two belts, one (the native belt with tuft of fibres) round the most protuberant place behind; the other round the most protuberant place in front" (Brown 1877: 263; Fig. 1.01). Whereas those plaited belts were generally easily identified during fieldwork as having been related to high-ranking status in the same way as tattoos or ornamented houses, nobody could remember that they ever had seen such a belt worn or being plaited. Memories were more vivid regarding tattoo patterns, as in the course of the first part of the 20th century, some of them progressively became detached from their high-ranking associations to be appropriated by women as beauty-enhancing devices. Whereas the whole body of *ne-ñweter* had been covered by tattooed designs, only the facial patterns were kept after the Second World War, about a decade after the last high-ranking woman

had died.⁷⁸ In 2010-2011, some women in their sixties or seventies still wore those patterns and remembered their names, while youngers sometimes wore one or two of them, amidst other patterns they liked, such as stars, crosses or written names (Fig. 4.05).

Often remembered as the female ancestors who came from nearby islands, *ne-ñweter* were identified as the origin of several matrilines, and were granted specific importance when recounting genealogies. Again, their role as food providers, who would have ensured the on-going fertility of the *tēgētēgē*, was emphasised. On a drawing shown to me during an interview carried out on Gaua, a *ne-ñweter* of the line Luwa, said to be the first migrant of this matriline going to Mere Lava, was represented in a wooden dish full of raw yams, floating on a raft as she crossed the sea channel separating the two islands.

In people's discourses and conceptualisations of the past, houses and food were therefore tightly associated with the *ne-ñweter* position. Often characterised by their hosting qualities, they were linked with planning capacities that would enable them to accumulate food from the gardens in order to host people and to provide wealth to support their *no-wotok* husbands. Moreover, this also showed that women of high status were more likely to marry men from other villages or even other islands (see also Rivers 1914: 107, Lanouguère-Bruneau 2002: 347). Thus they were contributing to the creation of kin relationships between local groups that otherwise tended towards endogamy (Vienne 1984: 186). Through their collaboration with each other, high-ranking men and high-ranking women were therefore agents initiating connections between different places, creating new social paths and ultimately exerting control over space and time. Mutually maintaining and enhancing their status and positions, both *no-wotok* and *ne-ñweter* were described as key figures who would inspire respect and stand as authoritative characters, whose speeches and orders would not be disputed and whose collaboration would ensure that a certain balance of the society and peace, *na-tañwat*, would be preserved. If in 2010-2011, women no longer killed pigs, the *ne-ñweter* title was nevertheless still held and transmitted. The next section will therefore look at the characteristics of this *ne-ñweter* contemporary position and will more generally describe female patterns of authority as observed during fieldwork.

⁷⁸ The last *ne-ñweter* who had achieved rank through the killing of pigs was said to have been living in Leverē hamlet, Leqel village. She was named Rokrē and she died in 1937.

4.3.2 Contemporary patterns of female authority: *ne-ñweter* and Mothers Union

In the Banks Islands, women today might be elected as *jif* holding one of the offices of the village (with the exception of the *kastom* office which is based on men's restricted knowledge). In October 2003, for instance, two women were elected as *nasara jifs* in Qaké village, Vanua Lava (Hess 2009: 178). On Mere Lava, female authority was said to be shared by different figures: "Mother's Union leaders are in charge of helping sick people or children; the *ne-ñweter* position is different, she is the *jif* for all women" (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/02/2011). However, despite the clear differentiation of these figures, and in the same way as men's leadership patterns demonstrated the entanglement of Church, government and *moëtup verē*-derived authorities, female leadership showed how intricately enmeshed Mother's Union Church-related positions and *ne-ñweter* positions were. Until May 2010, both Mother's Union presidency and the *ne-ñweter* position had been held by a single woman whose perfect knowledge of Church scriptures and of *moëtup verē* was generally praised and whose name and behaviour was remembered with great respect around the island at the time of fieldwork. Since her death, leadership in the Mother's Union Church context and the *ne-ñweter* position had been separated from one another and two different women had been invested with the positions.

Associated with the Anglican Church, Mother's Union on Mere Lava brought together a significant number of women in each village, under the authority of a President elected by a board constituted of the village group leaders. This board was responsible for the coordination of women's activities around the island. Fundamentally centred around health, family living and the raising and education of children, Mother's Union groups were considered as a relay of the Church into individual households and were especially dedicated to women's teaching of a Christian way of life.⁷⁹ The groups held regular awareness meetings on such issues as baby care, domestic violence, food and water consumption and organised workshops during which women shared skills and practical knowledge about non-restricted female activities such as plaiting baskets and sewing clothes. Hence, providing opportunities to distinguish oneself, leadership achieved in the context of these groups was an important way for women to increase their personal status. Entitled *veve*, or 'mother', such female church leaders were thus considered to be

⁷⁹ For a more detailed study about Mother's Union and their achievements in Melanesia, see Jolly 2003 and Scheyvens 2003.

empowered by the Holy Spirit, *nu-Vu nu-roñ*, in a similar way to male Catechists or Deacons.⁸⁰

Despite being recognised as a powerful position among women, leadership in Mother's Union groups was usually not included into men's exegesis about forms of leaderships on Mere Lava. In contrast, the *ne-ñweter* position was always talked about as being the female high-ranking status, inherited from the past status alteration system but changed with the arrival of *gurva* pel.

The contemporary *ne-ñweter* prerogatives were explained as follows:

"The work of *ne-ñweter* is linked to the house, she has to get everything ready, a place to sleep, food. When people come, she has to take all these things to the public place and provide everything which could miss in the *nakamal*.

Before, there were plenty of *ne-ñweter*, who followed high-ranking men, but now there is one only. Before, the *jifs* would have chosen the *ne-ñweter* but now the women also elect who they want to be titled this way. I am now the *ne-ñweter* but I am done with this position because I stayed four years already. There is not any specific *kastom* to become *ne-ñweter* nowadays, the women would only choose you, share a meal with you and you would start your work as the new *ne-ñweter*. Concerning what is expected from a *ne-ñweter*, you have to provide everything exactly as before. Janet [the previous *ne-ñweter*] has been very good as a *ne-ñweter* because she had Philip [her husband] to help her, but for me it is more difficult because my husband has died and I have to provide by myself all the food and everything which is necessary to host people when they come. I also stand as the voice of all women during the meetings of the Qet Varē Area Council of Chiefs. I have a vice-*ne-ñweter* who can attend when I cannot go myself. Then, there are two delegated women in each village to represent me, one president and one vice-president, plus one secretary and one treasurer." (Hilda Roñ, 15/02/2011, Auta village).

Hence, the *ne-ñweter*'s expected hospitality was conceived of as fundamentally based on her collaboration with her husband, in order to produce the food necessary for hosting various kinds of meetings and events, and to provide houses or sleeping places for all visiting relatives and foreigners. In addition to their hosting abilities, contemporary *ne-ñweter* authority was also importantly based on their oratory skills. Indeed, they were described as *ne-lē mu revet vaven*, 'the words of all women' and respected as such because of their knowledge of *moëtup verē*, which was supposed to enable them to help men solve problems, maintain peace, *na-tañwat* and things balanced, *da-ttareas*. The *ne-ñweter n-eañ*

⁸⁰ See Chapter 2.

kuk, and the food produced inside and shared outside of these houses on a broader community scale, appeared as specific items materialising the *ne-ñweter* and *no-wotok* authority or, put differently, as an ideal example of male and female's collaboration. If the idea of status transformation no longer seemed to rely strongly on a certain period of confinement or seclusion inside a specific *n-eañ ne-ñweter*, women nevertheless shared food together in order to mark the designation of a modern *ne-ñweter* or a President of Mother's Union. Such commensality was precisely what officially expressed the woman's new status. In the case of *ne-ñweter*, her important status was also said to derive from her right to enter men's *ne-gemel*, especially during the meeting of the Qet Varē Area Council of Chiefs. During those meetings, one of the *jifs* would be in charge of bringing food for his peers. However, the food intended to the *ne-ñweter* was always prepared separately and placed in a different dish that she would not share with her male companions. Hence, despite common high-ranking status, current male and female high positions were nonetheless clearly differentiated through food sharing practices. Women could indeed achieve status (and sometimes at a very important level) but their empowerment had to be clearly marked as different from that of men.

With the disappearance of matrilines *ne-gemel*, because these units corresponded to the Christian idea of households, and because they were tightly linked with the reproduction of matrilines, *n-eañ kuk* appear to have become increasingly important as places legitimating the status and authoritative positions of both their female and male owners. As such, they materialised contemporary patterns of leadership along with *ne-gemel* or Churches situated on central public places and *na-salagor* restricted spaces.

4.4 Collaboration and balance: the kitchen house as a locus for authority

Accounts of the past status alteration system found in the literature for the Banks Islands showed generally "on the empirical plane an important plasticity. The ethical code of the system always preserved an important space for intrusive events, personal innovations and discrepancies of interpretations and codifications" (Vienne 1971: 14, my translation from French), which often found some physical translation in the elements of material culture associated with it and which was made visible for instance through the different buildings linked with leadership. Sections were therefore added to *ne-gemel* for men acquiring

higher ranks or, on the contrary, their back were left to decay when nobody possessed the corresponding high rank any more.⁸¹

External influences and restrictions, notably those coming from missionaries and the colonial administration, were always negotiated and discussed rather than simply imposed and submitted to. Thus, the system has had a history of alternate disappearance and renewal following the shifting intensity and the modalities of missionary influence. Most of the first missionaries were not opposed to *suge* and *salagoro*, as they did not see them as religious practices that could threaten their work (Durrad 1920: 2). Indeed, Codrington for instance generally looked at those items favourably. This might have been influenced by his application of Western categories to local material productions:

"I was visited by Siplaglano, with whom I had a long chat. The subjects were chiefly worldly. He is the only image-maker in the island, others make them now, but as he says not the real things. As I never saw any thing except ornamental door posts, I could not accuse him of making idols" (Codrington's Journal 1870: September 7th).

Therefore, generally speaking for the Banks islands, by the end of the 19th century, the *suge* and *salagoro* were probably changed to the extent that they integrated those external relationships into the speculative play for leadership. However, the very practice and existence of the status alteration system was not threatened. The situation changed in the first two decades of the 20th century, with firmer opposition from missionaries such as Mr. Adams and Bishop Wilson who saw the *suge* and *salagoro* as being time-consuming activities that prevented people from attending Church school and celebrations.⁸² Under the influence of missionaries, the *suge* and *salagoro* organisations appear to have been less popular for a short period. Yet, since in the 1920s the Melanesian Mission ceased to be centred on Mota and focused more on the Solomon Islands, those organisations began to flourish again, at least in the central part of the group (Kolshus 1999: 85). Vienne also stated that the end of this period could be seen as the "the last renewal of *sukwe* and of the splendour of the old society" (Vienne 1971: 57, my translation from French).

As far as Mere Lava is concerned, Church buildings and kitchen houses appeared

⁸¹ Rights over dances and headdresses also circulated fluidly among villages or from one island to another, in the same way as rights over certain ornaments linked to the "status alteration system" (Huffman 1996). However, this issue about circulation and inter-island rights exchange in the Banks and Torres Islands lies beyond the scope of this thesis and should make the object of a full study of its own.

⁸² Mr. Adams entered the Melanesian Mission service in 1899 and left it in 1913, while Bishop Wilson was active between 1894 and 1911 (Melanesian Mission Archives, Archive inventory, SOAS).

as important physical witnesses of the changes that had occurred in leadership patterns in the course of the 20th century. In Tasmat village, after World War II, the church situated on Sere had been ornamented with carved and painted wooden planks representing various *ne-temet* entities, around the nave and the choir. They were described as the proper ornamentation for *na-salagor ne-gemel*, that had been put in the church in order to empower it and express the respect that this place inspired to the community (Luc Wokot, 02/02/2011, Tasmat village). In 2010-2011, only one painted plank remained from this set. Significantly, it had been re-placed as a central post in front of the *ne-gemel* situated on Sere when the church had been rebuilt in concrete and corrugated iron in 1986. The other planks, old and half rotten, had been burnt in the way all items associated with *ne-gemel* and *ne-temet* should be: accompanied with shell-money *no-som*.

N-eañ kuk, in contrast to church buildings, were linked to ideas of leadership related to specific households and matrilines, materialising both the links of their owners to some high-ranking ancestors and the legitimacy of their rights on land. A line of stone marking the ground at the front of the house, as well as pointed bamboo purlin, *nu-wutil*, and vertical spines obtained from the inner spathe of sago palm trees, *ni-bis*, and put on the front side of the roof, could thus be added to the *n-eañ kuk* in order to show the status of its male owner (Fig. 4.08). All these features were subjected to rights obtained from maternal uncles, *murui*, or from fathers, *ne-temei*, and which could be transmitted to younger male members of the matriline or sons willing to acquire them for an appropriate compensation in shell or cash money. These features, added at the end of the building process, and marking meaningful emplacements such as the two sides of the roof and the threshold of the house's front shelter, were said to be related to fundamental capacities characterising leaders in the context of matrilines. The sharpness of their mind, as well as their good memory were thus evoked through the sharpness and pointedness of *nu-wutil* and *ni-bis*, disposed evenly on the two sides of the gable, while all three features were more generally associated with the past status alteration system rank taking:

"There are three things that you can put on your *n-eañ kuk*. There are *nu-wutil*, *ni-bis* and the stones in front of it. It means that you are a Paramount *jif*, but you have to pay the rights for it to your uncle. *Nu-wutil* is the mouth of the sawfish. When you hook this fish but miss it, you will have to be careful because it will remember you the next time you go fishing and it will attack you at once. The stones, mean *keregēar*, the big stones that are at the basis of stone walls, they are the *jifs*, they ensure the balance of all the other stones put on top of them. These things were on the houses of the high-ranking men before but now one can put it on his *n-eañ kuk* if one has the rights. It will show that this house will stay because the man is thoughtful, he will advise appropriately his children and nephews, the matriline will go on." (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 07/06/2011).

Hence, commissioners of *n-eañ kuk*, by adding these elements to the house publicly demonstrated their links to their high-ranking ancestors, whose rights they had acquired. At the same time, they showed their abilities to ensure the continuity of their matriline through exerting social control over the following generations in collaboration with other leaders of matrilines, *nu-sur te bë tēgētēgē*. Eventually, *n-eañ kuk* appeared as artefacts demonstrating the importance of this collaboration of the two *tavalsal* as well as the value of being balanced, *nu-ttareas*, both commented as crucial features of the building and a fundamental qualities of *jifs*. Building or rebuilding a *n-eañ kuk* on the sites where their ancestors had lived, at the time of fieldwork, was thus a means for commissioners to strengthen their links to these places and to affirm their social skills as well as a way to enhance their prestige and authority.

N-eañ kuk also appeared tightly linked with female authority. They had been the places where the last *ne-ñweter* had lived and where they had been tattooed. They were the contemporary cooking places, where, on a daily basis, women were said to be 'the boss': "The man is the head of the family and the woman is the boss inside of the kitchen" (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 07/06/2011).

Therefore, the examination of the transformative agencies of buildings and food in relation to leadership did not just demonstrate how oversimplified the pairing of male leadership and public spaces / female leadership and household, kitchen and domestic spaces would be on Mere Lava, but also showed how crucial the collaboration between genders and matrilines was. Houses and food were as essential agents in some processes that were fundamentally based on containment, confinement (seclusion periods), and public display, legitimating change. Comparing past accounts and contemporary situations showed changes in practices and it contributed to explain the current emphasis that seemed

to be put on the *n-eañ kuk*. With the disappearance of matriline *ne-gemel*, standing as both *loci* for the expression of male authority and the physical materialisation of it in the hamlets, male leadership qualities such as memory, balance and social authority probably became increasingly invested into *n-eañ kuk*. There, they intricately mingled with a place also loaded with ideas associated with female leadership to such an extent that it could have enhanced the importance given to this building as an authoritative place, demonstrating the fundamentality of gender and matrilines' on-going collaboration over time in order to reproduce persons and the social orders (compare Rodman 1985: 59).

Part I: Conclusion

In the two previous chapters, this thesis has repeatedly considered the role and place of both buildings such as *n-eañ kuk* and *ne-gemel* (either of matrilines, of *na-salagor*, or contemporary *ne-gemel* of central public dancing ground), and food, in diverse contexts ranging from the everyday life to life-cycle-related ritual occasions and leadership achievement. Despite obvious differences characterising the ways they were made, consumed, or lived in and with, both food and houses appeared to be imbued with crucial transformative agencies, that made them efficacious items which shaped human bodies and persons' identities.

Containment and processes of confinement associated with moments of public revelation or display, that served as fundamental validations and legitimations, seemed to be the necessary stages constituting the very core of what was appraised as transformation on Mere Lava, as most probably elsewhere in northern Vanuatu. Similarly, Mondragón noticed the importance of both moments of containment and revelation, equating it with the very creation of relations, for Torres islands:

"Within the context of eating, containment constitutes the moment during which the *mëna*, which could also be called the quality of the 'knowledge' or efficacious potency of the 'producer', is recognised by others by virtue of its effect on those others. By effect here I not only mean the effect of the ingested food-substance, which is the direct product of horticultural efficacy, into the 'container', which is the consumer's belly. The effect of a person's potency is also (...) representative of the capacity to generate and provide food for others, i.e. to act as an agent upon others (cf. Strathern 1988: 238, on feeding). Such a process necessarily takes places (...) and times (...), and undergo specific relational roles at the moment in which food exchange occurs. In a word, effect also stands for the creation, modification or renewal of a relationship between two agents at specific spatio-temporal junctures of their existence." (Mondragón 1999: 173, author's emphasis)

On Mere Lava, the power or what Mondragón called "knowledge or efficacious potency of the 'producer'", i.e. the *mëna* or *na-man* in Mwerlap, did not appear strikingly in the exegesis collected about individual transformations. Rather, as physical artefacts, both houses such as *n-eañ kuk* and *ne-gemel*, and food, possessed inherent qualities which made them especially appropriate items to realise the successive containments and public

revelations crucial for these transformations. Houses, acting as containers that simultaneously hid and protected people and things while also revealing them to the outside world, allowed the transformation of individuals to take place safely and marked various levels of relational "boundaries" between insiders and foreigners. Food had a different effect on people according to its restricted or public aspect; eating restricted food during seclusion periods at the same time distinguished a person from others and identified him/her with a peculiar group of same-status peers (see also Strathern 2012). Public *moëtup verē* involving yams and pig's parts reaffirmed the separation of the society into two groups further linked through exchanges and affinal relations. However the general sharing and consumption of food during feasts also linked people together beyond their differences. Therefore, large food sharing were a crucial means to legitimate individuals' status transformation, newly acquired social positions and rights. The distribution and sharing of bundles of collectively prepared food, wrapped in leaves, provided, similarly to the houses, a visually powerful image of the productive unity achieved out of differences, wrapped together through collaboration.

Therefore, the efficacy of both kinds of materials was grounded into specific qualities that made them into liminal elements. It was in that sense only that houses or food could be related to human bodies. Indeed, in a way somewhat similar to a skin, they could be appraised as containers that both concealed and unified a fragmented inside and, at the same time, revealed this very aggregated nature to the outside (Gell 1993: 32). Whereas this identification to skin liminal qualities could appear slightly far-fetched at the first sight, on Mere Lava and in the Banks Islands in general, the fact that houses could be ornamented with carvings and paintings, some of which were described as tattoo patterns seemed to give weight to that interpretation.⁸³ Houses or wrapped food, thus appeared to possess liminal qualities that made them all very efficacious material items and surfaces. But even more than the fundamental fragmented nature of reality, what houses and food performed were the means through which unity was achieved, the ways that allowed the fragmented to become a coherent 'One'.

Houses and food assembled and materialised ideas about sociality, time and space in very specific ways. Overall, these artefacts strikingly emphasised the fundamentality, and the efficacy, of the notion of collaboration. They stood as images evoking and

⁸³ This assertion, while opening a promising view on both architecture and tattoos in the Banks Islands, will nevertheless not be developed more in the present work, for it will be one issue to be considered in later research.

performing the successive reproduction of matrilines through time, achieved in turn through the successful transformations of persons.

Whereas the previous chapters highlighted this through the analysis of the different uses of these artefacts, of their role and place in individuals' lives and of their presence in discourses, we will now focus on their efficacy through the lens of making processes. Indeed, their association with the idea of collaboration and their links to space, time and sociality, was as much achieved through their manufacturing as it was through their use.

PART II

MAKING HOUSES AND FOOD: THE EFFICACY OF TECHNIQUES



Figure II.01: *Tuptup*, making the thatch roof of the house, Luwör, Leqel village, 14/06/2011.

Far from being only performative items constituted along life-courses, people's everyday life or ceremonial occasions, *n-eañ kuk's* and food's multidimensional nature and efficacy were significantly constructed at the time of their making. This part will subsequently focus on their technical production processes, using operational sequences as a main tool in order to unfold the various moments and complex set of social and physical actions that formed those artefacts (Lemonnier 1992, Coupaye 2004, 2009b). Operational sequences were

defined by Leroi-Gourhan as the series of operations that aims to transform a raw material into a manufactured one. It allows distinguishing the different phases of an action and comparing them to similar phases in other operations (Lemonnier 1986: 26). Such a processual approach of the making of houses and food highlighted how transformational potencies were incorporated into these artefacts through technical action. Whereas actions on the matter will be a fundamental part of the following description, it is important to not limit the study to these if we want to understand what is at stake during the production and uses of objects (Coupaye 2009, see also Warnier 2009). Social, sensual and emotional dimensions were also crucial in shaping the making of artefacts. They possessed a real efficacy on both persons and things, thus being part of the technological device. Indeed sociality, speeches or cosmological beings interacted in the production processes of houses and food without being linked directly to actions made on the physical materials constituting these artefacts. Consequently, the following accounts of making processes will include these aspects as well as the description of actions, objects, energy, matters and knowledge that Lemonnier defined as the five fundamental categories of elements in studies of technical systems (1992: 5-6).⁸⁴

⁸⁴ For an accurate review of those categories, see Coupaye 2004: 138ff.

Chapter 5: Building the kitchen house

The following survey of the technical processes involved in the building of houses on Mere Lava draws upon the various ways I gathered information and data on the topic. I first discussed this issue while in Palon area in Espiritu Santo, with Adam Valuwa (head of matriline and one of my adoptive fathers), Leo Swithun (his brother in law and one of my adoptive uncles) and Clementine Mat (Leo's wife and one of my adoptive mothers). They described the complete process of building a house and listed the names of the various architectural components. Then from April to August 2011, on Mere Lava, I documented the technical sequences of house-building, observing and taking part in various houses' building processes. Indeed, at that time, a major part of the weekly work was dedicated to architectural projects around the island. In May 2011, Tasmat village alone counted twelve house-building sites, only some of which were finished when I flew back from the island in early August 2011. Although various kinds of houses were built, the *n-eañ kuk* buildings were given special attention, attracting more comments and more people to contribute to the work. Given the scope of the various working phases, extended over one to three months, and limited by various factors such as the date of my return flight and personal day-to-day obligations with my host, I could not take part in all phases of one specific, complete, building process. The technical processes were nevertheless described to me as being much the same for all kinds of houses, as were the durations of the building manufacture sequences. I consequently relied here upon observation and participation to the building of several constructions, which were at different stages of completion.

5.1 Building house on Mere Lava: the technical sequence

On Mere Lava, people included the building of houses in a general, integrated time-frame and connected it to other tasks undertaken throughout the year, notably those associated with the growing and harvesting of crops in the gardens.⁸⁵ Consequently, houses were built from April to July, because at that time the new yams were ready and allowed the

⁸⁵ See Chapter 2.

commissioner of the building to feed all the people taking part in the construction. Far from being accurate only for the building of *n-eañ kuk*, this general calendar was applied to all architectural work. *N-eañ bë moëtur*, 'house to sleep', *n-eañ lenledu*, 'storage house for yams' or any kind of semi-permanent shelters, were generally manufactured at that time as well.

The decision to build a new house was usually taken well in advance. It could be informed by a great variety of social situations. Generally, the project had to be validated by the head of the household. Whether intended to host youths old enough to sleep in their own small house, a newlywed couple, to replace a half-decayed structure, or to provide a resting place for expected visitors, the new building was the result of a communal consultation, in which all the co-residents of the commissioner's hamlet were involved, as well as several other kinsmen residing at other places (B, Z, F, and MB). Women were important characters from this early stage. They were usually consulted, especially about questions related to food preparation and garden supplies necessary to support workers. Although in smaller number than the men, they were included in the working teams and, beyond food preparation, they were also in charge of certain specific tasks which will be described below.

5.1.1 The first kastom, *ne-wismat moëtup verē*

When describing the proper process of building a house, people insisted that first the commissioner was required to "make a small *kastom*" to the man he had chosen as a foreman, *no-ñwo tadun*, to lead the construction. This kind of *moëtup verē* was called *ne-wismat*, a term generally referring to offers of money in order to request someone to do work. Unsurprisingly, the term drew upon vegetal imagery, often used to express social bonds or abstract concepts in Melanesia. *Wis* designated the new, green leaf growing at the end of breadfruit tree branches, bearing in itself the promises of a wealthy, continuously growing tree, while *mat*, used as a suffix, referred generally to raw, green or uncooked elements (William Sal, Leqel village, 03/01/2011). Both terms reflected the expectation expressed through the *ne-wismat* prestation. Ideally, this *moëtup verē* had to be made to the matriline of the commissioner's father. Thus beyond the completion of an expected work, what was at stake here was the strengthening of relational bonds between the two

sides of the extended family group. This was further explained by one interlocutor as follows:

"This *ne-wismat* is giving a little bit of money to the man who will make the house. You must give this *ne-wismat* to the other side, to your wife's matriline. Because you cannot spoil your father's matriline. You can joke with another *nakamat* [another matriline's men's house], but *ne-wismat* goes to this matriline because it is hard". (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 03/01/2011).

In the past, the proper item for *ne-wismat* would have been shell-money, *no-som*. During fieldwork, however, only a few people could afford *no-som* and cash was usually the offered valuable.⁸⁶ This *moëtup verē* was performed rather informally, which made it difficult for the researcher to follow its operational sequence properly. Consequently, I have to rely upon the two descriptions given by knowledgeable interlocutors: the commissioner either sent a message to the man he had already chosen, in order to enquire if he would agree to lead the building process, or otherwise went himself with the small amount of money he intended to give to his foreman to be. The prestation occurred unofficially, money just being handed over from the commissioner to the foreman if he accepted to take on this position. The latter would then gather a team of regular helpers, men and women who will be the major agents to take part in the building process (William Sal, Leqel village, 03/01/2011, Matias Rañ Tasmat village, 02/06/2011). In addition to this small group of workers, other relatives would join to help during certain crucial stages of the building. Sometimes the whole 'family' or even the all village community was mobilised, as the following construction step, the making of the terrace, exemplifies.

5.1.2 Making the terrace, *gēl ni-gēteanī* (Fig.5.01 and 5.02)

This stage was performed only when it was judged necessary to enlarge an existing terrace or to create a new flat space out of the volcano slopes. Given the huge amount of work to be done, the entire village community was usually asked to contribute. The *nasara jif* usually announced that a work requiring help from the whole community was coming up, after the Anglican Church service on Sundays. While people were not explicitly compelled to take part in what is called *nu-sul* or *komuniti wok* (B), each household

⁸⁶The amount that is given varies between 500VT and 1000VT (about 3.5 to 7 pounds), which corresponds to lengths of shell-money varying from one extended arm, reaching the chest, to two extended arms.

usually sent at least one of its members on the designated day. Participation or absence was indeed a major topic of comments and gossips, speculating about the diverse other activities which could have kept people at home or elsewhere, while they were expected to come and help. On the steep slopes characterising Mere Lava landscape, making flat areas to build the social spaces where human beings would be able to live and build their houses, *ne-verē*, was not an easy task, and it was considered of foremost importance. The skills associated with terrace making were described to me as being among the basic masculine skills. However, men and women participated to the work, even if certain tasks appeared to be more gender specific. The following account is drawn upon the fieldnotes taken during five non-consecutive days that were necessary to make a terrace in order to extend one of the hamlets of Tasmat village, in May 2011. Between twenty-six and thirty-two people came to this *nu-sul*, of which there were always almost as many women as men.

Once the area to be flattened had been identified, and its boundaries designated by the leader of the work, men and women cut the trees and vegetation covering it with machetes, *ne-gisel lap*, and axes, *ne-tēlē* (only men used the axes). Trunks and branches were discarded in the nearest creek. Then, young men started breaking the ground with pointed wood or iron sticks, throwing downward earth and stones of various sizes. They progressed upward, gradually creating the flat area. Women generally worked down the slope, together with the men who were not breaking the ground upward. They removed earth and smaller stones and discarded these materials into the creek below. Some of the harder stones were nevertheless kept aside in order to build the supporting stone wall that would constitute the terrace's edge and maintain it. As the work progressed, bigger stones appeared in the thickening layers of ground to be removed from the slope. The biggest stones needed the whole working party to gather to get them into the creek. Ropes were tied to it, and with the help of a few tree-trunks placed underneath, men and women pulled the stone to the edge of the terrace, from where it could eventually be dropped into the creek. The ambiance was usually cheerful and joyful with continuous joking and laughing amongst other comments about village life. When enough stones had been put aside, some men started to build the stone wall to bound and maintain the terrace (Fig. 5.03). They first dug a shallow trench down the slope and carefully arranged bigger rocks, *ne-keregēar*, inside it as a base. Then smaller stones, *nu-winē*, were chosen and placed individually so that the entire structure stayed stable, straight and strong, *nu-ttareas*. A few younger men

(18 to 20 years old) were helping older ones to build this wall, thus improving their abilities through apprenticeship.

The skills associated with the building of these stone walls were indeed highly valued on Mere Lava and, embedded in the context of terrace making, they specifically characterised masculinity. Indeed, stone wall building was the first thing I was told a young man should know before being able to marry (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/02/2011). Thus, through this technical action, these young men were consciously making statements about their gender identity, actually performing it publicly. At the same time, they also contributed to the strengthening of the general conception about stone wall-building being a specifically male task.⁸⁷

5.1.3 Planning the work, *nu-domdom te bë n-eanī*

Once a flat terrace or space had been made available, the building process itself could start. The foreman was now expected to carefully plan the working schedule, to be efficient without exhausting workers, with thorough consideration for individual contingencies linked to garden work, childcare or other social obligations. His capacity to anticipate the amount of work as well as materials needed was what Adam Valuwa, Leo Swithun and Clementine Mat described to me as the second stage of the building technical process.

On Mere Lava, people's ability to plan, anticipate and organise was indeed much valued. It was specifically associated with one form of knowledge, *lolmeren*, which also found a main visual expression through the organisation of the various events characterising social life.⁸⁸ This knowledge was generally spoken of in terms of daylight, *ne-meren*, as opposed to darkness, *no-qoñ*. Whereas the verb *nu-domdom* was used to express the actual process of thinking and planning, one would rather find the adjective *lolmeren* (from *lol* meaning 'inside' or also 'mind' and *meren* meaning 'daylight') to qualify such persons who possessed these organisational skills. The foreman would thus be called *qet lolmeren*, literally 'wise head', in much the same way as would be used in English to speak about a lucid or enlightened mind (see also François 2013). This form of knowledge was tightly linked to temporal management and concerns. The ability to properly plan and

⁸⁷ Compare the relationship between socio-spatial reproduction and piling in the Torres Islands described in Mondragón (2003: 177-178).

⁸⁸ See also Chapter 3.

anticipate work thus necessitated the mobilisation of a high level of memory in order to take into account forthcoming events or other tasks that could prevent one or the other member of the working team to be able to attend a construction session. In addition, the term *lolmeren* was also associated with the mastering of a deep understanding of the cultural meaning of things. Through this qualification, the foreman was included in a set of characters comprising the heads of the *tēgētēgē* as well as the Banks Islands' mythical hero Qet, all said to possess this same enlightened wisdom that was expressed through the term *qet lolmeren*.⁸⁹

Furthermore, the foreman was also expected to possess another form of knowledge, *n-ereris* (also *no-ñwog* in the old language), which corresponded to his ability to assess the appropriate measurements for the house as well as the amount of materials needed. People explained this technical knowledge and sense of the right proportions as being a fundamental characteristic of very skilfully crafted things. This relates to what Gell described as the "enchantment of technology" (Gell 1992), this knowledge appeared fundamentally located in the response of viewers:

"It means that if they do something with this knowledge, another man would come, look at this crafted thing and like it. I would be really surprised if the thing looks that good. This is like when you are building a house. You cut a wood trunk, which is very curved, but you straighten it skilfully (*leqquer*) so that it looks well. The other men would come and they would not be able to tell how you achieved this good and straight wood. This is *no-ñwog*" (Jif John Norman Turris, Tasmat village, 11/05/2011).

Implicitly, the presence of this form of knowledge, affecting the viewers of the crafted object, also entailed a desire to possess or obtain it, as the term *n-ereris* itself reflected. *Er* was described as the action of breaking words to make them bigger, "you see that there is something small but you break it, you make it appear bigger" (*Ibid.*), and is probably used here to create a substantive by reduplication (François, personal communication) while *nu-eris* was related to the verb *nu-moërus* generally translated in English as conveying the idea of a desire to obtain material things or as the English verb 'to want'.

From the very beginning of the construction process, houses were thus intertwined with social and temporal conceptions of the world. As material artefacts, they were intended, right from these early steps, to elicit reactions from people and to have an

⁸⁹ Generally speaking, memory appeared as a crucial element of Vanuatu conceptions of knowledge (see Lindstrom 1990, Mondragón 2007). The relationships between houses, social organisation and memory will be looked at more precisely in Part III of this thesis.

effect on places. However the modalities of these interactions between people and their environment varied regarding to the different tasks to be performed.

5.1.4 Cutting the tree-fern trunks to make posts, *tar qoér*, and the wooden tree logs for the beams, *tar tenkē* (Fig. 5.04)

Directed by the foreman, the building team gathered for several non-consecutive days, in order to cut the posts' tree-fern trunks and the beams' high tree trunks. The workers went together to the creeks situated on the upper slopes of the volcano. The choice of the exact source places for materials depended on the land rights owned by the house commissioner as well as on his knowledge of the proper maturation of the trees. On Mere Lava, creek areas, intentionally left uncultivated, were subject to the general pattern of land and trees ownership underlying the distribution of the entire island ground. According to this, the foreman should also possess rights over the creek where the materials would be cut, deriving from his social status as a member of the commissioner's father's *tēgētēgē*. The house was consequently connected to the social landscape, through its structural materials itself. Cutting posts and beams for a house at a specific place was thus not a meaningless action, but intrinsically bore a re-iterated claim on land that actualised and legitimised rights over it.

As for other tasks related to the building, obtaining the main wooden elements of the houses had an important gendered aspect. While men were supposed to go to the creeks, women were responsible for feeding the working team. However, as anthropologists often point out, everyday practices rarely respected what was nevertheless understood as acknowledged convention. The description below, based on two days of work in May 2011, stands as an example of such adaptations to different social and material contingencies.

The first working session I will consider was one dedicated to cutting the tree-fern trunks, *qoér*, intended as posts for a new house in Qorqas hamlet, Tasmat village. The place chosen to cut these trunks was situated about 30 minutes' walk upward from the hamlet and corresponded to a piece of land on which the commissioner of the house owned the rights. The whole hamlet, formed of the two households of the same extended family, was committed to the making of the new house. The chosen foreman, Matias Rañ, was also the commissioner's son. He deliberately did not ask relatives from other hamlets for help as he wanted the posts to be cut quickly and told me he could not afford to wait for other men to be available as well. Consequently, the cutting team was restricted to the hamlet's inhabitants and included the foreman's older and younger sisters, both unmarried women still living in Qorqas with their father, as well as his wife and me. The food, in the

form of two small *no-lok*, had been cooked over night and it was left to the foreman's oldest daughter, a 13-year-old girl, to uncover and cut it ready for the return of the working team.

Departing early in the morning, we reached the appropriate creek around 8 am and, after a brief pause to rest from the steep walk upwards, both the foreman and the commissioner examined and decided which tree-fern trunks would correspond to their needs. They then cleared the surroundings of the two first trunks with machetes and started to cut them down with their axes. Once down on the ground, each trunk was then pushed and pulled down the slope by the foreman's sisters until seven logs were gathered together at the same place, slightly below the cutting area. When all the trunks were cut and gathered, the men pierced a hole in the upper end of each of them. Through these holes, ropes were tied to facilitate the pushing and pulling of the trunks to the main path down, *ne-metsal lap*. These holes would also help builders to manipulate the posts and they would ultimately allow binding the posts to the roof structure. Both holes and binding were glossed as *ne-wēs*, literally the binding, which was also the word employed to describe the very action of attaching roof beams to tree-fern posts. Once the trunks were on the main path, it became possible for the foreman and the commissioner to carry them on their shoulders to Qorqas hamlet. While the foreman's sisters had helped to move the trunks down the slopes and through the thick vegetation of the creeks, men exclusively carried them to Qorqas, going back and forth from the path to the hamlet. Around 2 pm, the seven posts were all piled up next to the site where the house would be constructed a few days later, and everybody headed inside the main *n-eañ kuk* to share a meal of *no-lok* and canned fish purchased for the occasion. The working day was thus concluded with gentle chat about village life and the foreman informally announcing the provisional timetable he planned to set up for the completion of the house. Far from being immediately accepted, members of the hamlet households discussed it at length, the women also giving their point of view regarding food provisions and garden work. They were listened to and their opinion was taken into account even though they gave their views in a more sheepish way, after the men already discussed the topic.

The following working sessions usually consisted of cutting of long tree trunks meant to form the roof truss main elements. Sometimes about ten to twelve meters long, these logs required the presence of more workers to carry them back to the building sites and several days of work were often dedicated to this task. The straightness and diameter of *no-tor* and *ne-vilvēal* trees meant they were considered the most suitable for these

beams. Cutting and transporting of these 'woods', *ne-tenkē*, was achieved by means of very similar techniques to those used with the tree-fern trunks. As I accompanied such a working party to cut a ridgepole *ne-qet-eañ*, I noted again the high level of contextual adjustments with respect to gender-differentiated tasks. As other men were not available because so many houses were being built at the same moment, the foreman was in this case accompanied by his two oldest sons, one of his brothers as well as by his wife and his sister. The men cleared the place beforehand and cut down the tree, but both men and women together pulled and pushed the log through the creek slopes to the main path. During this, some other women relatives (the foreman WM and his MBW) directed the preparation of a *no-löt* from manioc, to feed the working party when they came back.

Unlike Roxana Waterson's observation for certain south-east Asian groups, cutting tree-fern trunks or trees was not associated with any magical practices on Mere Lava, and was not said to have been linked to such practices in the past (Waterson 1990: 118). Although they were preferential places for *temet* spirits and seen as potentially dangerous, men as well as women went to creek areas on a frequent basis. Only places of previous *salagor* or past powerful house sites had to be approached with specific care. They were generally avoided when searching for materials to build houses, for fear that one member of the team would behave improperly and badly influence the building process prevented people from going there. In addition, a certain number of restrictions were associated with the cutting of posts and beams. While they were usually no longer respected at the time of fieldwork, these restrictions were still well-known and readily explained to me when I asked about house-building processes:

"The proper time to plant the gardens is the crescent moon. When it is the full moon, it is not good to plant anything. You can only plant bananas. Then, after the full moon, you can only weed and clean your garden as well as making houses. If you plant garden at that time, the crops would not grow properly. But when the moon is in its last quarter, it is the proper time to cut the woods to make houses. If you cut the woods when the moon is crescent, the insects will eat the inside of it, because there is a lot of sap inside. After the full moon, the wood is dried so the insects would not eat the inside. (...). After the full moon, the sea gets warmer, you can go fishing, you will hook a lot of fish. Before the full moon, the sea is cold, you will not be able to catch any fish if you go fishing" (Philip Gen, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 06/12/2010).

Hence, beyond the obvious temporality informing the succession of technical stages, houses were also tightly enmeshed in other "spheres of temporal experience" on

Mere Lava (Mondragón 2006: 2). While the question of temporality will be looked at more thoroughly in the last part of this thesis, it seems nevertheless important to note here the accuracy of Mondragón's approach about temporality in the Torres Islands. Following Fred Damon's statement (1990: 21, quoted in Mondragón 2006: 2) that "temporality ties into cultural values mainly through the mediation of ecological knowledge and praxis", he showed, in a way that is also powerfully expressed in Philip Gen's explanation, that the conception of time in Vanuatu would be better understood as generally overlapping social and ecological temporalities. Therefore, this also gives a glimpse of the ways in which houses articulated social, spatial and temporal configurations. To formulate it in Damon's terms, houses actually tied into cultural values through the mediation of technical knowledge and praxis (Damon 1990: 21).

5.1.5 *Tow n-eañ*, measuring and marking out the house (Fig. 5.05)

Once the posts and beams had been collected, work started on the actual site of the house. Firstly, the foreman carefully measured and marked on the ground the dimensions of the building. That was described as a stage of crucial importance, for it would then constitute the base that would make the house straight and level. Usual house measurements on Mere Lava, following Melanesian common practices, consisted of taking one's body as a unit. Similar to shell-money, houses were thus measured on the basis of the two extended arms of the foreman, in a way that also recalled the English fathom. One such unit was called *ropva*, both for shell-money and houses. The latter usually ranged in length from *ropva i vet* (four *ropva*) to *ropva livēarow* (seven *ropva*), measurements which were described to me as the equivalent of eight to fourteen metres long.⁹⁰ Although the commissioner was the one who decided the length he wanted for his house, the measurements themselves took the extended arms of the foreman as a reference, on which bamboo lengths could be cut to serve as further benchmarks (John Norman Turris, Tasmat village, 30/06/2011). Imported fishing lines were also used as control and reference devices for the marking of the different parts of the building. In June 2011, I followed the measurement and marking of one large *n-eañ kuk* to be built in the hamlet of Lañramo in Tasmat village. The following description of the operational sequence of this stage of construction comes from

⁹⁰ Shell-money lengths are generally calculated with smaller units, all divisions of the extended arms: thumb, wrist, elbow, shoulder and chest.

the fieldnotes I took at that time. They especially highlight the enormous importance of the foreman's sense of balance and visual accuracy. These qualities were tightly related in people's conceptions to the abilities to plan and organise things. Indeed they were an essential part of the skills the foreman was expected to demonstrate mastery of.

The foreman, John Norman Turris, helped by his brother, first planted a wooden stick, made of a tree branch, at a spot intended to be one corner of the house. Having measured the appropriate length with the bamboo stick, he then planted a second wooden stick at the opposite corner lengthwise and tightened a string between the two. Another line was tightened to draw the diagonal of the emerging rectangular space and, as it intersected with the reference bamboo stick laid down to measure the width of the house, the third corner marker was put. Finally, the fourth corner was similarly set to close the basic marking frame of the building, which was materialised clearly with lengths of fishing-lines. While this first marking took about an hour to complete, the next hour was dedicated to the checking of its accuracy. Each at its turn, the four corner sticks were adjusted, and all measurements checked with the bamboo lengths and fishing-lines. When the foreman decided that the dimensions and marking were correct, he went on with the marking of the front space that would be sheltered by the protruding roof. In this aim he extended his arms on the ground and marked with his thumb a width of one *ropva* (*ropva i tuwel*) on both sides of the house. Again, wooden sticks were planted to mark it, and lines tied to it. Then the side lengths were divided in two by folding the corresponding lengths of string in two. The middle of the sides were thus marked, as reference measurements to put the inner *ne-bēr* posts that would support the transversal beams. The whole frame was finally checked one last time before we were all served a meal of boiled yams and fish that had been caught by the foreman's sons.

Through this process of measurement and marking, the foreman expressed precisely the sense of balance that he was expected to show and he legitimised his position at the same time. The marking stage was thus often surrounded by many comments about the abilities of the foreman and his team, as I discovered when returning from the Lañramo working-session to the hamlet where I was residing at that time. I was asked for details of the rapidity of the work and whether or not the foreman seemed to possess the visual accuracy that led to build balanced houses. Checking the place of the sticks for too long was generally criticised. Indeed, the foreman himself had shown a great deal of pride when he had been able to complete the house frame properly. The fact that the idea of balance achieved through visual accuracy was related to organisational skills, achieved

through an accuracy and clarity of mind, referred to the centrality of the body as a mediating agent between the house and sociality in general. This appeared very clearly through the use of the foreman's own body to measure the house of one member of his *tavalsal tēgētēgē*. Thus, on Mere Lava, despite the inaccuracy of considering houses and human bodies as analogues, houses seemed nevertheless to be 'embodied' in a more subtle way (Waterson 1990: 121).

5.1.6 *Tur n-eañ*, erecting the house's structural frame (Fig. 5.06 to 5.09)

Posts and beams being cut and the house marked on the ground, another working session was organised to erect the structure of the building. This should be completed (and usually was) in one day. Once again, the foreman's sense of balance and rightness was important to successfully complete that stage. The working team gathered early morning and either started with the preparation of posts and beams or the digging of the post holes, *no-wo*. In the following account, the nine men working chose to work in two groups, one preparing the posts and beams while the other was digging the holes. The foreman, Matias Rañ, in this case, was the commissioner's DDH. He had been chosen for his speed of work and general skills rather than his matching with the usual intermatrilines relationships.

The holes were made with wooden sticks *ne-vetgēl*, the same as those used to plant or dig crops in the gardens. Shovels were also used when the holes got deeper as well as hands to remove the ground. The ground was discarded down the stone terrace, into the space designated as *lanñ-viar*, using a wheelbarrow. Simultaneously, other men removed the bark and knots of the beams, situated next to the house-building site. The tool used for that part of the work was an adze, with several men generally taking turns handling it while one or two others kept the log still by sitting on it. Posts were also prepared by V-shaping their upper ends with an axe. As soon as one post was properly cut, it was then placed into its hole and temporarily kept in place with stones thrown into the hole. It was explained to me that the two sides of the house had to be worked alternately, starting from the outmost and going toward the central parts. Thus *ne-rēmtiñ* posts had to be raised first, one side after the other. *Ne-selgasēg* beams were placed over the rows of posts as soon as these latter were completed. Similarly, the *ne-bēr* posts were erected and the *ne-sigsig* beams placed over it before the two central *ne-senīep* posts were placed and the *ne-qet-eañ* ridgepole lifted on top of it.

The most important part of the beams preparation was made as the work went on and the beams were placed on their respective rows of posts. It consisted of the straightening of the logs, an action called *nu-legger*. This was achieved by sawing the log at the places where it was slightly curved and hammering thin wooden pieces inside of the cuts. The whole stage of raising the house structure relied once again heavily on the foreman's accuracy of eyes, as he carefully directed the straightening of the logs and the numerous adjustments of the posts' height and verticality. Only when he considered the positions of the various elements to be accurate were the posts' bases definitively buried, *kuteg gor*, and the beams tied to the posts with *na-garias* vines, an action called *nu-wēs*. Finally, the *no-wolwol* transversal beam was settled between the two sides of the house, resting centrally upon the two *ne-sigsig* beams, and some bamboo rafters, *no-woras*, were temporarily tied on the front, middle and back side of the roof truss. As usual, the working day was concluded with the sharing of a yam *no-lok* and canned fish meal, the preparation of which had been directed by the commissioner's wife and her grand-daughter (who was also the foreman's wife).

However, before leaving, I noticed that dried breadfruit leaves had been hung on all the posts and beams of the front and back of the building frame. As a reason, I was told that it was necessary to hang these leaves in order to prevent the *temet* spirits from destroying the balance of the house overnight by moving its structural elements. The breadfruit leaves would appear to the *temet* as men guarding the house and were intended to frighten them. Although, I was not given further explanations when I asked how the breadfruit leaves would appear to the *temet*'s eyes as men, this nevertheless pointed to the balance as being a specific quality achieved by human beings and somewhat threatened by the inhabitants of the supernatural world. It also negatively echoed the intrinsic quality of the spirit world that was described above as being unordered, indefinitely omnipresent and characterised by windy spaces and floating entities.⁹¹

In contrast, the well-ordered organisation of the human world needed to be carefully looked after and constantly rebuilt. *N-eañ kuk* buildings were therefore one means allowing this continuous re-achievement. Although one could understand the alternate raising of the two sides of the house, ultimately joined by the middle transversal beam *no-wolwol*, as a straightforward materialisation of the association of two *tēgētēgē* through marriage, the explanations given by the builders also allowed perception of the

⁹¹ See also Chapter 2.

organisational conceptualisation at a deeper level. When I asked about the reason of the two sides being erected alternately, it was explained that it was so to ensure the proper balance of the house (*da-ttareas*). What the building demonstrated would then be the broad, essential and positively-valued sense of balance characterising the realm of living human beings, a balance which pervaded other events in people's experiences of life on Mere Lava, as has been demonstrated in Part I.

5.1.7 Preparation for the *tuptup*: completion of the house roof

The following stages of the construction process were dedicated to the material preparation of *tuptup*. This step, consisting of the fastening of *natangura* leaf tiles, *ne-vean no mor*, over the two sides of the roof frame, was described as a most crucial step toward the completion of the house. As such, it necessitated the completion of an important amount of preliminary tasks. Despite the clear differentiation between these various technical actions, they were not submitted to any definite order of completion other than people's life contingencies.

5.1.7.1 Set up the rafters, *no-woras*

The first tasks were linked to the tightening of the bamboo rafters to the previously made truss. To this end, an additional day of work was usually organised a few days after the raising of the main posts and beams. Unless the foreman himself had already gathered the needed materials, the day generally started with a trip up the slopes to some creek areas, to cut the necessary bamboo culms, *lēat no-bo*. After arriving at the proper place, and after a brief rest, the foreman and his helpers placed themselves on the slope directly above the clump of bamboos. Bamboo culms were then slashed through with bush-knives, *ne-gisel lap*, the base, *ne-kuteg*, being cut first. Then the tips, *nu-ulsi*, were removed. Once the bamboo culms had been cut, they were gathered into bunches of six to eight culms, tied at both ends with *na-garias* vines pulled out, *rañrañ*, from the neighbouring bush area. Bunches were then lifted up onto one shoulder to be carried back to the building site.

After a small rest, bamboo bunches were untied, and as rafters, *no-woras*, they were set over the roof truss, one after the other and the two sides being worked alternatively. They were first temporarily fastened to the main beams with pandanus

straps, *var no-woras*. During this stage of the work the foreman usually stood on the ground, next to the house structure and actually directed the workers, who stood up on the *ne-selgasēg* beams and placed the rafters. During this step, I was told that the most important skill asked of the foreman was to properly choose the place where the roof tiles would be overlapping each other, *na-masa*. This action was called *tul na-masa* and was physically characterised by reduced intervals between contiguous rafters. Once all the rafters had been placed, the next step was to tie the intermediate beams called *ne-veret rig* and *ne-veret lap*, respectively between the *ne-selgasēg* and the *ne-sigsig* and the *ne-sigsig* and the *ne-qet-eanī*. Their role was defined to me as essentially consolidating the roof truss. They were the last part to be added. After the elements had been temporarily tied together, the foreman checked the general balance and rightness of the house, *nu-goria*. Then, all the parts were tied together, *nu-wēs*, with *na-garias* vines, which had been collected previously.⁹² It was explained that, in the past, the types of binding used to fasten the different elements of the house structure were subject to rights specific to each *tēgētēgē*. These rights would have been a masculine set, inherited through one's mother's brother. Visitors would thus have found themselves surrounded by the expression of the *tēgētēgē* identity of their hosts as soon as they entered the houses.

Numerous tasks to be completed at that stage were also strictly linked to the gathering of a sufficient amount of materials in prevision of *tuptup*. Some of these tasks appeared, at least in the past, heavily associated with gender, as men and women from the working team would gather separately to accomplish them. Men were in charge of the gathering of bamboo culms, *lēat no-bo*, sago palm leaves, *sepsep no-do taqor*, and thorns taken from the inner part of rotten sago spathe, *bēs nu-duw*. Women were associated with the cutting of wild cane, *lēat no-mor* and the gathering of *na-garias* vines, *rañrañ na-garias*. Today, however, as I heard several times, these conventions were loosened and it was not uncommon to see groups of men and women going together to the creek in order to collect the materials needed.

⁹² During the house-building season, every household generally had small lengths of *na-garias* vine available at home. They were usually collected informally while going to the garden or going to the creek for other purposes than house building. The vines used to tie the house can also be collected specifically at the same time as the bamboo culms.

5.1.7.2 *Sepsep no-do taqor* and *bēs nu-duw*

People from the working team usually conduct these tasks together in one or two days, depending on the amount of materials to be collected. The following account is based on an expedition to a creek led by my adoptive father, Philip Gen, to collect sago palm leaves, *sepsep no-do taqor* and sago spathe inner thorns, *bēs nu-duw*, from which he intended to make tiles to repair the roof of his kitchen house. Due to the small amount of materials to be collected, in this case, the working team was reduced to Philip, his younger son Masten and me. After arriving at the creek situated about one hour's walk from the hamlet, both Philip and Masten started to cut down sago palm trees. Three trees were cut with axes handled in the same way as to cut tree-fern or other kinds of trees. The branches presenting long and well-preserved leaves were then slashed with bush-knives and piled on the rocks where we had settled. The leaves were then pulled off by hands, which is normally women's work when working teams are composed of both men and women. Piles of leaves were tied together with vines taken from the neighbouring bush, before being gathered in heavily pressed bunches, tied at both ends with *na-garias* vines and intended to be carried home as backpacks. To this end, straps of bark were tightened to the vine ties to form handles.

After the leaf bunches had been made, thorns, *nu-duw*, were collected from the rotten spathes of the fallen sago palm trees. They were obtained by tearing off the outer bark of the spathes in order to carefully remove the inner, strong thorns one after the other. They were then gathered together in small bunches of 80 centimetres to 1.10 metre long and tied with bark straps to be carried home along with the leaves backpacks. This concluded the work in the creek and after a brief rest we headed back to Tasmat village. Once back in the hamlet, while sago palm leaves were stored in the shadow of the *n-eañ kuk*, the thorns, coming from rotten parts of the trees, were let to dry in the sun to strengthen them.

5.1.7.3 *Lēat no-mor* and *rañrañ na-garias*

In contrast to bamboo, sago palms leaves and thorns, the wild cane collecting, *lēat no-mor* was described to me as a task specifically reserved for women. The foreman organised the work in consultation with the female team members. On the planned day, the working party left the hamlet for the creek where they planned to gather the cane in the early

morning, carrying bush-knives, *ne-gisel lap*. Once at the proper place, and after a brief rest, each worker stood above a clump of wild cane and started slashing the base of the canes, two or three at the time. The canes that were considered too dry or too green to be suitable for house-work were discarded in the neighbouring bush. Canes were carefully counted as the work went on, to fit a quantity calculated by the foreman on the basis of the dimensions of the house-to-be. This calculation was based on the intended number of *na-masa* and it was closely related to the technique used to manufacture the roof tiles. Indeed one unit, *no-mor i tuwel* (literally 'one wild cane'), was conventionally composed of two cane culms, corresponding to the basic frame onto which the sago palm leaves would be folded to make the roof tiles.

After the cane has been cut at its base, the tip was similarly removed by slashing it with a bush-knife and the culms were cleaned, *nu-sirsir*, from the remaining leaves, which were discarded into the adjacent bush. Finally, the canes were gathered together into bunches of one hundred units and about two metres long, tied together at both ends with *na-garias* vines taken from the surroundings, and carried back home on the shoulders. Similarly to the *nu-duw*, the cane bunches were left to dry in the sun for several days before being judged suitable for use.

As we saw above, use of *na-garias* vines was ever-present in Mere Lava life, as a main tying medium. The vine was usually given a particular emphasis in people's explanations about *moëtup verē* ways and techniques, highlighting their strength and durability, especially when used to build houses. Found in uncultivated areas, *no-won*, the *na-garias* vines formed thick bushes strongly intertwined into the surrounding vegetation. As far as house construction was concerned, the huge quantities of vines needed to fasten together the different elements of the structure and the thatched roof, were gathered by the women of the working team during a specific day of work organised in anticipation of the *tuptup* stage. Women went to the appropriate creek to make bundles of vines that they carried back to the hamlet. Pulling it from the ground with hands, they dug up the vine roots before using the same technique to detach the vine tip from the bush. Each length of vine was finally folded over itself and piled with others to form the bundles. Back at the house-building site, the bundles were generally stored at the forefront of the kitchen house or in another sheltered space, so that they do not dry too much before *tuptup*.

5.1.7.4 *Sinsina* or the manufacturing of the roof sago palm leaves tiles (Fig. 5.10 and 5.11)

Commonly called *sinsina*, from the name of one of the technical actions performed, this phase gathered the extended family of the commissioner to manufacture the roof tiles so that they would be ready to be used on the *tuptup* appointed day. These family gatherings were of the *biriñbiriñ* kind. In house-construction contexts, *biriñbiriñ* could bring together a significant number of people, depending on the amount of work to be done, but also on the abilities of the commissioner and his foreman to attract or call upon their kin relatives. The attendance, or absence, of people was then often commented on at length, and the reasons for the absences thoroughly discussed. Thus the house-building event appeared as strongly anchored in a series of past *biriñbiriñ*, experiences of food sharing and mutual assistance that formed a fundamental frame for the shaping and transformation of social relationships. These individual stories ultimately drew a broader picture of the *tēgētēgē* sides mutually providing assistance to one another through time. In a *sinsina* working session, organised in July 2011 to prepare the sago palm roof tiles for the largest *n-eañ kuk* that was to be constructed in Tasmat village at that time, no less than fifty-six people were working together at midday. The work was determined by gender roles. Women were in charge of removing the strong part of the central stems of the sago palm leaves. They handled each leaf vertically and broke the stem at about two thirds of its length by folding the tip back and forth. Then the stem was gently pulled on with the right hand while the left hand held the leaf core until the base was torn out. This task, called *sinsina*, softened the leaves and enabled them to be folded over wild cane stalks in order to manufacture the tiles. Stems were piled separately from the prepared leaves, as they would be kept and later gathered in bundles to make brooms. Manufacturing the tiles, *nu-veanvean*, was considered a man's task on Mere Lava. To that purpose, two wild cane culms were joined together and formed the base of the tile. Then one after the other, sago palm leaves were folded around the wild cane, with half of the added leaf overlapping the previous one. *Nu-duw* thorns were used to pin them together as the work went on. One tile contained approximately forty leaves and it was called *ne-vean no-mor i tuwel*.

During this time, three or four women, including the commissioner's wife and her mother as well as the commissioner's sister were preparing a *no-löt* to feed all the workers. They cooked inside an old and decayed sleeping house, converted into a temporary kitchen until the new *n-eañ kuk* was completed. This was nevertheless inconvenient I was told, because there was no stone oven inside this improper kitchen and they were

consequently not able to bake *no-lok* for family meetings or ceremonial occasions. This was the reason why they decided to build a new kitchen on the site of an old, abandoned and rotten one belonging to the commissioner's WF.⁹³

As usual, the spatial organisation of the workers reflected the gender-differentiated tasks. Women were settled next to the temporary kitchen house while men sat at the opposite end of the hamlet terrace, next to the house-building site itself. However, the boundaries were not strictly delineated and towards the middle of the hamlet, some men found themselves sitting next to women. Once people had settled in a place, they tended not to move afterwards. The different materials were brought back and forth to the persons who needed it by children aged from five to ten. Older children were working with the adults, according to their gender, but were allowed more freedom of movement. The general ambiance was joyful; jokes were exchanged between members of the opposite sex who pertained to different side's *tēgētēgē*. It corresponded to the common conventions of respect, *no-domdomwēn/* joke, *no-borbor*, here privileged arena for the manipulation of the two sides' interrelationships. Indeed, as Rupert Stasch also showed for the Korowai of West Papua, joking and avoidance appeared to be "a playful and complexly reflexive engagement with the idea of a bond between two people and with the idea of signifying such a bond" (Stasch 2009: 83, see also Chapter 2). Thus, embedded in the socio-temporal cycle marking the lives of individuals, the *sinsina* stage of house-building powerfully reflected and actualised social orders in much the same way as life-course rituals did.

Once the tiles were finished, they were all piled next to the building site and would stay there untouched until *tuptup*.

5.1.8 *Tuptup*, fastening the leaf tiles onto the roof truss (Fig. 5.12 to 5.14)

This stage was similarly associated with a *biriñbiriñ* and usually gathered relatives coming from other villages around the island as well as from the commissioner's village.⁹⁴ The

⁹³ This case perfectly illustrated a contextual adaptation to the Mere Lava convention of patrivilocality, which was very commonly found (see Chapter 2). Here, the commissioner's wife was the only sibling still staying in the island because other siblings had emigrated to Port Vila or Espiritu Santo to work. Thus, although she was a woman, she had the obligation to look after the place of her father and, therefore, both her and her husband came to live at this place.

⁹⁴ *Tuptup* sometimes mobilised huge numbers of persons. Such a working day, at which I took part in June 2011 in Leqel village, gathered for instance sixty-eight adults from around the island (thirty-seven women and thirty-one men). I was unfortunately not able to count the children.

work started in the early morning, and followed strong gender differentiations by task, which was echoed by a relative spatial separation between men and women along the terrace. In addition to cooking, women were expected to prepare the *na-garias* vines to be used by men to fasten the tiles to the roof truss. Bundles of vines were thus untied and each vine length was cleared out from its base, *ne-kutegi*, its tips, *ne-ulsi*, and its diverging shoots, *qoron*, with a *ne-gisel lap* or *ne-gisel wirig*. This operation called *nu-teptep garias*, literally 'cut the *na-garias*' was followed by another one, *nu-evev garias*, during which the length of the vine was gradually moved between the thumb, index and middle fingers in order to soften. The lengths of vine obtained, measuring from two to four or five metres, were placed together nearby until one of the children, usually in charge of bringing the vines to the male workers, collected them. Men tied the leaf tiles to the roof frame. They organised themselves in two rows, corresponding to the two sides of the roof. Each row was composed of one or two men giving the tiles to the others standing up on a wooden scaffold set lengthwise at the middle of the house. Each man, working from the inner part of the house faced one or two rafters and was in charge of tying the tiles one over the other and fastening it to the rafters. The work progressed upward until the roof was entirely covered by tiles. The two rows of workers were described to me as being in a sort of race where the winner was the first team reaching the *ne-qet-eañ*, and thus completing one side, *sigit tavalon vita*. Similar to the *sinsina* stage, *tuptup* was shaped by, and conveyed local ideas about social order. The two rows of workers were thus organised according to *tavalsal* matrilines. One would share one's row with real or classificatory brothers, *tetei* /*tuwei*, mother's brothers, *murui*, sister's sons, *vonañi*, mother's mother's brothers, *tumbui* or sister's daughter's sons, also *tumbui*, while the other row would be composed of the real or classificatory fathers and father's brothers, *temei*, father's fathers, or son's sons, *tumbui*, and brother-in-law, *welei*.

Ideally, after the two sides of the roof had been completed, the back side, *no-vonogum*, and the final cover of the central ridgepole, *ne-qet sagear*, should also be manufactured during the same *tuptup* working session. The technical procedure employed to make the *nu-vonogum* was the same as the one employed to tie the leaf tiles onto the *no-woras* frame although people taking part in that stage of the work were generally less in number. The organisation in two different sides according to *tēgētēgē* affiliations was then usually loosened and people tended to mix easily on one side or another of the working site. In certain kitchen houses, this part could be the object of considerable

attention, bamboo rafters being arranged in specific patterns evocative of the supernatural world and *temet* spirits.

Similarly, men from the two sides worked together to set the ridge sheathing, which was the last task to be completed on that working day. An additional, thinner beam, *ne-bem töwur* was lifted and put on top of the upper crossing of bamboo rafters. It was then covered with coconut leaf mats, *na-bagēar*, which were eventually fixed with pointed wooden sticks stuck transversally through it, *ne-si bagēar*.

The day was concluded with the distribution of food. As it was explained to me, a special *no-lok*, called *no-lok wirwir*, should be served at that occasion. It was made of layers of yam pudding and cabbage leaves, wrapped in leaves, baked into the stone oven and finally sprinkled with coconut milk. I was not able to find out why this specific dish should be served at *tuptup*. People were generally puzzled at my question and answered that it allowed feeding a large number of people and was thus a convenient dish to be served at that time. So far as the meaning of the name given to this dish is concerned, it seems to be connected to ideas about reproduction, as *wirwir* was translated as the old version of one the terms employed to talk about sexual intercourse, *worwor*, that was mostly used to convey a sense of expected future outcomes and generative powers.

Depending on how close it was to nightfall when the food was distributed, people either ate on the building site or took the food away to their own houses if they came from far away.

5.1.9 *Ne-met-n-eañ*, the front side

The front side of the house was generally the last part to be completed, during the days that separated *tuptup* from the *moëtup verē* that would mark the definite completion of the building process. Unlike the previous stages, *ne-met-n-eañ* manufacturing did not involve the gathering of the extended family but only of the usual working team, led by the foreman. Three different techniques could be used to make the walling of this front side, which usually depended on the types of materials available and on the previous choices of the commissioner and foreman for the other wall parts of the house. The use of vertical wooden planks appeared to be the most valued technique. It was understood as being part of Mere Lava *moëtup verē* while other materials like wild cane or split bamboo straps were invariably identified as imported techniques. One would generally find wild cane or

bamboo for the front side walling where wild cane or bamboo has already been used over the *ne-birsīn* to make the wall, and if wooden planks were not available.

The first elements to be set were the two transversal wooden beams marking respectively the doorstep, *ker gēttam*, and the lintel, *qet gēttam*. Always to one side of the central line of the house, the doorway was generally situated on the side facing the downward slopes of the volcano. At the time of fieldwork, it was often counter-balanced by a small square window situated on the other side of the central line.

Although more rarely produced at the time of the fieldwork, wooden planks were obtained from large trees such as breadfruit trees, *no-bōtō*. In the context of house building, the foreman and several helpers went to cut the tree in creek areas, *tar no-bōtō*, with a chainsaw if they had access to such a tool and to fuel. In the past however, I was told people would have used axes, *ne-tēlē*, for cutting large tree trunks in the same ways as smaller ones like *no-tor* trees. Once the tree trunk had been cut down, branches were removed using the chainsaw and planks obtained from its length, *nu-toëson*. Here again the visual accuracy of the foreman was considered of great importance, for it allowed him to obtain more planks from the tree trunk by appropriately adjusting the width and length of each of them. Nevertheless, in the past, planks, at the rate of only two from each trunk, would have been taken from either side of its length with adzes, *ne-teages*. Once the planks were cut, they were brought back to the building site on the worker's shoulders. They were then set vertically beside each other to form the front side of the house, their lower part being inserted in a shallow trench dug in the ground.

The techniques employed to make wild cane or bamboo walling were identical to those used to make the walling of the rest of the house. They were those broadly used in northern Vanuatu at the time of fieldwork. A general frame was first made out of vertical and horizontal doubled lengths of cane culms carefully spaced and fastened with *na-garias* vines. Then other cane culms were added to fill in the empty parts of the frame.

5.1.10 *Gen tēqē-eañ*, feasting for the completion of the house and the *wol-eañ moëtup verē*, 'paying' for the house (Fig. 5.15)

While the raising of the front side marked the end of the material construction of the house, the building process was nevertheless not considered complete without a first meal being shared inside it, *gen tēqē-eañ*, and the builders being compensated for their work.

This was done formally through a *moëtup verē* called *wol-eañ*, literally translatable as 'to pay the house', during which the commissioner remunerated the foreman and the members of his team, men and women, for their efforts during the building process.

Carefully orchestrated by the commissioner of the house, this complex ceremonial event came as the climax of the building process, and crystallised the diverse social and temporal associations of the house. The house appeared thus as one of the possible material forms that gave physical evidence to a complex and overlapping set of conceptual ideas, as we will see now through the account of such a *wol-eañ* day to which I was invited in July 2011. Situated in the village of Leqel, about an hour's walk from Tasmat, the hamlet of the house to be 'paid' was already bustling with activity when we arrived around 7 am. Around ninety-six adults were busy cooking, preparing kava or simply chatting while at least forty children wandered around in between the two stone terraces of the place. Women had started to cook in the middle of the night and dishes of grated crops waited for the *no-lok* to be prepared, wrapped into leaves and baked. The men had gone fishing during the night and they had also killed two pigs, which would feed the attendees. It was explained that a *ne-wismat moëtup verē* had also been completed the previous day for the brothers of the deceased man who had been living in the concerned *n-eañ kuk* at a time when it was not yet rotten. They had been given a small amount of cash money to light the fire for the first time in the new kitchen and to kill the pigs. These fires were lit by these men soon after our arrival, around 8 am, in two stone ovens situated respectively in the new kitchen and under the old shelter that had been used as a temporary kitchen during the construction process. A small 'market' was also organised informally, with people selling sweets, tobacco leaves or pieces of bread from hand to hand when asked for. Around 9.30 am the commissioner's father called our attention and introduced to the audience the purpose of the *wol-eañ moëtup verē*. Then the commissioner's *tavalsal* relatives gathered behind him and his son in the usual *moëtup verē* way. The first *moëtup verē* saw the commissioner and his wife mutually giving to one another a small amount of cash money, in order to respectively recognise themselves as 'the head of the household' and 'the boss of the kitchen' (Jif William Sal, Leqel Village, 27/06/2011). Then, the foreman, in that case one of the commissioner's FMB, was called and came to receive the money given to him. Touching the extended hands of the commissioner and his closest relatives, he expressed his acceptance of the money and publicly demonstrated that the house truly belonged, from that moment onwards, to the commissioner. All the members of his working team were then similarly compensated with smaller amounts of money, as

well as all the women who had helped during the construction process, either by bringing food to feed the workers or bringing raw materials to be used. This type of *moëtup verē* was described to me as a *ne-sermasgēat moëtup verē*, because it compensated a completed work. As such, it was associated with the *ne-wismat moëtup verē* for they were performed at the two ends of the same process. It was understood as an efficacious demonstration of its proper completion according to conventions. At that moment, all those present had stopped their respective activities and had gathered to watch the *moëtup verē*. To my surprise, immediately after the main *wol-eañ* was finished, smaller groups suddenly formed everywhere in the audience to perform other types of *moëtup verē*, called generically *tula*. As I enquired for the reason for this sudden burst of *tula moëtup verē*, I was told that it was a common feature of the *wol-eañ* ceremonial occasions as, being a public event centred around a specific *moëtup verē*, it provided also an ideal space to actually perform other sorts of *moëtup verē*. As a direct strengthening and affirmation of kinship relationships between individuals, *tula kastom* were thus performed at that time to be validated through the public character of the event. On this day, two different *tula* were made. The first, called *nu-tula sus*, was made by the children to their father in order to acknowledge and thank him for his care throughout their lives. The second, called *tultula*, was related to the strengthening of relationships between siblings of the same sex and was usually done through the intermediary of children, who were said to *tula* their mother or father to this latter's brother or sister.

After the *moëtup verē*, people went back to their respective activities, either cooking, chatting or preparing kava, until a second call brought the audience back to the front of the new *n-eañ kuk* to assist the Church blessing of the building. After three gospels, the island priest read a bible extract associated with houses and blessed the building with sanctified water poured on the door with a *no-tor* tree short branch. The same gesture was then performed while circling the house as a small procession led by the priest walked around it, singing gospels. The day was then concluded around 4.30 pm with kava drinking and the distribution of food, which people either ate directly or carried back home. With those *moëtup verē* the *n-eañ kuk* became officially available to be lived in and to welcome visiting relatives.

5.2 Conclusion: Performing the unity, the house as a tied assemblage

As demonstrated in the previous sections, the complex construction procedure of houses revealed that numerous dimensions of Mere Lava social life and conceptual ideas overlapped and were materialised into *n-eañ kuk*. During the building technical process, numerous aspects were demonstrated as being linked. Furthermore, the very values ensuring the solidity of this assemblage were performed and foregrounded during this process as key efficacious elements. The careful examination of the technical procedures indeed unravelled the fundamental unity of social, spatial and temporal dimensions, but also highlighted that this unity was created out of differences.

Building a house appeared to mediate in a crucial way the expression, maintenance, and transformation of social relationships at different levels. Throughout the construction, masculine and feminine categories were displayed and reaffirmed through more or less strictly observed gender divisions regarding the tasks to be completed. There were male tasks and female tasks and these were reflected in the spatial organisation of the work. Most generally, women tended to gather closer to the place where the food was processed while men went to creeks or worked on the building site. Children deserve a specific mention, as they often acted as mediators who simultaneously separated and linked men and women. They brought materials to either one or the other part, or wandered about in the middle of the group. This mediatory role evoked what an old interlocutor who had never had children with his wife told me to explain the reason why they were both still so close while already in their latter years (when old people would generally tend to live more or less separately): "If you have children, those will tell their parents that this is men's work and that women's one [pointing out one side, then the other with his hand]" (John Hubart, Leverē village, 13/05/2011). Children thus strengthened existing gendered categories and performed them as they allowed people to realise themselves as grown up, productive man or woman. At that point, it seemed also important to notice the crucial role of the transmission of a gendered set of technical skills, by which children progressively integrated the conventional values associated with proper masculine and feminine behaviours.

In addition, ideally focused on the creation of a new independent household objectified by the couple figure, the building process permitted seeing the relationships between two intermarrying matrilineages. It performed the division between the two sides of

society but also materialised the interaction and the links of mutual help and support between the two moieties. If that was most strikingly emphasised by the *no-wolwol* transversal beam of the finished house, it was nonetheless repeatedly expressed through the successive stages of the building process. From the *ne-wismat* to the *no-wol-ean̄ moëtup verē*, the association of the foreman to the commissioner demonstrated it clearly.

Finally, at the level of the village, the cohesion of the whole community, strongly associated with the Church, was also performed through participation in the organised days of community work, *nu-sul*. As members of a village community, a person had to fulfill his or her duty regarding the village house building processes when requested, in order to ensure the general well-being of the group.

People's crucial and personal links with landscape were re-affirmed through the use of certain materials originating from specific places, the rights over which depended upon definite rules of transmission. These rights being implicitly demonstrated through the use of places and materials, the technical process of construction appeared as a mean to anchor the legitimacy of land claims by displaying them informally in public.⁹⁵ Conceptual ideas about landscape and the power of supernatural entities were similarly expressed, managed and transmitted to the younger generation through behavioural advice given by the foreman and knowledgeable elders while walking though the creek areas, or through informal explanations of such gestures as hanging on dried breadfruit leaves to the house's truss in order to ensure its stability overnight.

Indeed, the building process showed some of the fundamental conceptions in terms of knowledge and transmission of conventional values. Explanations or transmissions of proper technical gestures, but even more crucially, gossip and comments, implicitly contributed to fix a certain set of positively-valued conceptions about rightness and balanced things, *nu-ttareas*, achieved through proper collaboration of the different parties, as opposed to ideas of disorder and imbalance associated with the supernatural world. Similarly, it expressed and reaffirmed ideas about the nature of knowledge and its appropriate materialisation through artefacts that possessed a specific transformative efficacy. As a notion of primary importance, the idea of collaboration stressed during the different stages of the construction process made clear how the different parts should be tied together through common material contributions and actions, orchestrated through the careful demonstration of knowledge of both the commissioner and the foreman.

⁹⁵ This point, in relations to notions of history and temporality will be further considered in Part III of the thesis.

In addition, the most crucial importance of continuous cooking and sharing of food appeared in negative, pervading all the stages of the process, throughout the technical actions undertaken in building a house. It was eventually highlighted in a significant way through the *gen tēqē-eañ moëtup verē* that came as a socially effective act linking people together and with the building and the place. In the same way as a Mere Lava commissioner of a house would fully recognise the importance of the work of the women by including them amongst the people who would receive a small amount of money at the *wol-eañ*, I consider that people's work in the garden, in order to gather food and the cooking of the different dishes to feed the working team, was an integrative part of the technical process leading to the completion of a house.

Consequently, I will now turn to the description of the technical sequences that resulted in the production of food and to the related elements of material culture used in that context. This will further highlight how, through its very materiality, the *n-eañ kuk* building also related to sociality and people's relationships to place and time at the level of shared substances.

Chapter 6: Cooking and the material culture of food

"When you will go to the island you will eat properly, you will see how good the food is, people there are strong and light, because the place is light, the ground is salty, you will see the crops are good they have salt inside, you will taste the *nangae* nuts, that is our style, from the island, you will eat fresh fish, and crabs and lobsters, you will see, ha ... I would like to go there and eat all those things as well, you are lucky!" (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 10/12/2010).

"You will give the orange to Guillaume, and the seeds are for Riño, there is also a little *makas* of kava for him and one for the old man, don't forget to give them all those things, and you will ask them to send one basket of *nangae* nuts, and you will tell Jack to take one basket of *nangae* for Susie as well." (Clementine Mat, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 12/12/2010).

These kinds of recommendations and requests I was given repeatedly from the very beginning of my fieldwork in Palon, Espiritu Santo, appropriately conveyed a sense of the complex and intimate link between persons, social realms and food production, distribution and consumption in Vanuatu. Migrant people in urban areas made these kinds of comments very commonly, highly valorising the food from the place of origin. They were often accompanied by ambivalent considerations about the weakness felt by eating imported food such as rice, but valuing those as indexes of what was seen as the modern way of life. These remarks about food not only reflected the particular terms in which people expressed feelings of displacement and relationship to places, but also gave the researcher interesting insights about how food was understood as relating to bodies and persons in specific ways.

These comments on the quality of food found on Mere Lava and the desire felt for it, showed how food had to be understood as tightly linked to conceptions of timespace and to the shaping of people's experiences. Similarly to what we have seen through the examination of the technical actions leading to the building of the kitchen house, food dishes will thus be considered as multidimensional assemblages, and their transformative efficacy in conveying and reproducing ideas about sociality, space and time will be exposed as deriving from this multifaceted character.

The nodal points where social and physical actions came together to create food as such an efficacious item, as shown in Part I, will be explored through a focus on food processing in the context of the building of *n-eañ kuk*. Foodstuffs will be analysed in terms of their fashioning as technical artefacts, of which the operational sequence of production has to be included into the larger operational sequence of 'building a house'.⁹⁶ Drawing upon the description, made in Chapter 2, of the general ideas linked to food production and consumption, the first two sections will focus respectively on garden techniques and patterns of gathering, and on the technical processes associated with the cooking of two specific dishes, *no-lok* and *no-löt*. Those dishes, categorised as celebratory dishes, appeared regularly in the meals that punctuated the various stages of the house building. Then, a third section will consider several aspects of wooden artefacts linked to food production, through the lens of the conceptual associations highlighted in the previous sections. Indeed, *no-löt* related carvings distinguished themselves as specifically significant items of material culture kept in *n-eañ kuk* at the time of fieldwork. Finally the last section will provide a more detailed study of the place of food in house-building processes. In this way, the articulation between the house and food as both loci for the entanglement of numerous dimensions will be highlighted and questioned.

6.1 Horticulture and the gathering of food as initial stages of food production

As far as crops' symbolic associations were concerned, Jolly noted that in South Pentecost, "food like bodies are sexually differentiated" and considered "taro and yam as prototypical 'female' and 'male' food" (Jolly 1991a: 53). She added that this would be related to certain ecological conditions, as taro was grown in wet and heavy soils from the inland parts of the island while yam needed the dry and light ground of coastal areas, as well as to certain associations: of yams with male circumcision rituals and taro with birth rituals (Jolly 1991a: 54-58). From garden production to use in rituals, taro and yams thus seemed to acquire sexual associations that ultimately "convey (...) the domination of men over women and the hierarchical encompassment of female by male symbols" (Jolly 1991a: 58). Similarly, the creation, transformation and reproduction of conceptual ideas that linked food and sociality on Mere Lava, if initiated through production processes, had to be traced

⁹⁶ In another context, for an influential study focusing similarly on technical systems of food production and their relationship to people's conceptual ideas about their environment, see the work of Ludovic Coupaye about yams in the Abelam area of Papua New Guinea (Coupaye 2004).

well beyond those, through the further transformation and integration of food items into people's experiences and intersubjective relationships. More than male domination however, the main thing that seemed to be conveyed and reaffirmed at that time was the balanced collaboration between gendered individuals and *tavalsal* matrilines.

As in South Pentecost, on Mere Lava, men and women worked together in the gardens to produce crops and other edible plants, or were involved together in the gathering of fruits and nuts from trees, in hunting crabs at night or in fishing. Working groups, contextually formed, could be composed of members of a nuclear family, one or several neighbouring hamlets' relatives, women, men or both, or even the whole village community in the case of *nu-sul*, 'communal work'. Gender was nevertheless perceptible at two levels. Firstly, it was an organisational principle for certain tasks undertaken by mixed-sex working groups. Women would thus generally pick up the fallen nuts or fruits that fell down while men were climbing the trees up to 15 or 20 metres high. Deep-sea fishing with canoes or fishing with harpoons was a men's prerogative while women fished while swimming closer to the shore, in an area designated as 'inside' (*suwsuw sealēl*), and using lines. Pig raising was also incumbent to both men and women, especially feeding, although men were generally more involved in some of the tasks such as making wood fences for enclosures or catching runaway-pigs damaging neighbouring gardens. Secondly, gender was also largely acknowledged as an important aspect of the diverse restrictions men and women had to respect with regard to gardens and the production of food in general.

Drawing upon those considerations about gender but also sociality in general, the following sections will explore the technical sequences leading to the production of two main dishes, *no-lok* and *no-löt*. In this way, it will highlight the important patterns of social collaboration that made such dishes efficacious cultural artefacts and important elements in the context of *n-eañ kuk* building.

6.1.2 Planting new gardens, *nu-voësig ne no-oñ*

6.1.2.1 Clearing the gardens, *no-oñon* (Fig. 6.01)

Clearing the gardens, *no-oñon*, was a task undertaken by both sexes together. Clearing was often completed on a person's call to *nu-sul* work. For up to five nonconsecutive days, members of the whole village (ideally) gathered and lined up along the area of bush to be cleared, women on one side and men on the other side, everybody holding his or her individual bush knife, *ne-gisel lap*. Then the line progressed upwards, slashing down trees and other vines until they had completed the clearance of the intended number of *no-götom*, vertical units designating parallel strips of the slope, extending from one bottom line of trees to the following one upward. These *no-götom* were defined to me as the classical boundaries that delimited the vertical successive parts of the garden. They would be attributed afterwards to different relatives of the same family. A father would thus designate for each of his male children and unmarried female children, a certain consecutive number of *no-götom* that they would cultivate as their own (Fig. 6.02). As the work went on, cut branches and bush pieces were discarded, cut again in smaller sections, *nu-sarsarak* or *nu-siagsiag*, and left on the ground to be dried by the sun. These would be burnt later, when appropriate conditions of dryness, sun and wind were achieved. Regularly spaced, the bases of some of the trees cut, about one or two meters high, were left protruding from the garden slope. They were intended to constitute the stakes on which the yam vines would grow later.

6.1.2.2 Burning the garden, *nu-girar ne no-oñ* (Fig. 6.03)

This task was usually undertaken when the discarded cuttings from trees and bushes that had been left on the ground were judged to be dry enough, from a few days to one week after the garden had been cleared. People also waited for southeastern winds to blow strongly to feed the fire. Men and women equally took charge of the burning of the gardens, depending on their own time-tables. Groups of workers usually gathered a few members of the same hamlet, but it was not rare for one person to go on his/her own to burn his/her garden. The fires were lit at several places at the same time down the area to be cleared. This was done with a flamed bunch of dry coconut leaves, *nu-sul*, previously lit with matches. Then while the fire progressed upwards, the workers took great care to

control it, occasionally re-lit at some places where it was not burning properly or extinguishing it where necessary. The duration of this stage was variable, from one hour to the entire day, depending on the amount and size of *no-götom* to be cleared, weather conditions and the dryness of the discarded vegetation. Once the garden was entirely burnt clear, a layer of ashes giving to the ground the characteristic blackish colour that showed that the "garden is hot now, the food will grow properly" (Matias Rañ, Leverē village, 17/01/2011), the last smoking firebrands were dispersed and the workers left. Finally, a few days later, if necessary, the owner of the garden could return by him/her-self or simply accompanied by his/her closest family relatives for a further cleaning session, *nu-sussul*.

6.1.2.3 Planting, *nu-voësig*, the case of yams (Fig. 6.04 to 6.08)

On Mere Lava whereas burning the gardens was usually quite a small-scale task, planting yams often mobilised relatives on a larger scale. The owner of the garden usually announced to the relatives whose help he desired when he intended to plant his/her yams, *nu-voësig no-dom*. The following description is based on the observation made during plantation sessions on Gaua in 2012. Although they were not conducted on Mere Lava itself due to travel contingencies, Mere Lava people living in Gaua insisted in showing the proper *moëtup verē* techniques for planting. Consequently they carefully pointed out to me any differences they were aware of from what they would have done on Mere Lava.

On the appointed day, the working party (four classificatory sisters living in neighbouring hamlets) gathered in the morning and after a light meal everybody went to the garden, at about an hour's walk from there. Once arrived at the *n-eañ lenledu* situated on the slope, immediately below the garden to be planted, one of them sent her small daughter to gather firewood and lit a fire in a stone oven, under a shelter, close to the storage house. Other women gathered around the pile of crops to be planted, brought out of the *n-eañ lenledu*. While one of them started an operation called *werwerir no-dom*, the two others went up to the garden to dig holes where the yams parts would be put afterwards.

Werwerir no-dom consisted of dividing the bigger tubers into several parts, and lightening them by removing some of their flesh inside. The tubers were first cut horizontally with *ne-gisel wirig*. Then the two parts were hollowed out with a wooden knife called *no-got te bë werwerir*, the point of which was rotated. After the upper and lower parts of the yams had been 'lightened' one after the other, the lower parts were

generally divided again into two parts. Although this was the treatment applied to most elongated tubers, differently shaped or shorter ones could be divided in two only and parts of their flesh removed with a *ne-gēar* shell that had been brought from the seaside. In addition, the smaller yams were kept without being cut and called *ne-gēutē*. People distinguished between the various parts obtained through *nu-werwerir* operation: the two *no-wovēn* lower parts, as well as *ne-gēutē*, should be planted in the upper parts of the garden's *no-gōtom*, while upper parts of the tubers, called *ne-tenes*, should be planted at the bases of the *no-gōtom*, so that they could grow big. All the superfluous yam flesh taken out of the crops was collected in a *ne-tebēr* tray covered with leaves. I was explained that this had to be so people could cook a specific *no-lok* with it called *no-lok vas*, and that would be shared between the members of the planting party but also other relatives who possessed usage rights on the piece of ground if they were not attending the work session.

While one of the women was preparing the tubers, the garden itself was being prepared upwards. Two women created the softened mounds of earth to receive yam parts, *nu-lag no-to dom*, with pointed sticks, *ne-vetgēl*, and shovels, *ne-sibēt*. To that purpose they firmly planted the stick or shovel into the ground and pushed it back and forth to soften the soil. This gesture was repeated several times, usually three or four, until a proper bed was created for the future tuber to grow.

Then the whole working party took turns throwing the setts, *nu-werir*, carried from the *n-eañ lenledu* to the garden in a *ne-gēt* basket, into the holes, *nu-romra* or *nu-welle*. While one woman threw the crops into the holes without any particular care, two of them pushed each piece into the softened soil with their hands, great attention being to the direction of the part (the bottom of the piece should be directed downward). This operation was called *nu-voësvoësig*. Then, the planting was finally completed when pieces of yam had been covered with soil in order to form small mounds, *nu-toëvungor*. Once that work was completed, people went back to the shelter and uncovered the *no-lok vas* that had been prepared and baked in the stone oven while planting. This *no-lok* made out of yam and coconut milk, was then shared and eaten while chatting before everybody went home.

During the first couple of weeks, the owner went at least once to his/her garden patch to weed, *nu-wuwwur*, around the yam mounds. Finally, after a week or so, when the first yam shoots came out of the ground and had grown about fifteen to twenty centimetres, he/she went to add the stakes on which the yam vines would grow further, spiralling around it. This action called *nu-burbur* (from the name of the stake *nu-bur*) was equated to *na-tam*, or the care of a child:

"About adding the wild cane *nu-bur*, the side meaning of it is *na-tam, lov*. You do that when it is just grown, you put *na-tam*. It is like a child then, you have to tend it carefully, you have to weed carefully" (Timothee Wilson, Gaua, 21/09/2012).

Therefore, as we will see in the following sections, yams were strongly related to ideas of fertility and reproduction in ways that analogically related growth of crops in the gardens to ideas about general social reproduction.

6.1.3 Harvesting crops: the case of yams (Fig. 6.09)

Whereas products like manioc, sweet potato or island cabbage were available to be harvested all year long, being non-seasonal products, a specific harvesting season was acknowledged for yams, *no-dom*. For this reason, and according to the special significance and value of yams on Mere Lava, this sub-section about the harvesting process will again focus more specifically on this crop.

Starting in March or April, the harvesting season extended until June or July according to the state of the ripeness of the yams, also corresponding to the season when most houses were erected and a lot of new *ne-gēt* baskets manufactured. The usual working groups were composed of the members of one or several related households, of which the relationships often rested on either the ties between siblings, parents and children or mother's brother and sister's children. Thus, by choosing to help such and such among their relatives to harvest their yam gardens, people would in fact choose to actualise certain kin relationships rather than others in a similar way as to how they negotiated their help to the building of relatives' houses, or any of their participation into working groups of various kinds.

The proper time to harvest depended on the dryness of the vine. When the leaves and stem were completely dried, the owner of the garden would start to discuss a day for the harvest with his/her household relatives. This would ensure that other work to be done during the following days could also be completed without compromising the harvesting process. On the chosen day, the working group gathered at dawn and went to the designated garden. Once there, the workers first cleaned the area together, *nu-gurva no-won*, with slashing moves of their respective bush-knives, *ne-gisel lap*. Then, they organised themselves into two groups. The first one would be in charge of digging up the tubers, *nu-gēlgēl no-dom*, achieved with small *ne-vetgēl* digging-sticks and hands. Along

with the *ne-gisel lap* and *ne-gisel wirig*, the *ne-vetgēl* sticks figured among the most used tools when working in the gardens. They were fashioned out of the stakes left free by the now dried vines, or out of the sticks used to make the structure of the rudimentary fences marking the *no-gōtom*'s boundaries. Quickly blunted with *ne-gisel lap*, those sticks were temporary tools, usually abandoned after the work. Groups of tubers were dug out successively by planting the *ne-vetgēl* into the ground at the base of each dried yam vine and removing the soil covering them with leverage and scratching movements. When a more sensitive tool was needed to avoid damaging the tubers' skins, hands were used instead. Once dug out, they were piled beside their holes, which were then immediately back-filled with soil before the worker started to dig out another set of tubers. Whereas diggers generally worked individually, a second group of workers, generally composed of older women and children were cleaning the tubers, *nu-tegtek no-dom*, from the remaining lumps of soil covering them and removing their hairs, *nu-tep ne-vulvuli* or *nu-vulvul no-dom*. This was done with individually-owned *ne-gisel wirig*, the blades of which were used to scrape the skin of the tubers as well as to cut off the hairs, *ne-vulvuli*.

Finally, cleaned yams were piled together before being put into large *ne-gēt* baskets, *nu-gēteq ne-gēt*, to be carried back to the special yam storage house, *n-eañ lelendu*, pertaining to the owner of the garden. From that stage, small piles of yams were set aside to be kept for planting in the next new yam garden. This action was called *toqo no-dom* and was mostly directed by the fact that some tubers were considered unsuitable for consumption because rats or insects had damaged them. Those yams would be carried back to the storage house similarly to the other tubers but would be then piled separately inside of it. The *n-eañ lenledu* were generally built close to the main path situated down the garden area. They could be related to a single household or be shared by several households, the members of which were generally relatives. Inside the *n-eañ lelendu*, yams were piled according to their owners and their mode of consumption. Tubers intended for consumption were thus separated from those (usually bigger) intended to be used for *moëtup verē* and those kept to be planted.

Therefore, production processes did not seem to imply clear gender or matrilineal associations with regard to either crops such as manioc or yam, or other edibles such as pigs, sea products, crabs, fruits or nuts. Yams could be either male or female, regardless of their varieties, according to the size and shape of their tuber, respectively long and thin or short and thick or roundish. Pigs were commonly designated according to their sex, either female, *na-ratva na-vaven*, or male, *na-ratva ne-ñwarat*. This was further emphasised at a

mythical level, where those two specific resources, pigs and yams, seemed to be more closely connected to the creation of sociality and ideas about reproduction of human beings than other food resources. In the origin myth cited above, the first man's survival by eating half of the pig's food placed him on the same plane as pigs. Moreover, the fact that he ate only half of the pig's food, thus sharing the pig's meal instead of eating it all alone, could also be interpreted as a powerful insight into the sharing of substance between pigs and men.⁹⁷ Allied to the fundamental role of the seven women, born out of the very soil of the island, feeding the pigs and the man and finally creating the whole Mere Lava population by their marriage with the latter, the myth thereby stressed the centrality of collaboration between men and women and between matrilines. As far as yams were concerned, one recorded *kastom stori* identified the origin of the various yams as the dismembered body parts of a man:⁹⁸

"This is the story of the beginning of the yams on Mere Lava. Before, there was one man who lived and then got married. He stayed with his wife until his wife got pregnant. She gave birth to a baby. It was a boy. The three of them lived together until the child had grown up a little bit. When he started to walk by himself, his mother died. Then, as his mother was dead, his father looked after him. He looked after him until he was completely grown up, until he was able to work by himself.

Then the father said:

- 'You go look after your garden!'

The child went and cleared up a garden space, then came back and said:

- 'Papa, I cleared up my garden! What will I plant now?'

His father answered:

-'No! It will stay like that a little bit, wait a little and then you will plant. First, go and cut all the branches down.'

He went and cut down all the branches. He made the garden ready to dry.

Then, his father said to him:

- 'All right when the garden is dry, you can go and burn it.'

⁹⁷ Similarly, a number of other *kastom* stories emphasises the sharing of food and meals between human beings or between human beings and supernatural spirits. They revealed these situations of commensality as being a basis for the possibility of mutual influence and affection.

⁹⁸ This story seemed to be related to stories explaining the origin of yams in northern Vanuatu, especially on Ambae, Pentecost and Maewo. On Mere Lava, although only one interlocutor expressed his willingness to record it, the story then encountered a general public acknowledgement during listening sessions organised in the different villages around the island. For that reason, I chose to use it in this thesis, despite its relative lack of occurrence in the set of stories that were identified as originating from Mere Lava.

The child waited and then his father told him:

- 'You go and look if the garden has dried now!'

He went to check the garden and saw that it was dry. So he came back to tell his father, who said:

- 'All right you go and burn it now!'

But the boy was thinking:

- 'I am working like that but what will I be planting then? There is not anything to plant!'

He went and burnt his garden and went back to tell his father:

- 'I burnt my garden!'

His father said:

- 'Wait for five days and then you will go and break the ground to prepare it to plant!'

He waited five days, went to break the ground and came back to tell his father:

- 'I broke the ground already!'

His father said:

-'All right then, we both will go to the garden now!'

They both went to the garden and the father said to his son:

-'Now kill me. When I will be dead, you will cut me into small pieces that you will plant in your garden!'

The child answered:

- 'I cannot do that, you are my father!'

The father replied:

- 'No! If you do not kill me, you will not have anything to eat!'

So the child killed his father, cut him into small pieces and threw all the pieces into the holes he had prepared in the garden.

The father had said:

- 'When you will have planted your garden you will wait for ten days and then only, you will come and look at what grew out of the ground.'

So the child went back home and counted the ten days of his father. Then he went to look at his garden. He went and saw what had grown out from the ground. He saw yams, all of different sorts, some were red and others were white.

He said:

- 'All right, I know how to do garden work now!'

And from then the yams went on, on the island." (Simon Pita, Auta village, 17/02/2010).

If, on a mythical plane, both yams and pigs seemed therefore to be associated with a certain sense of maleness, this latter *kastom stori* further enhanced the link between yams and fatherhood and related in a very striking way the transmission of gardening techniques and knowledge of crops to agnatic descent. In this way, this story also referred to a certain extent to the transmission of land from fathers to sons. It emphasised the importance of death as a crucial articulation in this process, as it was through the father's death that the son was provided with a nurturing resource to sustain himself. However, similar to the collaboration between the sexes that was emphasised in the origin myth, this *kastom stori* also revealed the fundamental role of women in production and reproduction processes. The role of women was underlined in the introductory sequence, which stressed the mother's pregnancy and caring role until the child was able to walk by himself.

When considered together with the previous account of fishing, gathering and cycles of planting and harvesting in the gardens, these two myths strikingly evoked the relational power of food. Produced out of social collaboration at several levels (between the sexes, between households and members of allied matrilines, between members of whole village communities), food indeed acquired qualities that allowed it, in turn, to create and transform social bonds. Moreover, beyond the links between people, food also importantly mediated the relationships of people to land and to the passing of time. Therefore, looking at how food was produced out of gardens and land allowed insight into the ways in which foodstuffs were intricately related to ideas about sociality, land and reproduction processes, right from the initial stages to their fashioning as elaborated meals. In the same way, the transformation of raw food into cooked dishes intricately enmeshed men's and women's efforts, but also demonstrated other kinds of associations between food, sociality and temporal realms. It eventually highlighted the recurrence of a tension between containment and revelation that created food as a liminal, efficacious item.

6.2 *No-lok* and *no-löt* cooking

The expected social division of tasks, that could be rather loose in daily life, became more strictly defined when cooking for ceremonial occasions. Important ideas about the relationships between people, place and time were materialised at that time. As in the rest of Vanuatu, *no-lok* and *no-löt* were the kind of dishes more specifically associated with

celebratory meals on Mere Lava (Nojima 2008). The term *no-lok* designated in its narrowest sense the raw paste obtained once the crops were grated. *No-löt*, in contrast, designated dishes prepared from manioc or breadfruit *no-lok*, either cooked in metal pots or baked in stone ovens and then further softened through specific processing. On Mere Lava ceremonial occasions, these two categories of dishes were linked with ideas about gender and gendered behaviour. A close examination of the division of labour and cooking processes will now outline the articulation of these associations and broader social collaboration.

While both men and women were expected to contribute to the preparation and gathering of the raw materials and products, some of these tasks were more specifically related to either men's or women's work. As shown in Table 13, whilst most of the food gathered from the gardens was collected by both men and women, men only were responsible for the gathering of firewood, *ne-leat*, salt water, *na-nag*, and for the preparation of the stone oven structure, *nu-um*. However, the various leaves *do-va*, *do-vor*, *do-ptēl* and *na-sarop*, involved in the preparation processes of celebratory meals, were always gathered by women. In this way, the examination of the early steps of food preparation demonstrated a certain sense of the gendered conception of space, according to which men seemed to be connected to ideas of periphery – the sea surrounding the island and the circular structure of the empty and cold stone oven – as well as with the control of cooking fires, while women would be associated rather with a certain centrality and 'islandness' through their close link with products coming from the bushy slopes of the volcano. These links between gender and spatial conceptions of centrality and periphery could be formulated in terms of ideas of containment and reproductive transformation achieved through the collaboration between gendered individuals. Indeed, the involvement of men in cooking processes was closely related to raw food. As soon as the *no-lok* bundles were wrapped, ready to be put into the oven or removed from it once they were properly baked, only women were involved. This will be demonstrated through the following account of the operations leading to the preparation of a meal shared in conclusion of a *tuptup* day of work, in Luwör hamlet, Leqel village, in June 2011.

6.2.1 Operational sequence of *no-lok* preparation: the example of a *tuptup* day (Fig. 6.10 to 6.18)

Two days before the date fixed for *tuptup*, a group of five young men, all classificatory brothers, led by the commissioner, went to the latter's garden in order to gather firewood, *ne-lēat*. Starting early in the morning, around 7 am, they were back, their shoulders loaded with long, thick tree trunks around 12.30 am. During this time, the women from Luwör (i.e. the commissioner's M and Z) and from the neighbouring hamlets (classified as his M and Z as well, being FBW or FBD), together with the commissioner's father, went to their gardens to harvest the various crops that would be involved in the preparation of the intended meal. This group of six people came back around noon, carrying basketfuls of yams, manioc, sweet potato and island cabbage leaves that were piled underneath a shelter that replaced the *n-eañ kuk* while it was being rebuilt. As soon as they were back home, the women started to cook a meal of rice and a small part of the *na-sarop* that they had picked up in the garden. Once all the attendees had been fed, the group of men started to cut the firewood, *tep ne-lēat*, into smaller pieces to fit the size of the stone oven. Finally, around the end of the afternoon, a group of five young men and women (the commissioner and his siblings) went to climb two *nangae* trees, *kal ne-ñiē*, situated in a creek nearby. They came back around 5 pm with basketful of fresh *ne-ñiē* nuts, which were put next to the crops and cabbage leaves already collected.

The day before the feast was dedicated to the cracking and extraction of the *ne-giē* nuts, *qal ne-ñiē*. In addition to the fresh nuts, *ne-ñiēsmat*, two baskets of dried *nangae*, *ne-ñiēkur*, were also cracked using roundish pebbles taken from the stock of oven stones, *no-voët qinqinē*. From around 9 am, people thus started to organise themselves informally in small groups of four or five, men working together outside the cooking shelter while women were sitting underneath. Each group gathered around a few *ne-tebēr* coconut trays, into which the opened nuts were thrown, once they had been cracked by hitting them a few times on the edge. In this way, the work was divided up between some people who cracked the nuts, *qal ne-ñiē*, some who extracted the nuts from their shells, *lekleket ne-ñiē*, with the point of small knives, *ne-gisel wirig*, and when it concerned fresh nuts, some who removed the thin inner skin of the nuts by hand, *ul ne-ñiē*. The two last tasks were primarily, but not exclusively, left to children, who generously helped themselves to nuts as they worked

(indeed adults tended to do the same, but less frequently). At the end of the day, about twenty plastic plates and small metal dishes were full of either fresh nuts or dried nuts, whereas piles of empty shells put into *ne-tebēr* trays were discarded down to the pig's fence. In the afternoon, a group of five young men (the commissioner and his brothers) went to the seaside, carrying plastic jerrycans, to fill them up with *na-nag*. The day was completed, as usual, by a shared meal and kava drinking at dusk.

The celebratory day saw the activity starting at 3 am. Women from Luwör hamlet gathered first in the dark, holding torches to see the crops they were peeling, *sis ne-gen*, with *ne-gisel wirig*. Around 5 am, other men and women from the neighbouring hamlets or from other villages began to arrive, carrying smaller baskets of crops or other raw food to be cooked. While men gathered together to chat and smoke before starting *tuptup*, the women organised themselves informally to work in small groups around *ne-tebēr* trays into which they threw the removed crop skins. Newcomers generally peeled their own crops first, before piling them with the same crops brought by others. Each newcomer was the object of comments mostly focused on the time of arrival and the kinds and amount of crops brought. At around 6 am, most of the crops were skinned and, gradually, women shifted groups to gather around large plastic and metal dishes. Holding graters made from two prickly branches of tree fern, *na-vatras*, coupled together with a thin strap of dried pandanus leaf, they progressively reduced the piles of various crops into thick pastes, *no-lok*, which would then be mixed with *na-nag* and constitute the basis of the *no-lok* puddings to be baked in the stone oven. Around 10.30 am, the grating of sweet potato, *rasa nu-butēt*, yam, *rasa no-dom* and manioc, *rasa ni-minia*k was nearing its end and three young men came to light the fire in the stone oven, *bulian ni-ep*. They carefully positioned the firewood pieces into the circular hole and lit it with matches before piling pebbles to be heated on top of it, *wunduñ ni-ep ne na-voët qinqinē*. Shortly after, a thick smoke invaded the inner part of the shelter where most of the women were working, which marked the first break-time for the day. While some women joined the working groups that were busy preparing the *na-garias* vines for *tuptup*, others started to prepare *na-sarop* leaves for the making of *no-lok* bundles, *völvölu na-sarop*. Taking leaves one after the other, they piled them together and cut the strong part of their stems with *ne-gisel wirig*. Some women also simply sat and chatted, waiting for the fire to go down so they could roast some crops on the hot stones to feed children, men and themselves. Just before the firewood was reduced to red ashes, five women (all commissioner's mothers) passed the banana leaves over the fire, *ririg no-do*, and removed their strong central stem with small knives, *sinsina no-do*, to

soften them. Immediately after, the place filled up again with women who started fashioning wrapped bundles of leaves containing *no-lok* puddings to be baked. Women gathered in several circular groups centred on empty spaces that they covered with leaves, rice or old copra bags to protect the preparation space from soil. Ropes made out of the inner bark of pandanus branches were laid first, either in a radial way or a rectangular one, according to the *stael* chosen by each group. Then banana leaves, *no-do-ptēl* were radially arranged, a first layer with the back side on top, *vier vörup no-do-ptēl*, followed by a second layer with the right side on top, *vier tewerir no-do-ptēl*. Between these two layers, it was explained that sometimes, a third one was necessary to ensure the strength of the whole arrangement. Usually made of *burao* leaves, *do-vor*, this layer was called *kērē-gor*, literally ‘block the bottom’. Then the preparations of *no-lok* varied according to the chosen crops and recipes, but common features were nevertheless perceptible, in particular the organisation of the various ingredients in layers put one on top of the other. As the yam *no-lok* with *ne-ñiē* nuts was generally described as the most valued one, especially for celebratory meals, this is the one that will be described here.

A first layer of *na-sarop* leaves was spread out on the base of the circular leaves bundle, *vier na-sarop*, followed by a layer of *no-lok* that had been previously mixed with salt water, *kel ne-lok na-nag*. One or two women only executed this action, called *rumbus ne-lok*, the others helping to check the proper equal thickness of *no-lok* all over the leaves. Women gave a specific importance to the proper making of the *rumbus* gesture and defined it as one of the gendered identity markers. According to them, while men should be able to properly make a stonewall before marriage, women should be able to execute perfectly the *rumbus* gesture to spread the *no-lok* pudding out in an even layer. Together with the ability to share food, *esig ne-gen*, to which we will return later, these were skills among the most valued for women.

Over the first layer of yam *no-lok*, a layer of grated *ne-ñiē* nuts was spread, *rumbus ne-ñiē*, ideally about one centimetre thick, which in turn was covered by a second layer of *no-lok*. Then, all the women bent the protruding parts of the initial layer of *na-sarop* leaves over the edge of the *no-lok* preparation, and a last layer of *na-sarop* was added in order to cover the entire surface of *no-lok*, *lok-gor*. Finally the banana leaves were folded back over the preparation to close the bundle, *lok-loqöt*, and the pandanus ropes tightly fastened together to secure its strength, *wēt no-lok*. On this *tuptup* day, four *no-lok* were made of which two were prepared from yams, *no-dom*, one from manioc, *ni-miniak*

and one from sweet potato, *nu-butēt*, all of them organised in two layers of *no-lok* with a grated layer of *ne-ñiē* nuts, either fresh or dried, in the middle.

Corresponding more or less with the end of the preparation of the *no-lok* bundles, around 12.15 am, the stones were judged hot enough and young men were called back to remove them from the stone oven, *belet no-voët*. Three of them held some large wooden sticks with split ends, *na-gabal*, in order to grab the stones and put them beside the red-hot stone oven. Once this had been done, one of them poked the bottom of the stone oven with a *na-gabal*, *ur ni-ep*. This action was the last one to be effected by men. Putting the *no-lok* bundles in the oven, *momsow no-lok*, covering each one with stones to create a balanced pile of bundles and stones, *wunduñ*, and finally covering the whole pile with leaves *do-vor* to keep the heat in the stone oven, *törtöru*, were described as strictly feminine tasks. Among them, the ability to properly pile the hot stones, so the *no-lok* were evenly baked on all surfaces, was especially described as a valued skill. The different *no-lok* were generally piled one over the other in a definite order, with respect to the crop from which they were made. The yam *no-lok* were thus always put first in stone ovens, closer to the red brands, because yams had to be baked at a higher temperature than other crops. Then, in this case, the manioc *no-lok* was placed over the two yam *no-lok* and topped with the sweet potato one.

The leaves *do-vor*, used to cover the stone oven, were themselves made into flat discs or crowns called *do-titēa*. Women fashioned these in an informal way, *sur no-do-titēa*, either the day before the feast, or during the cooking process, at times when they were not busy doing other things. The bigger leaves, with their stems removed, were put aside and called *do-ñwesñwes*. They would be used as single cover elements on the stone oven. In contrast, *do-titēa* were formed from smaller leaves, assembled together by sticking one into the other in a radial way, with the whole device eventually fixed by twining stems together, forming a crown on the reverse side. Finally, when the stone oven had been covered with *do-ñwesñwes* and *do-titēa*, sometimes roughly tied with pandanus straps to ensure its stability, it resembled a mound whose height and consistence was a source of pride. Indeed beyond the generosity of the commissioner of the house and his close family, what was demonstrated to the larger extended family audience was that the organisation of time and planning of the quantity of crops that had to be collected had been properly mastered by women of the working team.

The *no-lok* bundles were then baked for three or four hours, which marked a second break in the food preparation process. Women again rested and chatted, some of

them joining the *na-garias* workers, others simply returning home to rest and refresh. Everybody would be expected to come back for the food distribution of food, *esig negengen*, when men would also have finished the roof, *sigit ne-tavalon i row*, and, ideally, the back side of the kitchen house, *sigit no-vonogum*.

The stages described here were typical of food processing for celebratory occasions. It showed how different connections to notions of gender, sociality, space and time were expressed and bound to physical artefact, namely here the *no-lok*, during the very making of it. Beyond the fact that *no-lok* were ultimately considered as a female food, the gendered differentiation of tasks at the successive stages of the preparation referred to ideas about the collaboration between the sexes as the basis on which food and thus the reproduction of physical human beings was achieved. Men were thus responsible for the setting up of the initial structure, the stone oven and its red-heated pebbles, allowing raw crops to be properly transformed into cooked food inside, for which women were then responsible. Grounded in gardens and land, from which crops were grown, the reproduced human beings were at the same time fashioned into social persons through food processing and consumption. Indeed, beyond the gendered attitudes performed through food related activities, social bonds were also more broadly materialised through individuals' involvement in food processing. As numerous authors have stated in Melanesia, a crucial importance was placed on the social origin of the food consumed: who had grown it, who had given it and who had transformed it into edible dishes (Strathern 1988: 290). On Mere Lava, this was strikingly expressed through the comments made during food preparation, especially at such occasions as ceremonials or working sessions gathering large numbers of people. So, if eating was always about performing social relationships, food processing was indeed also a crucial locus for relational creation and the tying of social ideas to artefacts such as cooked *no-lok*.

Collaboration during food preparation was therefore related to the reproduction of social beings as much as physical ones. Again, the containment into the stone oven was linked to transformational processes. However, transformation had to be ultimately validated through acts of food distribution, sharing and consumption. The links between eating and sexual intercourse had been numerously pointed out throughout the literature on the topic (Gregory 1982: 33, Strathern 1988: 293). However, in Vanuatu, it would seem more appropriate to relate the actual processes and sexual intercourse, as it was during this very moment that the collaboration between the two sexes appeared as most striking. This

was particularly expressed through the imagery of the stone oven and through restrictions related to it.

6.2.2 The stone oven (Fig. 6.22)

On Mere Lava, the name given to the stone oven, as a semi-permanent place situated inside of *n-eañ kuk*, was *nu-um*. Whereas Nojima noted that the Polynesian term to describe the stone oven is generally derived from the reconstructed proto-Polynesian term **umu* and proto oceanic **qumu*, she also remarked that in Melanesia, this term is rarely found. Rather, a variety of terms are used, reflecting the diversity of cooking techniques throughout the region (Nojima 2008: 14). However, this term was mainly found to designate stone ovens in Banks Islands. Mere Lava stone ovens were thus linked to other Banks Islands pit structures and distinguished from ovens of many other northern Vanuatu regions. The ovens were generally settled in *n-eañ kuk*, their size ranging from sixty centimetres to one metre or more in diameter, which placed Mere Lava *nu-um* among the largest ovens in the Banks group (compare Nojima 2008: 109). The pit was lined with stones, most often a mix of coral and volcanic flat pebbles gathered on shore. This was said to form the bottom, *ne-kērē*, of the oven and was called *ne-winriñ*. On the ground level, a circle made of bigger quadrangular volcanic stones formed the external edge of the oven, *no-bölösum*, while smaller roundish volcanic pebbles to be heated and used to cover the baking food were designated as *no-voët qinqinē*. When not in use, the latter were kept either inside of the stone oven or piled next to it. Although formed on the same structure, stone ovens situated in men's and women's meeting houses, on the public dancing ground, were much larger, reaching approximately 2.30 metres in diameter in order to accommodate enough food at ceremonial times.

While certain restrictions related to garden or pregnancy were no longer followed at the time of fieldwork, those linked to *nu-um* were still very carefully observed. Among those, the most important were the taboo against women entering the empty oven, or sitting on the stones of the *nu-bölösum*, lest the food would provoke people's sickness afterwards. The invoked causes for those restrictions were female's menstruation, whose odour could affect the food and therefore the consumer's bodies. Beyond the pollution aspect, broadly debated in the context of Melanesia (Douglas 1966, Meigs 1984), those restrictions evoked a rather classical intertwining of ideas about food and sexual

reproductive capacities. Moreover, it indicated that the oven, even when still empty, was considered a meaningful place, a significance that was explained as coming from its past and future capacities to produce food that people would ingest. In that sense, it seemed to slightly diverge from Mondragón's assertion about the Torres stone ovens in which "the leaf-wrapped food that constitutes the core of the oven is (...) not a separate part, but is intrinsic to the body of the oven. Thus, a stone oven only acquires the status of a meaningfully charged artefact, which contains and transforms edible matter, at the moment when the leaf-wrapped food is placed within" (Mondragón 2003: 177).

In the same way as places could be laden with the capacity to affect living entities deriving from their past and potential future hosting of specific people and events, the empty oven therefore possessed a dangerous potentiality to affect people. This, however, would be realised at the time of consumption only, for the two elements enabling the transformation to take place with efficacy, containment and revelation, were necessary. The fundamental link between these two aspects of transformation was further expressed through the name of the oven when filled up with food. Called *ne-teqes*, the full oven was conceived of as an artefact, this time in a very similar way to what Mondragón remarked (2003: 177). Yet, this term did not only serve to designate the transformative oven as a separate unit of material culture but it was also used as a verb to express the action of baking *no-lok* in ovens, in sentences such as "*kemem nu-teqes no-lok worlemlem i tuwel*", literally, 'we (inclusive) baked one *no-lok worlemlem*' (Glenda Lois, Tasmat village, 09/05/2011). Finally the same word was also very commonly used as a name for all kinds of celebratory meetings or family gatherings involving a general distribution and sharing of food. People would hence formulate a question about participation to such a gathering by saying for instance: "*Niak sa-van Qorqas le-teqes?*", literally meaning 'Are you going to the feast in Qorqas (a hamlet of Tasmat village)?'. Thus, the term *ne-teqes*, meaning at the same time the oven as an artefact, the food transformation itself and the event during which this food would be consumed, summarised at once the connections between food processing and the reproduction of gendered social relationships grounded in the places where food had been grown, prepared and consumed.

As far as the *no-lok* preparation was concerned, men were excluded from the process as soon as the food had been put in the stone oven. Cooked *no-lok*, as well as *ne-teqes*, if acknowledged as the product of the collaboration between the two sexes, were thus rather related to women and women's skills. In contrast, another common dish, *no-löt*, was said to be 'the food belonging to men', *ne-gen te bē remel ñwarat*. Restricted in the

past to men's consumption inside of *ne-gemel*, at the time of fieldwork, this dish was also prepared during family gatherings or at celebratory occasions and it was most common to prepare a *no-löt* to feed the working team during house-building steps. The operational sequence leading to the production of this dish, involving very definite gendered tasks in the same way as *no-lok*, thus allowed refining the metaphorical connections between food and the production of social persons.

6.2.3 Operational sequence of *no-löt* preparation: the example of a *no-löt* prepared for a *tar qoér* session of work (Fig. 6.19 and 6.20)

In Vanuatu, the Banks Islands are generally well-known for the variety of their *no-löt* recipes. Among this variety, the *no-löt* called *no-löt ne-ñiēkur* was the most commonly prepared. Based on a pre-cooked *no-lok* pudding of manioc and grated dried *ne-ñiē* nuts, this dish originally required a very long preparation time. Indeed, as in the past the *no-lok* pudding was processed in stone ovens, the first actions of the *no-löt* operational sequence were the ones described above for *no-lok* processing. In 2010-2011, however, most *no-löt* cooking started in metal pots, the grated raw paste being wrapped into small square bundles and boiled over the usual fireplace. This method, although still time-consuming, was nevertheless described as much shorter than the previous stone oven baking. The following account is based on a cooking session that took place in Tasmat village in June 2011.

On the day before cooking, three women (the commissioner's W, and two Z) had gone to their garden, situated on the same parcel, to dig manioc, *gēl ni-miniak*, and pick up *burao* leaves *do-vor*, that they had piled in a temporary kitchen. In the morning, men from the working team gathered around 7 am and after a brief chat and smoke, they departed to the creek where the tree fern trunks would be cut, *tar qoér*. Around the same time, the commissioner's wife, assisted by her mother, three of the commissioner's sisters and the commissioner's brother's wife started to peel manioc tubers, *sis ni-miniak*. About 45 minutes later, small piles of white crops surrounded the cooks, carefully put into metal dishes or on clean *do-vor*. Then the tubers were grated with *na-vatras*, *rasa ni-miniak*, and the paste gathered into one large metal dish. Around 9.15 am the six women started to wrap this *no-lok* in *do-vor* leaves so that they formed small rectangular packets approximately fifteen centimetres long and five centimetres wide, an action called *nu-wē no-lok miniak no-do vor*. These bundles were then disposed radially inside a metal pot and

after water had been added and the lid put on, the pot was put over the fire, for the *no-lok* to be cooked, *kuk no-lok*. Meanwhile, women removed the shells of dried *ne-ñiē* nuts, a basketful of which was removed from the *ne-lesles* over the fireplace, and grated them. The grated powder was then wrapped into leaves *do-vor* with a red-heated stone and the bundle carefully closed and fastened with pandanus straps. This was cooked next to the pot over the fire. About five minutes after the bundle had been put to cook, the *no-lok* was ready and the pot removed from the fire. Around 10.30 am, two young men, who did not go to the creek with the others, were called and asked to bring the wooden dish, *ne-tabēa*, pounder, *ne-vetiglöt* and knives, *no-got*, in order to make the *no-löt*. Once these had been settled in the middle of the temporary kitchen, the young men sat at the two opposite sides of the oval wooden dish. The commissioner's wife took hot *no-lok* bundles from the pot with a *no-got* knife, removed the *do-vor* leaf covering it, *ow no-lok te bē löt*, and gave the rectangular pieces one after the other to the young man holding the *ne-vetiglöt* pounder. When three or four such pieces had been put on the wooden dish, the latter started to pound them together, *qēsē no-löt*. The very characteristic gesture of this action was clearly associated with maleness and somewhat similar to the gesture made when pushing the *ne vetgēl* stick into the garden's soil to plant crops. Whereas in the past, only men would have been responsible for *no-löt* processing, inside men's *ne-gemel*, I was also told that the gendered division of tasks had changed; women could occassionnally process *no-löt*. However, this gesture still carried important male associations. Men who saw them immediately laughed at the women making it. It was explained that men had this gesture while women had the *rumbus* gesture.

When a small mount of soft *no-lok* was created, it was put aside on the wooden dish and the two young men exchanged their roles, one holding the wooden dish steady while the other was pounding *no-lok* pieces. Once all the pieces had been pounded, the two smaller mounds created were then gathered together in one larger one, at the centre of the dish, *rañ no-löt döl*. The *ne-ñiē* nuts were then removed from the fire and the bundle opened by one woman, while one of the young men made a hole in the centre of the mound with *ne-vetiglöt*, *gos no-löt*. Nuts were put into the hole and slowly pushed inside with the pounder, moved circularly so that the entire *no-löt* surface gradually integrated the nuts, *ris no-löt*. As soon as the nuts had been poured onto the top of the hole, the woman who had removed the leaves from the cooked pieces of *no-lok* cut pieces of *no-löt* at its base and dipped them into the thick hot nuts preparation. These pieces called *ne-tenisi* were then given to all the people involved in the cooking as a direct compensation for their work. *Ne-*

tenisi were defined as the best parts of *no-löt*, for their surface was covered by a thicker layer of nuts. Other people who attended the *no-löt* processing were always offered *ne-tenisi* for their presence was considered helpful, and their chat entertaining. As soon as the *no-lok* pieces had been put onto the *ne-tabēa*, the dish was considered a *no-löt*. When everybody had eaten his /her part of *ne-tenisi* and when the *no-löt* ring created was judged properly and equally covered by nuts, the latter was flattened by hammering it with the pounder *ne-vetiglöt*, *kona no-löt* to obtain a flat, even disc of *no-löt*, about 2 cm thick and covering the whole wooden dish *ne-tabēa*. Then women cut it with *no-got* knives, *tep no-löt*. They started first by cutting radial parts from the centre to the edge of the disc and then cut again smaller rectangular pieces that were ultimately piled on the centre of *ne-tabēa*. Around noon, these pieces were equally shared and pieces of canned fish added before being distributed in *do-titēa* bundles to returning workers.

Hence, the gendered division of tasks implied in *no-löt* processing followed those of *no-lok* preparation. On Mere Lava, although several recipes of *no-löt* were known and commonly prepared, most of them involved the previous production of *no-lok*. Generally speaking, *no-löt* were mostly made out of manioc. Less frequently, however, people also processed *no-löt* from pre-cooked breadfruits. On other islands, *no-löt* mainly involved the pounding of entire pre-cooked crops such as breadfruit, taro or yams. The significant aspect of *no-löt* seemed thus to be located in the fact that it was prepared from pre-cooked food, either under the form of *no-lok* or entire baked crops (Kirk Huffman, personal communication, Sydney, 09/2011).

In the past, when *no-löt* were made and consumed in men's *ne-gemel* contexts, this dish would have been associated with male physical and social reproduction in the context of the status alteration system. At the time of fieldwork, however, outside the *salagor* space, the emphasis appeared to be put on the collaboration between the sexes, as the process of production involved a passage from a female food issued from social collaboration, *no-lok*, to a male food, *no-löt*, similarly originating from a further collaboration between the sexes. Thus, in the same way as *no-lok*, the communal *no-löt* processing and consumption reproduced gendered human beings, both physically and socially, but ultimately conveyed ideas about collaboration and male and female complementarity. Further on, like *nu-um/ne-teqes*, items of material culture linked to *no-löt* making, especially wooden pounders, *ne-vetiglöt*, dishes, *ne-tabēa*, and knives, *no-got*, were imbued with ideas about social reproduction and transformation.

6.2.4 The wooden material culture linked to *no-löt* production

On Mere Lava, the artefacts linked to *no-löt* production were of three kinds; all of them carved from strong wood, especially from Casuarina tree, *no-tor*. The dishes, called *ne-tabēa*, were oval, flat wooden dishes with two quadrangular handles at their opposite ends. Their base showed usually very short protruding parts, of various shapes, that served to raise the dish a few centimetres above the ground when used. Ranging approximately from sixty centimetres wide and one metre long to one metre wide and one metre twenty centimetres long or even more, the surface of these dishes generally allowed several people gathering around it to prepare and then consume the *no-löt*. Usually, their heights did not exceed ten to twenty centimetres.

By contrast, *no-löt* pounders, generically named *ne-vetiglöt*, were elongated conical objects, presenting a large base and a narrow, conical upper end. Measuring generally from eighty centimetres to one metre fifty centimetres long, these items were held with two hands by men and hammered onto the paste on the *ne-tabēa* dish to produce the soft *no-löt*. Although all the pounders found today on the island seem to be approximately of the same length, an example from the Musée du Quai Branly in Paris (MQB 71.1972.92.11), identified from both the museum inventories and people on Mere Lava as originating from this island, seemed to show that at least in the 1960s, shorter pounders were in use. They would have been related to taro pounding. Although this would be an element in favour of the hypothesis that taro was grown in the past on Mere Lava and disappeared only recently (see Chapter 2), it was nevertheless impossible to assess the extent to which these taro *no-löt* would have been produced. The carved end of the *ne-vetiglöt* preserved in the MQB collection, representing a head of a figure that people recognised as Qet (Manlē Turris, Luganville, Espiritu Santo, 04/2011, Adam Valuwa, Palon area, Espiritu Santo, 04/2011, Philip Gen, Tasmat village, Mere Lava, 06/2011), seemed to associate this pounder with a restricted use inside the *na-salagor* space. That would make it a singular artefact, from which no general assumption could be made regarding the wider existence of shorter taro pounders everywhere on Mere Lava. Although none of the pounders used on Mere Lava at the time of fieldwork showed any pattern at their upper end, some exemplars kept in the roof tiles or on *ne-lesles* platforms showed designs similar to those of the museum collections. In the past, their use was similarly said to have been connected with the status alteration system but now that matrilines men's *ne-gemel* had disappeared and that "people do not take rank anymore",

they were mostly kept and transmitted from generation to generation (Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 21/05/2011).

The last items to be related with *no-löt* making were knives *no-got*. Although these could also be used to cut *no-lok*, they were mainly related to *no-löt* processing. Measuring from twenty-five centimetres to forty centimetres, the ones commonly used were composed of a single, flat piece of wood into which a pointed, oval blade terminated by a rectangular handle had been designed. However, similarly to the pounders, some exemplars kept in the roof tiles of certain *n-eañ kuk* sometimes showed patterns that connected them with more restricted male domains. The association of patterned knives with men's ranks had faded in the same way as pounders and they were also rather kept and passed on inside matrilines.

In the past, according to Kirk Huffman, the *no-löt* related carvings showing patterns, often successive openworked lozenges or circles, as well as figures on their handles or upper ends, were linked to the successive ranks men take in the status alteration system. Each pattern was specifically associated with hierarchical position and these objects were of the kind that should be publicly acquired or *kole* (in Mota) in order for the initiate to validate his new status. Their use would then have been restricted to men who indeed had acquired the related status and rights to prepare food and eat from the fire inside *ne-gemel* to which the carvings were linked. The carved patterns representing lozenges or circles, especially on knives in fact showed these successive ovens and ranked fires (Huffman 1996c: 206). This was readily explained as well by Mere Lava men, but they added laughingly that these patterns were actually also linked to a very specifically female element (Deacon Steve Turris, Jif Luc Wokot, Philip Gen, Tasmat village, 07/2011), thus connecting further *no-löt* related carvings and stone ovens with ideas about transformation, containment and revelation, expressed through the metaphor of sexual reproduction.

If associated with ranks, these variously patterned carvings were nevertheless also related in interlocutor's discourses to specific matrilines, *ne-tēgētēgē*. When looking at pictures of some *no-löt* related carvings identified as coming from Mere Lava, it was thus explained that the patterns belonged to *tēgētēgē* (Leo Swithun, Palon area, Espiritu Santo, 25/11/2010). Hence, as stated above about the patterns and shapes of the *temet* headdresses in the context of the *na-salagor*, it seemed that, at least according to people's current conceptions, the transmission of the rights to use these objects followed from both considerations about status or rank and matrilines. Moreover, this would account for the

variety of patterns still found on wooden knives on Mere Lava as in other islands of the Banks group, a variety that is also striking when looking at museum collections.

Finally, it was explained that one should not confuse the rights and skills necessary to make these carvings and the rights to use them, obtained in the past through the taking of ranks. Again, similarly to the *temet* headdresses, use-rights and manufacture-rights were described as being different things and, if they could be obtained at the same time, the latter kind of rights involved also longer processes that implied learning carving skills through participation and help given to an elder carver, usually being a real or classificatory father or maternal uncle (Philip Gen, Tasmat village, 12/06/2011).

So, if in the past, the preparation and consumption of *no-löt* was probably tightly related to the reproduction of hierarchized male human beings, it seemed that this was conceived of, at least partly, through an imagery drawing upon implicit statements about the (sexual) complementarity of men and women, which the patterns carved on the *no-löt* related items ultimately recalled. According to Rivers, this gender imagery was to be linked in a larger sense to the general shapes of a broader array of items. He thus noted that "the Banks islanders regard everything large or long as male" implying implicitly that the shorter things should be considered as female (Rivers 1914: 91). This assertion was still of relevance during my fieldwork and was confirmed by several interlocutors (Manlē Turris, Luganville, Espiritu Santo, 15/04/2011; Philip Gen, Tasmat village, Mere Lava, 21/06/2011). A lot of flat, round and short items could be considered as evoking femaleness while elongated items tended to be viewed as masculine (Deacon Steve Turris and Jif Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 17/05/2011). Thus, the carvings related to *no-löt* preparation were readily related to this general imagery, as they explained to me that "it is like a woman going with a man" when asked the reasons why men generally made sexual jokes during *no-löt* pounding (Deacon Steve Turris, Jif luc Wokot and Plilip Gen, Tasmat village, 17/05/2011). Hence, while on other islands, such as Espiritu Santo, *no-löt* dishes seemed to have been either from the man's kind or from the woman's kind (Candice Roze-Hoy, personal communication, 03/2012), on Mere Lava, the *ne-tabēa* were more clearly related to femaleness while pounders and knives were associated with maleness.

Therefore, similarly to the stone ovens, the *no-löt* related carvings conveyed ideas about the tight metaphorical connections between sexual intercourse, gender collaboration and food processing. Whereas in the past, those items were associated with the status alteration system and men's *ne-gemel*, and thus linked to the reproduction of men's hierarchy, they were also, at the time of the fieldwork, related to the matrilineal, in the same

way as land. Indeed, it was explained that "the carving should follow the land, at his death, one father gives them to his son and this son will give them to his own son and so on,..." (Jif Judah Tula, Tasmat village, 13/02/2011). Possessing *no-löt* related carvings from the ancestors could be seen as legitimising an individual's position in the matrilines. Metaphorically related to the reproduction of gendered and social human beings, their presence inside of *n-eañ kuk* conveyed, at the same time, ideas about the safety achieved by ancestors' acts of proper behaviours, since they ensured the transmission of resources, as well as ideas about the capacities for future reproduction of matrilines through the making and sharing of future *no-löt* with one's relatives.

Hence, although certain bodily gestures or tasks involved in food processing were indisputably linked to men or women, collaboration was again the most striking aspect that emerged from the analysis. Indeed this was further foregrounded by people when they talked about the importance of food, particularly in rituals. Thus, when I asked for the reason why the yams to be exchanged during certain phases of the life-cycle rituals should be of the domestic type *no-dom* and not of the wild kind *no-qor*, people always identified the collaborative nature of the work its production had necessitated as being the main explanation of that fact. An interlocutor told for instance that this was "because this is the work of the family, they worked together in the garden to produce it, it is a hard piece of work" (Philip Gen, Tasmat village, 09/02/2011). On this basis, and although they were not grown on Mere Lava, taro tubers were also identified as a product that could potentially replace yams in funerals. Coming from specific pieces of land, issued from the collaboration between gendered individuals and between *tavalsal*, foodstuffs were thus efficacious items that reproduced and transformed physical individuals, as well as internal and external matriline social bonds. However, as Mondragón put it, drawing upon the major insight into food consumption in Melanesia given by Strathern (1988: 288-298):

"(...) it is through such relational events that people constitute other people, and themselves, as agents with particular qualities because, if the production of living growth implies efficacious potency on the part of the cultivator, that efficacy can only be recognized at the moment in which crops are harvested, enter into social circulation and are (literally) consumed." (Mondragón 2004: 174).

Similarly to the different relationships that had to be revealed and legitimated in the context of house-building in order to make this space an efficacious one, food had thus

to be shared and distributed in order to gain its full social efficacy. The procedures and principles underlining this food ‘revelation’ will now be looked at in the context of house-building, during which the crucial importance of food sharing was notably expressed through the required character of the *gen tēqē-eañ* stage.

6.3 *Gen tēqē-eañ* and food preparation in the context of house construction

6.3.1. Food as pervading the entire building process

Beyond the technical actions linked directly to the building of the house itself, cooking and sharing food was as an integrative part of the technical operational sequence ‘building a kitchen house’. Indeed, similarly to its centrality in people’s everyday life, food processing and consumption pervaded all the different stages of the building process. As soon as the first *ne-wismat moëtup verē* was made to the foreman, this appeared to be central as working teams included women who would be expected to take care of feeding the team as well as contributing certain building materials such as the wild cane *no-mor* or the vines *na-garias* (Matias Rañ, Tasmat village, 22/05/2011). Generally constituted of women who were close relatives of the commissioner of the house (either his wife or real or classificatory mothers, sisters or daughters), the feminine part of the working team were consulted about the appropriate timetable for working sessions, as they were expected to manage the supplies of crops necessary to feed the team during these. Thus, in June 2011, the date of the erection of a *n-eañ kuk* ‘s structure, *tur n-eañ*, was for instance postponed so that women could have time to go and gather enough food supplies in the gardens. Moreover, this crucial role of women and food processing as part of the technical process was also clearly acknowledged at the time of the *wol-eañ moëtup verē*, when after the male workers of the team, female workers were publicly compensated for their contribution to the finished new building. The importance and recurrence of food making throughout the building process is shown in Figure 6.23, which summarises the different tasks to be completed according to gender and time, following the example of a *n-eañ kuk* built in Bulurig hamlet in June/July 2011. Food processing appeared hence to be correlative to most working sessions of the construction.

However, despite its ever-presence, food should nevertheless be distinguished according to some degrees, or levels, of sharing. Whereas the meals prepared to feed the

team after the working session were mostly direct compensations for their efforts, other meals prepared at the occasion of *biriñbiriñ* days such as *sinsina* or *tuptup* usually took more the form of celebratory meals, of which the expected outcome, if still related to the compensation for work, was more clearly related to the strengthening of social relationships in a prospective way. This was shown, for instance, by the composition of such meals, which generally comprised dishes associated with feasts, that is *no-lok* or *no-löt* with either fish or pieces of pork. Food, at such *biriñbiriñ* occasions was usually eaten close to the house construction spot. However, it could also be wrapped in *do-titēa* bundles and carried back home in *ne-gēt* baskets when the work was completed late. Either eating in or taking the food away, the emphasis in people's discourses was always put on the importance of the appropriate sharing of the food by women.

This sharing usually occurred as follows: once they had taken out the cooked bundles of pudding from the stone oven and arranged it on the ground of the kitchen, women gather around them and cut the tying ropes with *ne-gisel wirig*. The hot banana leaves were unfolded to reveal the smoking puddings, which were immediately cut with *ne-gisel wirig* into square pieces. The pudding disc was firstly cut into parallel strips, which were then individually divided again into pieces. During food processing, the number of people to be fed had been carefully counted, based on who had come and helped even if not for the whole day. At the distribution time, *esig nu-gen*, individual portions constituted of pieces of the various *no-lok* and fish, canned fish, corned beef or pork were distributed in plates or *do-titēa* bundles. If all the portions were not constituted of the exact amount of same *no-lok* pieces and *mit* kind, the crucial importance was that they should be judged equivalent one from the other. An exception to this was formulated as being the huge portions of food distributed to honoured people or guests. Most often, these were made at the very beginning of the sharing in order to ensure that they would not lack any kind of food and that the quantity of food they contained would be large enough. In the case of the house building, these larger portions were usually offered to the foreman and sometimes to the people he himself designated as his main helpers.

Similarly to what has been stated above about daily life and celebratory moments, the food distribution process in the context of house building was therefore a crucial point at which social relationships were acknowledged and transformed, revealing people's social position.

Moreover, it also appeared as an important time at which fundamental values were conveyed, that echoed the positively-valued skills of men when building a house.

6.3.2. Qualitative appraisals of food production and distribution

During distribution moments, women were strongly expected to share the food evenly, which, as we said, implied first that they should have carefully counted or evaluated the number of persons to be fed from the time they had gone to gather raw crops and food-related materials in the gardens. Secondly, they would have to take into account the whole set of helpers involved in the specific phase of the construction. Indeed, even the people who came to help for only a few hours should be fed, *do-titea* bundles being carried back for them by their relatives if they were not attending the distribution itself. The planning skills that women, and especially the closest kinswomen of the commissioner, were expected to show, somewhat evoked the organisational skills that the foreman and the commissioner were expected to demonstrate when they planned the various working sessions. Overall, people hence generally stressed the fundamental importance of women possessing this ability to appropriately and equally balance the amount of food given to each person taking part to the construction, according to his or her social position.

A positive emphasis put on balance and appropriateness was also expressed through the judgments people voiced about food itself. Much value was given for instance to the fact that a *no-lok* pudding should present two layers of *no-lok* evenly distributed over the entire surface, which was said to be ‘making straight, with balance’ the *no-lok*, *da ttareas nu-gen*. Similarly, the two layers should be of an equal thickness, lest they would be judged as *ti won gor tia*, ‘not being properly stuffed’. Finally, the central layer of *ne-ñiē* nuts should be thick enough for the *no-lok* to be found rich or fatty, *löllör*. As far as taste was concerned, this richness was considered one of the most important aspects of food, together with saltiness. The combination of these two aspects was expressed through the term *derñwöt*, ‘tasting good, delicious or sweet’, which demonstrated the knowledge and skills, *nu-ereris*, of the cooks. These characteristics were generally found also in the appraisals of other kind of dishes such as *no-löt*, of which the layer of pudding should also be evenly spread over the wooden dish, or pork that should be fatty enough. Hence, balance, richness and saltiness seem to be the main elements of good cuisine on Mere Lava. This, together with the positive valuation of appropriateness and balance conveyed at the time of the distribution, strongly linked women’s skills and the men’s ones shown during the construction of a house. Indeed, both sets of skills were judged according to the

same term, *nu-ttareas*, ‘making the thing straight, equally, balanced’ and both finished artefacts contained and revealed the knowledge and skills of their makers, *nu-ereris*.

The main means by which these values were conveyed was comments exchanged informally between people. This gossiping and commenting made up a large part of the discussions that animated groups of people during *biriñbiriñ* days, but also formed the basis of much chat accompanying people in their everyday lives. Such comments were for instance made at the time of the food processing for the birthday of a young child in June 2011. The women of two hamlets in Tasmat village, all close relatives, gathered in the early morning in the dark kitchen of the household to which the child belonged. While starting to peel the crops they had brought and those that had been gathered by the mother of the child, they began to comment on the food processing that had taken place the day before in order to feed a working team erecting the structure of a new *n-eañ kuk*, situated in their hamlet. Two young sisters aged 22 and 24 years old, who had been designated by the foreman as main cooks and had received part of the *ne-wismat moëtup verē* made to him, were especially criticised. According to the women, they had been unable to properly manage the food for the working team. As a first reproach, they were blamed for cooking at different places instead of cooking together. This had resulted in twice the amount of food needed to feed the working crew and was considered as a waste. Their lack of organisational skills was thus heavily criticised, as well as the lack of management from their mother, who had preferred to go to work in her own garden rather than properly advising her daughters. Another critique arose from the fact that, during another work session, the two young women had not correctly estimated the number of *do-vor* leaves they would need to cover the stone oven at the moment of the baking of the food. Consequently, they had inadequately covered it, *nu-törtöru nu-siet*, and obtained only half-cooked food, *no-lok nu-sumat*, which was judged highly inappropriate. The whole gossip session, carefully listened to by female children who attended and helped the preparation at that time (and by me), was then concluded by statements about the education of children and the fact that modern young women were no longer educated the way they used to be

Therefore, beyond the efficacious action on social relationships that foodstuffs, as multifaceted artefacts, performed during events such as the stages of the building process, they also importantly contributed to convey fundamental values about what should be seen as appropriate and positively judged. In that, similarly to houses, the diverse food dishes could be considered to possess a certain agency that precisely followed from their multifaceted character.

Moreover, if food processing was thus to be considered as an integral aspect of the technical building process, it seemed then that *n-eañ kuk* should similarly be considered as integral parts of cooking, as it provided the spatial and architectural structure in which cooking as a social and technical process took place. Such *moëtup verē* as the *gen tēqē-eañ* articulated the relationships between *n-eañ kuk* and food. It showed the fundamental importance of the revelation moments in which the multidimensional aspects of both artefacts were at the same time deconstructed, revealed to the audience and, hence created them as efficacious items.

6.3.3. *Gen tēqē-eañ*: the link between food and *n-eañ kuk*

Usually made at the same time as *wol-eañ*, *gen tēqē-eañ* was nevertheless considered as a stage to be performed before the house could be ‘paid’. This sharing of food with relatives and the working team that built the house marked the very moment when it was publicly shown as being finished and functional: “*Gen tēqē-eañ* means that the fire is lit again inside the *n-eañ kuk*, that everything is finished, that the house is physically completed. Everybody is glad that everything is completed” (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 12/06/2011). Through that, both food and buildings were linked together as socially meaningful items that would ensure the reproduction of social relationships and matrilines at future times. This was particularly expressed through the imagery of the fire made in the stone oven, which appeared as a materialisation of the social transformative and reproductive potential of the place.

While the assertions according to which sharing food both identified eaters and differentiated the one being fed from the feeder (Strathern 1988: 289-90, see also Chapter 4) on Mere Lava, in the context of events such as *gen tēqē-eañ*, the emphasis seemed rather to be put on the strong links of collaboration between the two *tavalsal* and between men and women. Proceeding from the collaborative work in the garden, brought individually by women coming to attend the event, processed communally in order to make the *no-lok* and *no-löt* that would feed the whole assembly, the crops and meat eaten during shared feasting meals indeed seemed more imbued with conceptions about collaboration than with distinctions between some who fed and some who were fed. At the level of gender, whereas Mondragón noted for the Torres islands that “the actual preparation of food crops, or of a pig, a chicken or a bullock, for consumption, are

processes which evidence the transference of the food crops, or the animal, from the status of what Strathern would have label a ‘same-sex construct (i.e. the outcome of a male cultivator’s horticultural effort, and/or his nourishment of a pig, for example) into an object of ‘cross-sex’ transformation (Strathern 1988: 182-187, 294)" (Mondragón 2004: 176), it seemed that this assertion would perhaps need to be refined on Mere Lava, at least in the case of *no-lok*. Indeed resulting from heterogeneous contributions and collaboratively obtained crops, *no-lok* was nevertheless qualified as being associated with femaleness when cooked. Only when mixed with *ni-mit* such as fish or pork, similarly resulting from collaborative work but associated with male processing (cooking pieces of pork or fish were usually strictly male-related tasks, at least in feasting contexts) could these *no-lok* be considered again as ‘cross-sex’ products. By contrast, *no-löt* with the *ne-ñiē* nuts covering it considered as *ni-mit*, was often accompanied by fish or pork, relating this dish more strictly to maleness.

Part II: Conclusion

The analysis of making processes showed that while both *n-eañ kuk* and food should be seen as transformative constructions in which numerous aspects and conceptions were enmeshed, this multidimensional aspect was importantly grounded in the particular ways in which they were materially produced. Houses thus gained efficacy as much through material assemblages that made them into coherent physical containers as through social assemblages that actualised groups and individual bonds in relation to it. Food processing similarly entangled social and material actions in a way that importantly imbued food dishes with fundamental transformative potencies.

Not only showing how ideas about gender and sociality were related to conceptions about space and time at various levels, technical production processes also demonstrated how such artefacts as houses or food embodied these various dimensions on Mere Lava, as in many islands of Melanesia. In addition, they revealed how these ideas conflated at a level that stressed the importance of the notion of collaboration between individuals and groups. This made *n-eañ kuk* and food efficacious entities linked to transformation and reproduction, at the precise condition that their aggregated but coherent character was validated through occasions such as public meetings and celebratory days. The *gen tēqē-eañ* appeared as one of those. During this event, the link between the kitchen and the food that was to be processed inside at future times was shown. Indeed, the efficacy of the kitchen was then revealed as depending importantly on the lighting of the fire in the kitchen's stone oven. In turn, this very action was not only thought of as the *wol-eañ moëtup verē* prerequisite, but also showed that the efficacy of food to reproduce social relationships similarly depended on the household's appropriate position in the social orders. The fact that relatives entered the *n-eañ kuk* and shared a meal cooked inside demonstrated their recognition of the commissioner's and his family's rights to land and gardens where the food was grown and harvested. If we consider that this was ultimately enacted through the building of a *n-eañ kuk*, we see now that a close intertwining of both kinds of artefact was therefore performed at the same time as they were materially produced.

These multiple layers of interaction between *n-eañ kuk*, food and people finally made these artefacts into culturally striking items. As such they came to stand as crucial elements that materialised ideas about the reproduction of the social order through time.

The last part of the thesis will focus on food and kitchen houses as prominent items crystallising people's conceptions about sociality through time, especially looking at the relations of these artefacts with the notion of *histri*.

PART III

HOUSES, FOOD AND HISTORY



Figure III.01: View of a decayed house situated close to the main path, *ne-metsal lap*, Beop Hamlet, Tasmat village, 04/05/2011.

From the 1950s onwards, with the development of "island-oriented" histories, social historians focusing on the Pacific islands increasingly criticised the Western-focus that previously dominated the discipline.⁹⁹ Anthropology has had a crucial role in this historical

⁹⁹ See for instance Davidson (1966: 5-21). Although these "island oriented" studies drew mainly upon written sources by European voyagers, traders, missionaries or colonial officials, they nevertheless constituted a valuable attempt at reconsidering Pacific islanders' agencies (Hooper and Huntsman 1990: 13-14). See also

integration of indigenous presence and indigenous empowerment, through critical concerns arising from the consideration of paradigms such as evolutionism, functionalism and structuralism.¹⁰⁰ In his classical study *Islands of History*, Marshall Sahlins denounced Western oppositions such as those between systems and events or past and present. Cultural systems, he stressed, are fundamentally historical, and continuously reproduced in action, while in turn history has to be appraised as a cultural phenomenon. Indeed "different cultural orders have their own, distinctive modes of historical production" (Sahlins 1985: 10). Theorising historical change, he developed the idea of "structures of conjuncture" based on two kinds of frames, the interrelation of which would be the locus of the cultural shaping of social groups into bounded entities. On one hand, prescriptive structures would dictate norms and hence define the potential extension of innovations or change so that the new elements would be inscribed among conventionally recognised efficacious actions and items. On the other hand, performative structures would constantly and empirically reappraise, and play with, the "appropriate" order, showing that the notion of society itself should be understood as crucially dynamic (Sahlins 1985: 11). Hence, he saw the event as being located in the interplay between prescriptive and performative structures: "the event is a happening interpreted – and interpretations vary" (1985: 153). Local conceptions of events would thus be constituent parts of the ways different regimes of historicity are created and transformed. Despite being a seminal study, later critiques have rightfully remarked the insufficiency of Sahlins' theories to consider how individual memories are transformed into collectively shared histories (Friedman and Sahlins 1988, Toren 1988, Ballard 2003), a question which this section will attempt to address, by focusing on artefacts such as houses and food in the Mere Lava context.

In another influential study, Strathern, looking at the arrival of Europeans in Papua New Guinea, defined this event as "one [that] encapsulated both past and future time; indeed the two were conflated in so far as the second coming would bring not the generations unborn but generations already deceased, in the form of ancestors" (1990: 25). She asserted that, at least in Melanesia, events should be seen as performances, or images, that contained in themselves their own prior context, without a need to be contextualised according to previous structures, or assemblage of other events. Consequently events

Dening (1980, 1991), Maude (1971), Howe (1979), Leckie (1983), Routledge (1985), Douglas (1998), Merle and Naepels (2003).

¹⁰⁰ See for instance Fabian's seminal *Time and the Other* (1983), Thomas' *Out of time* (1989), and also Siikala (1990), Biersack (1991), Carrier (1992), Borofsky (2000).

should be known by their effects: "the problem lay in what was to be the future outcome of the performance, its consequences for the future, what would be revealed next, in short its further effect" (1990: 33). This emphasis on effect also underlined Ballard's reappraisal of what would actually constitute an historical event. Following Bensa and Fassin's consideration of events as ruptures or failures (2002), he analysed the reasons why first contacts between Huli Papua New Guinea highlanders and the two Fox gold-digger brothers, which marked individual memories of highlanders, were not transmitted to the level of collective recollections of past in the region (Ballard 2003). According to him, the failure to come to a consensus about the very nature of the Fox brothers prevented individual stories from being transformed into acknowledged histories. This first contact would hence be better defined as a non-event, Ballard asserted, and, in turn, he emphasised the transmissive and heritable character of what would be an historical event (2003: 134). This corresponded to what Strathern already perceived when she stressed the cruciality of audiences or witnesses to events: "An event taken as a performance is to be known by its effect: it is understood in terms of what it contains, the forms that conceal or reveal, registered in the actions of those who witness it" (Strathern 1990: 29).

Therefore, she further concluded that the study of history or events can epistemologically be related to the study of artefacts: both should be appraised as efficacious images materialising or performing conceptual ideas about sociality and space-time. Close and distant time and space would therefore conflate into a single event or artefact containing in itself past and future potentialities. Events, in the same way as artefacts could be seen as "an enactment" not so much concerned with showing "the ground rules of sociality (...), but the ability of persons to act in relation to these" (Strathern 1990: 40-41). Events or artefacts should therefore be analysed as performed actions and their efficacy depends importantly on collective witnesses and acknowledgment.

Artefacts such as houses or food have been the subject of numerous comments regarding the ways in which they relate to people's diverse temporalities and conceptions of history (for instance Waterson 1990, Fox 1993, Stasch 2011 for houses; Douglas 1966, 1975, 1984; Weiner 1980, Munn 1986, Sutton 2001 for food).¹⁰¹ Some tended to separate

¹⁰¹ I follow here the distinction between "time as a culturally specific category" and "temporalities" as being "the multiple ways in which time-experience is made manifest" pointed out in Mondragón's work (2006: 2). Thus, history as a culturally specific concept would be one expression of temporality among, and interrelated with, others.

dwelling houses and everyday food from such buildings as men's houses or meeting houses and food prepared and exchanged in a ritual context. In her Trobriands account, Weiner for instance, associated women's valuables and more generally what she located as female-related domestic domains with events linked to ahistorical time and space and the reproduction of the cosmogonic order, while male-related domains such as kula exchanges, or men's houses, would be linked with historical events and reproduction of sociality (Weiner 1976: 20, Jolly 1992: 38). Yet, since then, these assertions have been widely criticised (Jolly and Macintyre 1989). In the same way as women's agencies were reasserted and their historical presence affirmed, dwelling houses or casual food processing have been analysed as artefacts and actions situated at the core of people's temporal and historical conceptions.

Overcoming these distinctions, Stasch accurately showed, for instance, how Korowai houses from West Papua could be analysed as "indexical icons of temporality", signifying multiple spheres of temporality in various ways (2011: 330). Following the same interest in the multidimensional aspect of houses and food dishes, the previous parts of the thesis have attempted to identify more precisely various aspects of both the making and usage of these artefacts. This showed them as possessing a highly constructed efficacy, significantly based on proper 'making' technical processes including the performances of certain *moëtup verē*, as well as on-going usage and living from, with and in it. It ultimately emphasised the values of balance, and people's collaboration with each other. The next chapter will now highlight how these aspects crucially associated houses and food with conceptual ideas linked to temporality, especially focusing on their association to the specific form of temporal experience which is defined as *histri* in Vanuatu. However, rather than approaching it in semiotic terms, as Stasch did, it will focus on the way technical processes of production as well as usage shaped houses or food as efficacious devices, intricately relating them to ideas about *histri* and more generally about the construction of persons and social dynamics. This will finally point out the importance of a specific "social aesthetic" based on tying, wrapping, containment/revelation processes and the liminal positions of houses and food (see also Rio 2009).

Chapter 7: Houses and food as materialisation of *histri*

In Vanuatu, conceptions related to the passage of time, events, and the way people formulated and negotiated their impact on their present lives was intimately related to the practice of narrating stories. Recounting such a story about the arrival of a whiteman, Jimmy, that Taylor heard several times in Sia Raga, north Pentecost, he remarked: "For the people who tell it, the story of Jimmy does more than provide a framework through which to explore the politics of the past. At the same time, its powerful evocation of insider-outsider relations was made to confront issues regarding neocolonial social relations in the present." (Taylor 2008: 69-70). In his view, to take the stories seriously as histories necessitated also considering how they could be made to serve a host of conflicting interests according to the contexts that surrounded their recounting, here for instance the presence of a white anthropologist. In the same way, stories and the way artefacts were presented to me during fieldwork were linked, as already noted above, to my work with the Vanuatu Cultural Center. Thus, it translated specific aims of people sharing information with me. This is not to say that personal bonds of friendship and esteem did not also direct our interrelations, but at least in some cases, or concerning specific topics, certain socio-political purposes informed the way some people came to ask me to record stories or to attend certain events. Yet, in turn, some associations they took for granted also helped me understand some aspects of my research. A prominent example was the way they straightforwardly related my interest in architecture and food to the recording of *histri*, the Bislama translation for history.

Anthropologists such as Rodman (1985) or Taylor (2008) have already pointed out the cultural relevance of associations between architecture, food and *histri* in Vanuatu. Taylor's last part of his north Pentecost monograph focused for instance on the ways *gamali* (in Raga language) and houses in general "are (...) part of a broader corpus of grown and made things that give shape to Sia Raga renditions of past and present. Through these things," he added "the links that bind people together, with their ancestors, and with their land, are materialized and crystallized" (Taylor 2008: 171). Whereas this appears to be

something common at least throughout Southeast Asia and the Pacific area (Waterson 1990, Fox 1993, Carsten and Hugh Jones 1995), I shall argue that the precise way in which these artefacts do what they do, and relate to a specific sense of time and *histri*, is grounded in their material features and therefore merit a local examination. Consequently, drawing upon the previous parts of the thesis, this last chapter will bind together the analyses of houses' and food's usage and making in order to highlight some of the ways in which such artefacts dynamically articulated conceptions about past, present and future on Mere Lava. It will start with a brief section dedicated to the concept of *histri* itself, examined through the lens of meanings and contexts in which this word was used in front of, or with me, during fieldwork. Then both kinds of material artefacts' relations to *histri* will be considered in order to eventually give elements to understand the prominence of such items of material culture in the construction of persons and identities in Vanuatu today.

7.1 The notion of *histri*

Histri, as it first sounds, was on Mere Lava as elsewhere in Vanuatu a concept thoroughly grounded in colonial times, at least as far as the word is concerned. On the one hand, it could convey, particularly on a national scale, a sense of the past seen as a whole, encompassing a set of events that shaped the country's current situation, as the title of the educational manual *Histri blong Yumi* seems to evoke (Lightner and Naupa 2005). On the other hand, especially as understood and used by people on a daily basis, it corresponded to the common Pacific condensation of particular social, spatial and temporal dimensions used by people in order to talk about and achieve intended effects in the world, either legitimating social positions and land rights or simply valuing or strengthening particular social bonds (see for instance Munn 1986, Strathern 1990, Küchler 2002a).

Mere Lava people explained *histri* as primarily defined by social and spatial efficacy. If my interlocutors could not give a direct Mwerlap translation for this term, they first formulated it as being roughly equivalent to *n-ēs t-erön*, 'the life of old times'. Whereas here the term *erön* was defined as generally expressing past, a sense of the particular presence and potentiality of this notion could also be gathered through the expression *teorön* used to translate the idea of states of being, or relations, 'that will always last'. It was, for instance, the term used to translate the bible expression "now and for

ever". In addition, as I asked people again about this notion, *histri* became more and more used in the context of my recording of *kastom* stories recounting genealogies related to matrilines.

At that time, they explained to me that *histri* would correspond not to the story itself but to the very act of telling the story of one's matriline, *nu-sussur ne-tēgētēgē*, in front of an audience. Therefore, it always encompassed a legitimating aspect, placing the story teller and his kin on a social map marked by people's movement in the landscape, the birth of new generations and alliances between matrilines. Such kind of *kastom* stories were preferably told by male elders, often the head of the matrilines, *nu-sur ne-tēgētēgē*, who were considered to possess the appropriate knowledge. Although one elder was usually considered more than others as an appropriate speaker, the stories were generally told collectively, with other men of the matriline acknowledging it, adding some details or sometimes discussing it when they were able to do so. Younger members of the matriline were usually encouraged to attend the story-telling session, for them to learn from their maternal uncles. Most often, the recording session was hence perceived and organised as an efficacious performance, understood as actually being *histri*. I was indeed told several times as a matter of explanation for this Bislama term: "We are making *histri* right now" (Manlē Turris, 07/01/2011, Tasmat village).¹⁰² In a number of cases, the story teller used a written account of the story to support his memory. This could take the form of either genealogical trees or lists of names and places, always giving prominent roles to women (Figure 4.07). Therefore, the stories linked to matrilines appeared as things given existence through action, *nu-sussur ne-tēgētēgē*, and through being told in front of an audience. They were understood as re-creating the very relations between people and land, and because they had such an efficacy, competitive versions of them were the focus of intense discussions.¹⁰³

Secondly, on Mere Lava *histri* also corresponded to events that socially and spatially marked the island (see also Crowley 1995: 97). The arrival of Bishop Patteson and the cycad tree that was planted in Leurok hamlet, where he first stayed, was typically described as being one *histri*. It was also the case for the last important earthquakes and hurricanes that transformed the landscape, or for the refashioning of the path going around

¹⁰² This equivalence between genealogical narratives and the term *histri* was also noted by François for the Mwotlap language (François 2011: 30).

¹⁰³ Those discussions could include knowledgeable elder women as much as men. If stories were generally told by men, in some cases, women such as *ne-ñweter* were said to be the ones possessing authority to solve the arguments about the 'truth' of competitive versions.

the whole island. On a more personal level, however, any kind of social or spatial action could be described as being *histri* as soon as it was witnessed by other people. While planting my first island cabbage in the garden of one of my adoptive mothers, she stopped me in order to call other workers to gather and witness it, explaining to me that she had to do so because she wanted this action to become *histri blong me ia*, 'my history'. Generally speaking, *histri* encompassed all ceremonial actions and *moëtup verē*, social changes, as well as events that marked or transformed people or land. The fundamental core of the concept seemed again to reside in the fact that *histri* was something performative and continuously productive. It implied not only the entire substance or matter that formed people as they presently were but equally encompassed an understanding that those things would significantly impact their future. This aspect was stressed by an interlocutor as being a major difference from Western conceptions about history: "the white man time starts up and goes downward, but if you look at one tree, you cannot start with its branches, you have to start with its roots. The white man starts with the branches. It is the same as a child who has to start small and then grow as an adult, he cannot start as a grown-up directly" (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 24/04/2011).

Although we find here a certain echo of Taylor's account about Sia Raga ideas about history, especially its metaphorical representation as a growing tree whose branches corresponded to socio-spatial developments of the society (Taylor 2008: 74), no drawings like the one he collected on northern Pentecost were shown to me on Mere Lava. However, houses were similarly given significance in terms of *histri*, and so were food dishes when shared and circulated.

7.2 Houses and *histri* on Mere Lava

On Mere Lava, the ways in which houses and especially kitchen houses, *n-eañ kuk*, related to the notion of *histri* were grounded in a common multidimensional aspect and the tight link of both *histri* and houses with the reproduction of sociality and the relation to land through time. The concept of *histri*, as we just described above, collated ideas about past and future sociality anchored in the landscape. Hence it expressed the entanglement of social, spatial and temporal realms into one single, performative concept. Similarly, material and formal qualities of the houses appeared to condense diverse meaningful

elements associated with those dimensions into a transformative space that operated at several levels.

Growing in the landscape even before their construction as architectural units, the houses were intricately related, through wooden beams and poles, sago palm leaf tiles and vine ties, to the places and creeks in which the commissioner possessed rights. The building thus provided, from the very first steps of its construction, a legitimisation of the latter's appropriate 'standing' in these areas and use of their resources. Possessing these rights placed the commissioner in a position to be looked at, and acknowledged as, the appropriate current 'owner' of these places. Moreover, land rights contained in themselves the continuous set of *moëtup verē* social gestures, especially those made for funerals that shaped the commissioner as a person over the course of his life. To build a new house in an appropriate place was hence also a meaningful action recalling and reaffirming the social bonds that linked the commissioner and his family to both ancestors and living beings, and to the places they had lived on and successively inherited rights over. As Bachelard would have put it "an entire past comes to dwell in a new house" (1964: 5, quoted in Taylor 2008: 171). In the Mere Lava case, this link to the ancestors was especially made significant when people came back to places where some of their ancestors had lived a long time ago, and it sometimes influenced the way houses were built. John Hubart, an old man in his late seventies, explained to me for instance that he inherited the rights to the place he had built his houses, in Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, from his great-grandmother, who was the last *ne-ñweter* of the island. He was born the same year as she died, in 1937, and this was the reason why, shortly before her death, she had expressed her will to transfer the rights to this place to him, although he was still a young baby. Much later in the 1980s, when he had decided to come back to the place with his wife, he had asked his brother-in-law, Manasē Wovē, who possessed the appropriate rights and knowledge to do so, to carve and paint the front and back walls of the *n-eañ kuk* with the powerful patterns related to *ne-ñweter*. He had done that, he said, in memory of his high-ranking female ancestor and for the future generations not to forget these patterns. Indeed, at that time, the rights had also been transmitted to one of Manasē Wovē's younger nephews, Adam Valuwa, who had indeed become at the time of my fieldwork the head of his matriline (John Hubart, 25/04/2011, Leqel village).

In addition to past sociality, houses also came to materialise the present bonds, always dynamically negotiated, between people, through both the building processes and the current residence patterns. Since the changing choices of residence were informed by,

and at the same time created social bonds on an everyday basis, houses instantiated the contemporary state of relationships between relatives in and between villages. This was clearly exemplified by an argument that arose in Tasmat village between affinal relatives that physically took the form of, and was expressed through, damage to house parts and eventually ended with a change of residence. This happened during an all-night drinking party in a hamlet where one family had been residing according to an agreement with the relatives of the woman, that is with affinal relatives of her husband. In a fit of anger, the latter destroyed parts of the kitchen house he was residing in at that time. Among the reasons he gave to explain his action was the fact that he felt inadequate recognition was given for the care he and his siblings gave to an old couple, who also resided in the same hamlet from time to time. This old couple had taken care of his wife's mother while she was a child, and that was the reason why he and his wife were now, in their turn, taking care of them in their latter days because none of the old woman's closest relatives (the man's actual affinal relatives) were still residing on Mere Lava. This originally formed the basis of the mutual agreement allowing this man and his family to come and reside in this hamlet with the old couple. However, after the damage had occurred, the affair was discussed amongst elders of the matriline that possessed rights over this hamlet and had built the damaged house. They asked for the house to be repaired and it was decided that in order to avoid further incidents the man responsible and his family would have to change residence and "go back to the proper place where they belonged" (Manlē Turris and Leo Swithun, 26/04/2011, Luganville, Espiritu Santo). This specific case, particularly the fact that houses were actually the privileged objects against which the man had turned his anger, in order to express underlying relational issues between him and his affinal relatives, was characteristic of the ways in which buildings were crucial artefacts materialising social dynamics on Mere Lava. As we have seen above, the same idea was also strikingly emphasised in discourses surrounding funerary feasts and rites, that featured houses, and particularly the possibility of being hosted in them, as prominent metaphors for the continuation of relationships between remaining relatives after a death.

Eventually, beyond the merging of people with land and their dynamic relationships with both ancestors and the living, houses also related to social processes through the very characteristics of their physical construction. They did so in two ways. Firstly, the building was always a performative process during which social bonds were

actualised and collaboration as well as leadership patterns were demonstrated.¹⁰⁴ Secondly, houses physically materialised more abstract ideas underlying the past and present construction of sociality.¹⁰⁵ The two sides of the house's roof, *ne-tavalon*, joining at the level of the ridgepole, *ne-qet-eañ*, and through the transversal beam, *no-wolwol*, evoked the two sides or paths, *ne-tavalsal*, organising the living, joined together through marriage, *ne-legleg* and through the proper 'payment' of brideprice. The balance of the house, achieved through the appropriate mastering of people's work and mutual collaboration by the foreman and the commissioner, acted as a metaphor for an equivalent feeling of balance that was expressed as being the purpose of social control exerted on young people from both sides, especially concerning the choice of their spouse. Where collaborations of commissioners and foremen stood for the collaboration of the two sides, allowing houses' balance, collaborations of fathers and maternal uncles were, through a similar process, supposed to allow intermatriline relationships to remain balanced and thus lead to peace, *na-tañwat*. However, in the same way as the balance of the house was physically achieved through adjustments based on trial and error, general social balance was continuously maintained through contextual adjustments according to contingent social events. Innovations and situational management were therefore constitutive parts of the ways both houses and sociality were constructed. Mere Lava houses were indeed not static images or metaphors, they appeared as performative constructions that both expressed and created sociality and links to land (see also Taylor 2008: 182-183).

Connections between places and houses as artefacts were also demonstrated through a focus on this building as a privileged item exhibiting visually striking features linked to memory. This, in a sense, made *n-eañ kuk* into mnemonic devices. Showing particular designs or features inherited from ancestors or hosting artefacts particularly linked to them such as walking sticks, bows and arrows or *no-löt* related carvings, houses contained a sense of these past social bonds. But specific houses were even further and more directly associated with people who had built them or had lived in them. This was shown first by the *moëtup verē*, a small amount of cash money, given by commissioners to the previous builder (or his siblings or close relatives when he had died) if they had to dismantle an old and decayed *n-eañ kuk* in order to rebuild it. By the same logic, houses where people had died were usually left to decay after the set of funeral feasts had been completed. In other cases, when the death of a member of the household had occurred on

¹⁰⁴ See Part II.

¹⁰⁵ See Part I.

another island or outside the house, close relatives could abandon the place only temporarily. Usually at that time, the remaining relatives of the deceased would go to live with close kin residing in another hamlet (often their sisters, brothers, parents or children). When they came back for the first time to the place associated with the deceased person, they would have to perform a *moëtup verē*, called *veoret*, giving a few coins to the deceased's siblings in order to walk again through paths and places the deceased had once marked with his/her everyday presence. Similarly, a small amount of cash money was also given in order "to re-open the doors" of the houses where the deceased person had lived. Then, sometimes years after the death, sorrow and grief were said to come to an end when the last tears were dropped on the houses' doors and then on the deceased's personal effects kept inside.

Houses were therefore artefacts loaded with personal memories and emotions. Moreover, buildings could further continue to be a support for commemorative expressions. Personal items such as clothes could be displayed as tokens of memory on the front wall of the *n-eañ kuk* or of the *n-eañ bë moëtur* in which the deceased lived. These displayed items, made in order to remember *na-tam*, 'the love and care', that once linked those living with the deceased, were also said to show the deep respect, *no-domdomwēn*, of the living towards him/her:

"That dress was one of my older sister's favourite ones, this is why I put it here as a memory. It is because I had respect and love for her, she took care of me, I respected her. When she was alive my children had *tula* me to her and she had done so as well. When she died we have made the *da-matë moëtup verē*. This dress is to remember the good person she was" (Elin Ben, 02/02/2011, Tasmat village).

Being placed on the front wall of houses, these memory-loaded items thus linked past and present human beings, in a continuous thread of *na-tam* relations, encompassing both *moëtup verē*, especially funerary ones, and daily life.

Therefore, at a first glance, houses appeared to be highly personal artefacts whose mnemonic dimension rendered it difficult to understand why they were so often rebuilt, or moved as people changed residence. However, as Rodman pointed for Ambae:

"(...) kinship requires spatial expression in place as well as expression in personified symbols. One way in which kinship achieves this expression can be through houses themselves. The mobility of houses symbolizes the extent of land rights and substance as the residential group expands or dwindles, and emphasizes the importance of housing as a symbol of co-residence in translating substance into land." (Rodman 1985: 70).

Similarly on Mere Lava, houses were to be understood as instantiations that performed broader kinship bonds in the landscape, in personified ways. The current appearance of a house materialised the current state of a person's social bonds, and recalled at the same time the full set of relationships with people and land that had caused this particular situation to emerge. The dialectical relationship between the ephemerality of houses, due in part to the impermanence of their materials, in part to contextual contingencies, and the rootedness of people's relationships to land created a specific sense of place that could accurately be described in Rodman's terms: "Inherently without dimensions, space becomes place through the implantation of people and events in the creation of a historically crafted landscape" (Rodman 1985: 68). New houses on Mere Lava thus actualised people's experiences in the landscape and created the changing network of places. This was also most striking through the fact that people, especially elders, could be called by the name of the hamlet where they lived. Especially at ceremonial times, these alternative names allowed speakers to publicly respect name avoidances between father/mother-in-law and daughter/son-in-law, for they could be called "uncle Qorqas" or "olfa Qorqas", 'old man from the Qorqas hamlet'.

However, houses were not reducible to ephemeral materialisations and actualisations, for new buildings often retained something of the previous construction, either wall panels or thatch sections. Wooden planks constituting the front wall were especially kept and recycled as part of new houses, partly because they were not easy to produce in an island where operational chainsaws were rarely found. Hence, material details of a house could often be traced from previous constructions sometimes more than fifty years old to the present day and created a sense in which ephemeral houses were also linked to past social movements in a network of places. Through material bonds as well as shared structural qualities, houses thus performed important roles in linking together people and place through time.

Therefore, houses, especially *n-eañ kuk*, seemed to relate to the notion of *histri* in a way that evoked Strathern's assertion that some events, such as the advent of Europeans

in the case she developed, could have been seen by Melanesians "in the form of an artefact or a performance" (Strathern 1990: 26). Following the analogy drawn by Strathern between events and artefacts as performances, I shall argue here that houses indeed could themselves be analogically regarded in the same way as the Mere Lava understanding of *histri*, that is as a set of historical events that dynamically marked both persons and landscape.¹⁰⁶

Histri, on the one hand, referred to the succession of one's ancestors as recounted in *kastom* stories, *nu-sussur ne-tēgētēgē*. In this context, the various ceremonial feasts and *moëtup verē* that shaped people into persons and made them agents in those genealogies appeared as historical events. They were crucial performances that marked sociality and, in order to serve that purpose, they had to be witnessed. Among the steps fundamental to the formation of persons, to commission a house was considered a stage that any young man was supposed to undergo. To build a *n-eañ kuk* was a stage that couples were supposed to face together, and at that point a particular emphasis was put on the idea of collaboration between *tavalsal* matrilines and between men and women. This was, for instance, shown through the *moëtup verē* made at *wol-eañ* that saw the commissioner and his wife exchanging a small amount of money in order to publicly recognise their role as head of the family and head of the kitchen respectively. Then, it was further demonstrated through the commissioner's compensation to his foreman – coming from *tavalsal* matriline – and the building team for their work. Therefore, ceremonial feasts and events seemed to relate to the building's technical process in the way they both articulated ideas about collaboration shown at *biriñbiriñ* gatherings and *moëtup verē* times. In both cases, the performance in front of witnesses during both life-course events and house-building was said to be necessary in order to legitimate respective social positions and change, and to ensure the event's or artefact's efficacy.

On a more abstract level, houses and *histri* also appeared analogous because the conditions of their efficacy and relevance respectively as artefacts and as concepts were articulated in a tension between some acknowledged forms and principles and empirical developments drawing upon situational contingencies. *Biriñbiriñ* and life-course events were thus to be understood as part of *histri*: they related to other similar events through a common acknowledgment of the *moëtup verē* moment, mediated by the diverse comments made by the speaker and the audience, and in turn, as performances they allowed

¹⁰⁶ On the power of visual analogy in the way people think and continuously re-appraise the world, see Barbara Stafford's influential *Visual Analogy: Consciousness as the art of collecting* (1999).

innovations and changes to occur. Thus past and future were bound together and powerful devices which people used to act upon their lives were constituted. The funerary ritual described above, made for an old woman who was not yet dead, is an appropriate example. Similarly, houses were understood as being given efficacy at the time of *wol-eañ*, through the common validation of the appropriateness of the technical building-process including, among proper gestures, the conventional management of collaborative work by the commissioner and his foreman. Life-course events such as birth, marriage or death, like building a house, could also include innovative dimensions, provided that these were validated by a witnessing audience. At the end of July 2011, for instance, a large *n-eañ kuk* was re-built in Leqel village, commissioned by a young man, the household's head's son, who, at the time of the construction process, had been working in New Zealand for several years. Although his father managed the whole building process with a foreman chosen according to appropriate conventions regarding *tavalsal*, the young New Zealand worker came back in order to perform the *wol-eañ*. Speeches made at that time stressed the innovative elements of the process while it also carefully related them to established principles, so that the house and its commissioner would be socially, spatially and historically legitimated. Afterwards, the *jif*, who had made the speeches, explained that to pay for a house was a crucial stage for young people because:

"They become adult/potent persons doing that. But they have to prepare that step carefully. They must take their time and prepare the gardens first. They have to work with their family, and for the community first. They have to act in the ground and then, only after they have done so, after two or three years of preparation, they would be able to pay for a house properly. However, what Rabu has done is fine. He came with a lot of money from his work in New Zealand and paid the house whereas he was not living on the ground during the last years, but his money from New Zealand is still redistributed among a lot of persons and it will help a lot of persons from the island, so it is fine. There has been an agreement about that. Through his house, Rabu will be grounded in that place and his children too. That is what I explained to people today for they will be witnesses" (Jif Colin, 01/07/2011, Leqel village).

In addition, the house commissioned by the young worker was named *Siagror Varē*, meaning 'standing over the place to block it', which enhanced the claim he was willing to make about his relation to the place. Once witnessed by the audience, the unconventional commissioner was legitimated and the building process turned into an event of *histri*, which grounded him and his future heirs in that place.

Accordingly, the relation between houses and *histri* on Mere Lava appeared as located in an analogical relation between the visual artefacts and the concept. Both articulated similar ideas about important elements of social organisation, the two *tavalsal* for instance, land ownership and temporality, in a way that emphasised at the same time their fundamental heterogenous nature and their consistent unity. On a more abstract level, houses and *histri* unfolded as performances that, at the same time, re-affirmed the validity of acknowledged ways of acting upon one's life and environment, while re-appraising them and transforming them through public witnessing during *moëtup verē* moments. While we will examine in the last section the relationship of values such as collaboration and balance to the idea of *histri*, drawing upon the place these values appeared to possess in relation to houses or food, we will turn first to the way food was also closely associated with the *histri* concept on Mere Lava.

7.3 Food and *histri*

Beyond the fundamental bonds existing between food and the reckoning and expression of time, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, the enmeshed character of the relationships between food and events has been demonstrated throughout the thesis. Suffice it to recall that the term *ne-teqes* designated simultaneously the filled stone oven, the process of cooking in such an oven and the feast related to this food processing. However, on Mere Lava, the relationship between food preparation, consumption and circulation, and the concept of *histri*, seemed also grounded in the fact that food dishes as artefacts succeeded to tie together multiple dimensions. They appeared thus, like kitchen houses, as powerfully performative items linked to the shaping of persons and their environment, enacting social, spatial and temporal realms.

Grown and produced out of the land, foodstuffs and other materials used in the context of food processing were continuous actualisations of land rights, both in an everyday production and consumption context, and at ceremonial occasions. As a material artefact, any prepared food dish was related to the full range of past and present social relationships that informed the transmission of rights to certain garden places. The relationships between people and their ancestors and relatives was therefore as much a crucial component of food production and consumption as it was of house-building and use. Stories recounting genealogies generally specified the places where the ancestors used

to make their gardens and from where they obtained their subsistence, in order to eventually confirm the storyteller's own land rights and resources from his very position as a narrator possessing knowledge of these named places. The centrality of food production as a fundamental component of people's links to land was also striking in the fact that rights to garden patches were casually expressed through the expression *kemem nu-regen la tan kelkē*, 'we eat from this ground'. Narratives about successive land transmissions therefore often took the form of a succession of ancestors' 'eating' from the same specific land, and who had thus marked the landscape through time by producing food from it.

Present food production, consumption and sharing therefore embodied past sociality and, in turn, it actualised people's current social bonds. Conflating, in Strathern's terms, past and future into a meaningful and performative experience, everyday and ceremonial processing and sharing of food shaped people and land in a way that seemed to be closely related to the idea of *histri*'s efficacy (Strathern 1990: 25). As ideas about social order, space and time aggregated into foodstuffs, the latter's efficacy as artefacts continuously contributed to redefine the current state of conceptual realms. Patterns of collaboration highlighted at *biriñbiriñ* occasions, for instance through the food brought by relatives and its collective preparation and consumption, not only re-created the current social relationships but also contained a sense of the full set of past productive and collaborative bonds that linked ancestors to specific patches of land. In addition, the productive agency of food was also importantly demonstrated during the process of preparation through the more or less clear association of certain phases with sexual intercourse, and of certain dishes, especially *no-lok* and *no-löt*, with the result of the procreative work allowed through male/female, *tavalsal/tavalsal* collaboration. In that performative sense, processing and sharing food can be analysed as a fundamental component of *histri*. Every single dish contained in itself a prospective multiplicity of social relations and relations to land as well as various underlying specific temporalities.

Importantly marking the temporal frame of ceremonial occasions and everyday life, food producing and eating hence possessed a transformative efficacy similar to that of houses and of *histri*. As such, eating food from the place and helping in its production for a while made foreigners co-actors in people's *histri*. That was the reason given for the systematic offer of patches of garden to school teachers coming from other islands to Mere Lava, so that they could feel included in village communities:

"We must give them a piece of ground so that they would be able to eat from the island. If they have to rely only on store supplies for food, they would not stay a long time on the island and feel settled, they would not feel the love and care, they would not exchange food with other households and they will want to go back to their own island because their *histri* would stay only there. But here, the children will not be offered the possibilities of a proper school education." (Gresline Matthew, 06/07/2011, Tasmat village)

For this reason as well, food appeared on numerous occasions as a highly mnemonic device but also as a way to publicly display these memories in order to legitimate them in front of witnessing eyes. Large displays of food were among the main elements used to remember specific ceremonial occasions, and it was not rare for me to be told about past feasts by the number of *no-lok* cooked, of stone ovens filled, or the number of pigs killed. This indeed marked the feasts as being the reflection of the proper collaboration and contribution of a large number of relatives. Pictures of the food display and piles of *no-lok* inside stone ovens often constituted, with the *moëtup verē* itself, the specific photographs the sponsors asked me to take during feasts.

Other practices linked to food also revealed a similar association between food and memory. People very often exhibited food remains, either on the front walls of kitchen houses or inside of it, stuck in the thatch ceiling. It was particularly common on Mere Lava to see pig's jaws and large fishbones hanging on the front sides of *n-eañ kuk*, while lobster or other seafood shells or plastic noodle soup packets could be found on the inner ceiling of houses. To my enquiries about the reasons underlying these practices, I generally obtained two slightly different types of comments emphasising, when considered together, a certain sense of memory that seemed to include a necessary 'display' component:

"We put fish or pig's bones like that for it will be a memory of the feast when they were shared and eaten. Like that people would see it and remember that event, and the people who shared food together at that time. Sometimes it is just that a boy had caught this very big fish and he wants people to remember how he shared it at that time." (Glenda Lois, 05/07/2011, Tasmat village)

"Some people like to display these bones for they are proud and they want to show to others how good it was to eat that. They think they will gain importance by doing so, but they are just show-off people." (Gresline Matthew, 15/01/2011, Tasmat village)

In both cases, the display of food remains was related to the performance of memory achieved through it. Bones physically made present past events and the social bonds that had been tied through the sharing of food at that time. In that sense, memory also appeared as something that had to be legitimated and re-actualised through objectification. Food thus seemed to be a privileged element allowing that actualisation to happen. Hence, cooking and sharing meals every five days during funerals could similarly be appraised as actualising the memory of the deceased, gradually transforming it into a non-problematic one, at the same time as it reaffirmed and strengthened the current social relations between the living. Food restrictions observed by certain relatives at a death, *ne-velvel*, were also related to memory and highlighted food as a main support for personal emotions related to the loss. After the death of a close relative, people could choose one or several kinds of food they would refrain from eating for a certain amount of time. This was a personal decision, but generally involved a type of food specifically associated with the deceased - either something the latter particularly liked or a dish the mourner had shared with him just before he died. This restriction, *ne-velvel*, could last until the mourner would judge it appropriate to break it and feel that he would be able to eat again the type of food imbued with the memory of the deceased. Sometimes this would last years, and people spoke about it in the same emotional way as they would describe how they felt when returning to places and houses where they had lived with their lost relative. The end of this *ne-velvel* had to be marked by a *moëtup verē* called *veoret*, which consisted of a small amount of cash money given to some members of the deceased's matriline, usually his real or classificatory siblings. The latter would then prepare the restricted food for the mourner to eat again while other close relatives would also generally be invited to share the meal with him. Therefore, similar to funeral feasts, memory in this case included a fundamental exhibiting component, for invited relatives acted as witnesses of the termination of the food restriction/mourning period. From that moment onwards, the memory of food consumption with the deceased's family would substitute for the consumption of this food as associated with the deceased (Küchler 1987, Strathern 1992). Thus, food on Mere Lava was clearly a major medium for the transformation of memory and its actualisation. Indeed, it corresponded to Küchler's assertion that "as interlocutor between personal recall and shared recognition of what was thus recalled, objects accrued a value whose measure remained, often in spite of all appearance, unstable, requiring continuing reactivation through acts of social commemoration" (2011: 57).

Shared meals as well as foodstuffs could thus be considered as crucial elements constituting the types of events glossed as *histri*. As such, food also served to articulate changes and innovations. If *no-lok dom* and pig constituted the conventional food to be prepared in funerary contexts, people also recognised that, increasingly, some rice could be cooked and be included in food bundles offered to the feasts' participants at these occasions, for it expressed the financial contribution of relatives residing in other islands. They would send money or rice bags in the care of relatives voyaging on copra trading ships calling at Mere Lava, in order to help organise the funeral and the *moëtup verē* related to death. Again, the emphasis was put on the value of collaboration between relatives, as overriding the fact that rice was perceived as non-*moëtup verē* food.

The multidimensional aspects of food therefore related this type of artefact to *histri* in a similar analogical way as *n-eañ kuk*. Foodstuffs manifested in a prospective way past and present social experiences. They encompassed into their materiality sets of events as well as people's merging with land. They bound together social, spatial and temporal dimensions to create unprecedented pathways, through procedures of display, and legitimisation, i.e. consumption and circulation. Meals conveyed powerfully the idea that social and spatial future existed through continuous re-enactments, but they also demonstrated that this had to be achieved through proper and acknowledged forms such as the feasts' collective processing and public sharing, or everyday circulation of plates between close relatives. Hence, food processing and house-building corresponded on Mere Lava to what Rio remarked for Ambrym: "(...) the creation of material objects and exhibitions is (...) an aim in itself, not as a revelation of, or a metonym for, past relationships, but as an attempt to build a material presence for *future* benefits" (Rio 2009: 286, original emphasis). However, whereas in Rio's terms revelation did not stand as the purpose of the displays, in the case of *n-eañ kuk* and food on Mere Lava, it nonetheless figured as an important performative device (Mondragón 2003; see also Chapters 3 and 4). It indeed represented the very procedure that, combined with processes of containment and assemblage, constituted the fertile ground on which innovations and changes were strategically grown. Following Strathern's idea of revelation eliciting actions of decomposition from the audience (Strathern 1992), the next section will now consider how crucial social values such as collaboration and balance constituted some of the fundamental aspects revealed at *moëtup verē* times. This will allow us to highlight that analogical patterns linking houses, food and the concept of *histri* could be seen as importantly located in similar processual elements constituting a "social aesthetic" that could be highlighted as

a key part delimiting the efficacy of technical processes or ceremonial devices (Rio 2009: 288).

7.4 The two sides of the road: collaboration, balance and processes of containment and revelation as constitutive of *histri*

As I have demonstrated in this thesis, on Mere Lava, as elsewhere in Melanesia, the general physical characteristic of a house served "as much to reveal and display as it does to hide and protect..., the physical structure, furnishing social conventions and mental images of the house at once enabling, molding, informing and constraining the activities and ideas which unfold within its bounds" (Carsten and Hugh-Jones 1995: 2). These, I argue, should be extended to food on this island. As we have seen, food's transformational potency similarly resided in processes of containment and revelation. Examples highlighted in this thesis were the containment of food in the protective *ne-gēt* baskets when returning from the garden, the processing of food inside *n-eañ kuk* and its wrapping into individual *do-titēa* bundles before their public sharing and distribution during feasts.

More broadly, social processes themselves relate to such dialectical tension between containment/protection, and revelation to witnesses. Processes leading to changes and transformations in social status indeed relied on devices such as seclusion or *ne-velvel* periods, followed by public display and collective feasts. Containment and revelation were therefore important elements of what Rio termed, for other parts of Vanuatu, an "aesthetic of the social". Whereas this concept accurately matched with the Mere Lava context, I shall question now the ways in which this aesthetic of containment and revelation achieved its efficacy in transforming and dynamically reproducing persons and social orders. Here, Strathern's analysis on the "decomposition of an event" appeared helpful (Rio 2009: 288, Strathern 1988, 1992).

Focusing on the role of the witnessing audience during public feasts, she tried to understand what constituted social efficacy for Mount Hageners. She drew upon Gell's interpretation of the identification of the Umeda masked dancers with cassowaries and thus started with the premise that such displays' efficacies would be importantly located in the way they were a "revelation of the nature of things" (Strathern 1992: 245, Gell 1975: 243). According to her, presentations allowed the witnessing audience to decompose the social relations that created it and to identify them as the elements to be acknowledged. In the course of this process, the audience itself became the mediatory path through which the image was conveyed (1992: 248). Although, in this specific article, Strathern's main concern was not directly oriented towards the role played by the physical qualities of

objects circulated or exhibited, she nevertheless pointed out the fundamentality of forms and aesthetic considerations to social efficacy:

"The premise is an aesthetic one. Forms appear out of other forms, that is they are contained by them: the container is decomposed, everted to reveal what is inside. We can call this indigenous analysis. It follows that past and future become present; any one form anticipates its transformation, and is itself retrospectively the transformation of a prior form. It must also follow that forms already exist, and indeed when we talk of human creations this is so: it is the work of people to make new things appear - tubers from the ground, shells from houses, children from women. By contrast, things that appear by themselves may be regarded as non-human, as wild spirits are in Hagen." (Strathern 1992: 249).

Here again the image of containment as consubstantial to revelation was striking and Strathern directly related it to the presence of past and future during social performances. On Mere Lava as well, the performative concept of *histri* was imbued with the same socially relevant idea of efficacy achieved through an aesthetic of containment and revelation. Yet, looking further into those processes, we shall see that what was precisely revealed at that time was the fundamentality of such values as collaboration and balance.

Conversely, following Rio's statement: "the particular status of the object emerging in social process is one that can be taken apart and divided up. The object reaches a status of being complete - fulfilling its role and constituting the form of oneness or totality that is necessary for decomposition and distributed alienation" (2009: 293). We shall argue that values to which houses and food related, namely collaboration and balance, should be regarded as most crucial as well to the conception of *histri*. The term *nu-ttareas* used to describe the general balance of a house or the equal thickness of *no-lok* layers, was also important in the context of *histri*, for instance when recounting genealogies. As characterising both the physical and abstract straightforwardness and the balance achieved through an appropriate management of social alliances, it implicitly affirmed the fundamentality of collaboration to the reproduction and transformation of social, spatial and temporal realms. In turn, artefacts such as houses and food gained specific prominence and efficacy in terms of *histri*, precisely because of their material characteristics, as assemblages that allowed both containment and revelation, eliciting from the audience the acknowledgment of the collaboration and balance values.

Looking at "social ontologies" underlying practices of people from Ambrym, Rio, although similarly highlighting that the association of some artefactual displays and conceptions about history and social reproduction could be appraised through a common aesthetic, nonetheless identified it as "circling". According to him, circling was to be related to an on-going circulation of people and things, all alternatively passing through subject and object stages, and ultimately drawing spiralling patterns. He associated this motif with the growing of yam vines on their stakes or the form of boars' curved tusks, as well as to privileged forms taken by ceremonial displays or dances in north-central Vanuatu. Circling or spiralling would thus be, in his sense, the appropriate motif associated with, and allowing, the dynamic reproduction of society in this area (Rio 2009: 296).

Whereas one could find occurrences of the aesthetic of circling on Mere Lava, as in many other places indeed, either in dances such as women's *no-bo*, or in the circling and blessing of a new house by the priest at *wol-eañ*, in the Banks Islands numerous authors also emphasised the efficacy of a productive dialectical balancing between two collaborating sides, performed through a visual aesthetic of containment and revelation (Codrington 1972 [1891], Vienne 1984, see also Taylor 2008: 95-97). Hence, on Mere Lava, both circling and containment/revelation processes could be considered as socially relevant devices. Yet, I argue that they could be so only insofar as they highlighted the value of another form: that of liminality, and the importance of the actions leading to this liminality: those of tying and wrapping. These actions drew movements through time that characterised, in an analogical way, houses, food and *histri*.

In this approach, I eventually join theoretically with Küchler's and Were's statement about a certain model of sociality that is prominently achieved in the Pacific through the technical production of material artefacts and their further displays in front of audiences (Küchler and Were 2009: 194). Focusing on *malanggan* artefacts from New Ireland and wooden canoes and bowls from the Solomon Islands, these authors focused on the social efficacy of additive or subtractive actions in making the wooden items and the way this related to contextual developments of the socio-political orders. Hence, they concluded that the relational nature of the artefactual world in Oceania corresponded to the conceptual understanding of empirical social realities (2009: 208). On Mere Lava, the processes of production themselves emphasised ideas about liminality, and the importance of tying techniques that allowed joining the diverse elements necessary to create a coherent productive unity – that could then be further disassembled. Food was thus importantly prepared through being tied into leaf bundles that maintained for instance the equal layers

of *no-lok* together. Food distributions bound together people through equal and appropriate sharing of food to the different parties attending the feasts. The liminality of food not only resided in its transitional nature as a substance that productively linked places to persons, but also in the fact that it literally bound the *moëtup verē* time, being both at the centre of preliminary collaborative preoccupation (collecting the various crops, pigs or other materials necessary for ceremonial cooking) and of the necessary final commensality that concluded feasts. In the same way, house-building processes expressed the value of parts being tied together, for instance in the binding of the two sides of the house's roof onto the truss with *na-garias* vines, or through the *no-wolwol* transversal beam linking these two sides. This ultimately allowed the house to act as a liminal artefact, as a coherent container, that would protect and reveal. Furthermore, as we have already indicated in Chapters 5 and 6, the making of houses as efficacious liminal artefacts included processes that had to be bound by *ne-wismat* and *no-wol-eañ moëtup verē* in order to see their efficacious unity realised through the very acknowledgment of their fragmented nature. The processing and sharing of food was indeed crucial in those stages, especially at *wol-eañ*, for it provided a means for people to validate publicly the building's general coherence. The agency of the processes seemed thus to rely upon intricately related layers of tying and wrapping, allowing successive containments and revelations. Those, I argue, ultimately created a sense of circulating, or in Rio's terms, circling movements: food was processed inside the *n-eañ kuk*, revealed outside during ceremonies that bound the house-building process, which would in turn contribute to making houses into efficacious transformative containers, in order to finally ensure the transformative agency of the future food to be prepared inside (see for comparison Kaepler 2007).

Therefore, actions of tying and wrapping appeared also at the core of the performative notion of *histri*, as defined above. Considered in charge of the continuity and well-being of their matrilines, the *nu-sur ne-tēgētēgē*, the heads of the matrilines, were held responsible for the balanced tying together of the various matrilines through time and for the wrapping and revelation of social relationships at appropriate occasions. Typically, this corresponded to what Küchler, following Levinson, considered as a tendency of human beings to translate a "non-spatial conceptual problem into a spatial one" through the means of "visual analogy" (Küchler 2003: 212, Levinson 1991). Here, houses and food allowed translating problems such as keeping the relations between matrilines balanced, or ensuring the transmission of land rights and knowledge, and revealed them as importantly resting upon both collaboration and the proper use of an acknowledged "social aesthetic".

Whereas this analysis does not claim to solve the question raised by Küchler about "whether such holistic spatial models are expressed in ritual, myth, art and architecture, or whether the spatial concepts that are given analogical force in figurative form entrap thought" (Küchler 2003: 212, Gell 1998), it constitutes nevertheless an attempt to characterise the relationships between material objects and social realms on Mere Lava. Highlighting the close level of entanglement and interplay of social and material realms, it thus showed the intrinsically dynamic and performative nature of these relationships.

In addition to the extraordinarily complex interrelationships between Mere Lava people, the artefacts they produced and the technical and social management of their lives, this analysis has demonstrated the efficacy of what could be termed a "social aesthetic" as a generally shared and valued element that found privileged material forms in houses and food. Centred on ideas about liminality, containment and revelation, and achieved through processes of tying or wrapping together differentiated parts, this aesthetic was implicitly performed during making processes and everyday usage of artefacts such as food and houses. Ceremonial moments elicited the public revelation of the values being associated with it, through 'decomposition', so that this "social aesthetic" indeed allowed the renewal of society. Through interrelations based on visual analogy, houses, food and *histri* related to each other and resonated in ways that tightly entangled physical characteristics to conceptual values and ideas. Houses and food constituted a series of images that performed the fragmentation of society and the tying together of different parts as a necessary correlative to ideas of singularity, identity and coherence. The balance between parties, and unity, could be ascertained only through the necessary acknowledgment of their fundamental difference, and their further appropriate management through time, in order to achieve innovative solutions, grounding people in their places in continuously new ways. While it is hoped that some relevant elements have been provided to answer the initial question about the striking place taken by houses and food in ni-Vanuatu discourses about identity, through the study of these artefacts on Mere Lava, a final aspect remains now to be evoked. If houses are so important, could we relate Mere Lava, and more broadly Banks Islands social organisation with the lévi-straussian concept of "sociétés à maisons"? I will now explore this as a conclusion, for this could constitute one lens through which future investigation of architecture, material culture and social realms could be approached in the region.

CONCLUSION

If artefacts such as kitchen houses and food constituted the main focus of this thesis, we also demonstrated how closely entangled the threads of the material and of the social and abstract conceptions of the world were. At first sight, the Lévi-straussian concept of house-based society seemed rather irrelevant in the Mere Lava context. Even if a vocabulary linked with houses could be used as metaphors in the expression of the state of the relationships, the term *n-eañ* did not designate social groups *per se*. Moreover, despite the importance of residency-based working groups on an everyday basis, they did not constitute any moral persona in the sense Lévi-Strauss intended it. Households were not hierarchically classified and neither the buildings themselves nor the co-residency of their occupants seemed very durable.

Yet, at the level of the matriline, several features nevertheless drew attention and could command a reappraisal of the notion's relevance. Indeed, if the affiliation to a *tēgētēgē* was strictly defined as matrilineal, numerous manipulations could occur, of which adoptions and alliances represented the most common examples. These were generally turned towards the larger goal of perpetuating the matriline and, above all, of keeping the land rights that were associated with it. *Tēgētēgē*, hence, possessed a constantly renegotiated and dynamic character that matched the Lévi-Strauss' definition of "maison" in *The Way of the Masks*:

"a corporate body holding an estate made up of both material and immaterial wealth, which perpetuates itself through the transmission of its name, its goods, and its titles down a real or imaginary line, considered legitimate as long as this continuity can express itself in the language of kinship or of affinity and, most often, of both." (Lévi-Strauss 1982: 174)

As a crucial aspect of the "sociétés à maisons", their link to on-going socio-political strategies also characterised the intermatriline's relationships on Mere Lava, and whereas kitchen houses could not be seen as durable architectonic elements, they nevertheless materialised rather well the dynamism of the intermatriline's social negotiations. In addition, the existence in the past of matriline's related *ne-gemel* probably confirmed in this island the importance of the visually striking presence of buildings in the context of Mere Lava sociality. However, this needs for now to remain an opening question for

further research, as it would necessitates a thorough investigation into kinship organisation and practices to become more than a research hypothesis.

Both the possibility of building a kitchen house on a place and of cooking food inside, i.e. the possibility of materialising one's relations to land and its resources, constituted major parts of the material set associated with the *tēgētēgē*. Other material and immaterial items transmitted along the matrilines were the *no-löt* related carvings, a certain knowledge of genealogies, specific *kastom* stories, as well as supernatural patterns and designs. However, the transmission of this set of things to the younger generations of the *tēgētēgē* could follow various ways and be inherited either from fathers or maternal uncles, thus asking for a fundamental collaboration between members of different matrilines, so that in alternate generations the material set appropriately came back to its origin matriline.

Kitchen houses and food incorporated these notions into their very physical properties and it is through the lens of these material characteristics that this thesis has approached Mere Lava social order and the way it could relate to a "société à maisons". Through technical processes that visually enhanced the presence of two sides (for the house) or layers (for *no-lok*), of which the appropriate binding or wrapping ensured a unity that could be further decomposed in order to achieve social efficacy, both kinds of artefacts articulated the different perspectives of matrilines and the entangled interdependency necessary to their perpetuation.

House-building and food processing, as key processes during which the value of a balanced collaboration between men and women and between matrilines is established, were thus crucial events marking the life of the *tēgētēgē*. They constituted some core elements of the processual formation of these social entities. In effect, reproducing houses and specific dishes such as *no-lok* and *no-löt*, served to reproduce in continuous new ways the relationships between matrilines. Put another way, both kinds of artefacts were therefore fundamental constituents of what was described as *histri* at the same time as being visual analogies of its on-going process for the reproduction of the social order. In that way the Lévi-straussian concept of "maison" is given an empirical interpretation and appears as a relevant concept in order to further consider both material culture and social organisations in the Banks Islands.

Yet, above all, this analysis of kitchen houses and food showed how important these material elements are on Mere Lava, for they allow people to constantly transform individuals' and groups' relationships, as well as to re-assess their relationships to land in a prospective way. Transformations and innovations are thus to be seen as an integrative part

of *moëtup verē* ways of doing things on this island, as is the case in the whole Vanuatu archipelago.

GLOSSARY

<i>na-bagēar</i>	Coconut mats used to make the final cover of the ridgepole on houses.
<i>na-balak</i>	Type of leaves put on the door of the kitchen house in order to protect people inside the house from the influence of the spirits.
<i>nu-belet no-voët</i>	To remove the hot stones from the stone oven.
<i>ne-bem töwur</i>	Transversal wooden beam at the back of the house.
<i>ne-bēr</i>	House post situated insied the house.
<i>nu-bēs</i>	To remove the sago spathe inner spine by hand.
<i>nu-big</i>	To eat meat.
<i>ne-biriñbiriñ</i>	Extended family gathering.
<i>ne-birsiñ</i>	Stone wall of houses.
<i>ni-bis</i>	1. Finger; 2. Pointed spines situated on the front side of the roof and indicating the high status of the house's commissionner.
<i>no-bo</i>	1. Bamboo; 2. Women's dance.
<i>no-bölösum</i>	External edge of the stone oven.
<i>no-bon</i>	Smell.
<i>no-bono</i>	The world of the dead, or supernatural realm.
<i>nu-borbor</i>	To joke (related to joking relations in kinship).
<i>no-bōtō</i>	Breadfruit.
<i>nu-buliañ ni-ep</i>	To light the fire in the stone oven.
<i>nu-burbur</i>	To set the stakes for yam vines to grow.
<i>no-butēt</i>	Sweet potato.
<i>no-butan</i>	Umbilical cord.
<i>nu-da</i>	To do.

<i>na-dar</i>	Blood.
<i>derñwöt</i>	Sweet.
<i>no-do</i>	Generic term for leaves.
<i>no-do-kerē</i>	Leaves used by women to make their dance skirts. Exist in masculine (long) and feminine (short) type.
<i>no-do-ñwesñwes</i>	Unique and large burao leaves used as a cover for the stone oven.
<i>no-do-ptēl</i>	Banana leaves.
<i>no-do-taqor</i>	Sago palm leaves.
<i>no-do-titea</i>	Crown of burao leaves used as a cover for the stone oven and as container to carry food.
<i>no-do-va</i>	Leaves used to make the laplap bundles.
<i>no-do-vor</i>	Burao leaves.
<i>no-do-vow</i>	Pandanus leaves.
<i>no-dom</i>	Yam grown in the gardens.
<i>nu-domdom</i>	To know.
<i>no-domdomwēn</i>	Respect.
<i>no-duw</i>	Sago spathe's inner spine.
<i>n-eañ</i>	House.
<i>n-eañ bë moëtur</i>	House to sleep.
<i>n-eañ bë suwsuw</i>	Bathroom.
<i>n-eañ do-taqor</i>	House manufactured with local materials especially sago palm leaves for the roof.
<i>n-eañ kap</i>	House manufactured with imported materials, especially corrugated iron.
<i>n-eañ kuk</i>	Kitchen house.
<i>n-eañ lap</i>	Big, important house.

<i>n-eañ lenledu</i>	Storage house for yams.
<i>n-eañ tes</i>	Toilets.
<i>n-eañ woqoqē</i>	House with plaited bamboo straps as a sure elevated floor.
<i>ne-ep</i>	Fire, by extension fireplace.
<i>n-ereris</i>	Specific kind of knowledge.
<i>erön</i>	Before.
<i>n-ēs t-erön</i>	The life of before.
<i>nu-esig</i>	To share.
<i>n-etto</i>	Areas situated toward the top of the volcano.
<i>nu-evev garias</i>	To supple the <i>na-garias</i> vines.
<i>na-gabal</i>	Forked wooden stick used to remove hot stones from the stone oven.
<i>na-garias</i>	Strong bush vines.
<i>ne-gēar</i>	Type of seashell.
<i>nu-gēl</i>	To dig with a pointed stick.
<i>ne-gemel</i>	Nakamal, men's house.
<i>ne-gen</i>	Food made of crops.
<i>ne-gen tēqē</i>	Final meal shared for the completion of something.
<i>nu-gengen</i>	To eat crops.
<i>ne-gēt</i>	Pandanus basket used to go to the gardens.
<i>ne-gēteanē</i>	Stone terraces supporting the houses.
<i>nu-gēteq ne-gēt</i>	To fill up the <i>ne-gēt</i> basket.
<i>ne-gēutē</i>	Smaller yams kept entire to be planted.
<i>nu-girar</i>	To burn the cut bush to make a new garden.
<i>ne-gisel lap</i>	Machete.
<i>ne-gisel wirig</i>	Knife.

<i>nu-gos no-löt</i>	Make the hole in the centre of the nalot mound.
<i>no-got</i>	Nalot wooden knife.
<i>no-götom</i>	Strap of garden situated in between two lines of trees and delineating individual's own used parts in gardens.
<i>nu- gurva no-won</i>	To clean a bush area in order to make a new garden.
<i>nu-kal</i>	To climb.
<i>nu-kel</i>	To mix, often in cooking to mix crops' paste with water or saltwater.
<i>ne-kēr</i>	Walking sticks.
<i>ne-ker gēttam</i>	Threshold transversal beam.
<i>ne-kērē</i>	Bottom.
<i>ne-kērē-gor</i>	Middle layer of leaves of the laplap leaf bundle, intended to make the bundle stronger.
<i>ne-keregēar</i>	Bigger rocks forming the base for stone walls, by extension chiefs.
<i>nu- kona no-löt</i>	To hammer the nalot paste with the pounder to obtain a flat and even disc.
<i>ne-konset</i>	Comic play performed during feasts.
<i>no-koskos</i>	Comic game between the two <i>tavalsal</i> performed during feasts.
<i>ne-kuteg</i>	Base of things.
<i>nu-lag</i>	To make the earthen mounds where the yams would be planted.
<i>nu-laklak</i>	To dance.
<i>na-lam</i>	Open sea.
<i>ne-lañ-vēar</i>	Area situated underneath the stone terraces of the hamlets.
<i>ne-lē</i>	Inside.
<i>ne-leat</i>	Firewood.

<i>nu-lēat</i>	To slash with a machete or knife.
<i>ne-legleg</i>	Marriage.
<i>nu-lekleket ne-ñiē</i>	To extract the <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts from their shells.
<i>nu-leqper</i>	To straighten the beams for the roof truss.
<i>ne-lesles</i>	Wooden platform placed over the fireplace and used to keep diverse things.
<i>ne-liāñ</i>	1. Wind; 2. Women's dance.
<i>no-lo</i>	Shore.
<i>no-lok</i>	Laplap, pudding made of grated crops.
<i>no-lok vas</i>	Specific laplap made during yam planting sessions.
<i>löllör</i>	Quality of a proper laplap with a sufficient layer of nuts.
<i>lolmeren</i>	Knowledge of the appropriate time to organise things. Wise head.
<i>no-löt</i>	Nalot, pudding made of pre-cooked crops.
<i>ne-luñwer</i>	Children.
<i>na-mag</i>	Men's dance.
<i>na-maleg</i>	Cloudy sky.
<i>na-man</i>	Mana, specific power pertaining to the supernatural world, of which men and things can be imbued.
<i>na-matē</i>	Death.
<i>ne-meren</i>	1. Morning light; 2. Tomorrow.
<i>nu-met</i>	To die.
<i>ne-met-n-eañ</i>	Front side of the house.
<i>ne-metagisgis</i>	Godparents.
<i>ne-metsal</i>	Path.
<i>ni-miniak</i>	Manioc
<i>ni-mit</i>	Food considered as meat, including island cabbage and

	nuts.
<i>nu-moërus</i>	To want.
<i>ne-moëtup verē</i>	Kastom, customary actions, situations or objects.
<i>nu-momsow</i>	To put down.
<i>no-mor</i>	Wild cane.
<i>nu-mwol</i>	1. To go back home; 2. To point from the ground.
<i>na-nag</i>	Saltwater.
<i>ne-nēag</i>	Fish.
<i>ne-ñiē</i>	Type of nut most valued on Mere Lava.
<i>ne-ñiēkur</i>	Dried <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts.
<i>nier</i>	Generic term to designate shore areas.
<i>ne-ñiēsmat</i>	Fresh <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts.
<i>ne-ñwarat,</i>	Man.
<i>na-ñwēlē</i>	Cycad leaves.
<i>ne-ñweter</i>	High-ranking woman.
<i>no-ñwo tadun</i>	Foreman in the context of house-building.
<i>no-ñwog</i>	Old word for <i>n-ereris</i> .
<i>no-oñ</i>	New garden.
<i>nu- oñōñ</i>	To clear new gardens.
<i>nu-ow no-lok te bē löt</i>	To remove the leaves from cooked laplap in nalot processing.
<i>nu-qal ne-ñiē</i>	To smash the <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts.
<i>ne-qan̄</i>	Creeks.
<i>nu-qēsē no-löt</i>	To pound the laplap paste.
<i>Qet</i>	Mythical hero in the Banks Islands.
<i>ne-qet gēttam</i>	Lintel transversal beam.

<i>ne-get sagēar</i>	Final cover put over the ridgepole of the house.
<i>ne-get-ean̄</i>	Ridgepole.
<i>no-quoēr</i>	Tree fern.
<i>no-qon̄</i>	Night.
<i>no-qor</i>	Wild yams growing in the creeks or uncultivated areas.
<i>no-qöt</i>	Men's dance.
<i>nu-rañ no-löt döl</i>	Gather in one the two initial mounds of nalot.
<i>nu-rañrañ</i>	To pull on.
<i>nu-rasa</i>	To grate.
<i>na-ratva</i>	Pig.
<i>ne-rēmtiñ</i>	Outermost posts of the house.
<i>nu-ririg no-do.</i>	To pass leaves over the fire in order to supple them.
<i>nu-ris no-löt</i>	To push <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts inside of the nalot's hole.
<i>nu-romra</i>	To throw pieces of yams to be planted into their holes in the garden.
<i>no-ropva</i>	Fathom.
<i>nu-rumrubus</i>	Feminine gesture made to poor coconut or <i>ne-ñiē</i> over island cabbage leaves or grated crops in laplap.
<i>na-sagean</i>	Bodily smell.
<i>na-salagor</i>	Male restricted area where they manufacture masks and rehearse for dances.
<i>na-sarop</i>	Island cabbage.
<i>nu-sarsarak</i>	When clearing a bush area, cut the branches already lying down in smaller sections. Aussi <i>nu-siagsiag</i> .
<i>na-sas</i>	Croton leaves.
<i>ne-selgasēg</i>	Outermost beam of the roof truss.
<i>ne-señiep</i>	The two front and backside central posts of the house.

<i>nu-sepsep</i>	To pull on leaves.
<i>ne-ser</i>	Arrow.
<i>ne-sermasgēat</i>	Type of customary gesture made when a work has been completed.
<i>ne-si bagēar</i>	Pointed wooden stick used to fix the <i>na-bagēar</i> on top of the roof.
<i>nu-siagsiag</i>	When clearing a bush area, cut the branches already lying down in smaller sections. Aussi <i>nu-sarak</i> .
<i>ne-sibēt</i>	Shovel.
<i>siet</i>	Bad. dangerous.
<i>sigēlēg</i>	Up.
<i>nu-sigsig</i>	Middle beam of the roof truss.
<i>silēg</i>	Down.
<i>ne-sinag</i>	Generic name for yams.
<i>nu-sinsina</i>	To remove the central stem of leaves in order to supple them.
<i>ne-sirsirmelē</i>	Type of adoption that sees the child calling sister and brother to the same generation in his/her adoptive family, but not changing matriline.
<i>nu-sis</i>	To peel crops.
<i>no-som</i>	Shell-money.
<i>no-sul</i>	Community work.
<i>no-sur te bē tēgētēgē</i>	Head of matrilines.
<i>nu-sussur ne-tēgētēgē</i>	To tell the story of the matrilines, equated to <i>histri</i> .
<i>na-tabēa</i>	Wooden dish used to prepare <i>nalot</i> .
<i>na-tam</i>	Love and care between kin persons.
<i>na-tañwanian</i>	Spirit inside people.
<i>na-tañwat</i>	Peace.

<i>na-taqan megep</i>	Labour pains of the pregnant woman.
<i>na-taqr</i>	Sago palm tree.
<i>nu-tar</i>	To cut with an axe.
<i>na-tavalsal</i>	One side of the path, by extension name of the social moieties.
<i>ne-teages</i>	Adze.
<i>ne-tebēr</i>	Coconut leaves tray.
<i>ne-tēgētēgē</i>	Matrilines.
<i>nu-tegtag no-dom</i>	To remove the hair on yam tubers after the harvest.
<i>ne-tēlē</i>	Axe.
<i>ne-temet</i>	Generic name for spirits.
<i>ne-tenes</i>	Upper parts of the yam tubers to be planted.
<i>ne-tenkē</i>	Generic word for wood or trees.
<i>ne-tensiagsiag</i>	Place to sit down.
<i>teorön</i>	Now and forever.
<i>nu-tep</i>	To cut with a knife.
<i>ne-teges</i>	1. Filled stone oven; 2. Food cooked in the stone oven; 3. Feast implying laplap cooking.
<i>no-to</i>	1. Yam mounds; 2. Volcano.
<i>nu-toëvungor</i>	Cover up the yams with ground in their mounds.
<i>no-tok</i>	Pandanus basket used to put the dried <i>ne-niē</i> nuts.
<i>no-tok</i>	Clear blue sky.
<i>no-tom</i>	Customary taboo post.
<i>no-tor</i>	Casuarina tree, often used to make roof beams.
<i>nu-törtöru</i>	Stone oven leaf cover.
<i>no-tot</i>	Poison arrow.

<i>ne-tötöl</i>	Old garden where yams have already been harvested.
<i>nu-tow</i>	To mark down, to put down.
<i>nu-ttareas</i>	To make things appropriate, balanced.
<i>nu-tul na-masa</i>	To define where the <i>na-masa</i> will be on the roof truss.
<i>nu-tula</i>	To give.
<i>nu-tula loqöt</i>	To make the customary gesture of giving a small amount of cash to the deceased siblings for them to put the corpse in the coffin and close it.
<i>nu-tuptup</i>	To make the roof of a house.
<i>nu-tur</i>	To stand, to erect.
<i>n-ul ne-ñiē</i>	To remove the inner skin of the fresh <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts.
<i>no-ulsi</i>	Tip of things.
<i>no-um</i>	Stone oven.
<i>nu-ur ni-ep</i>	To poke the bottom of the stone oven with a <i>na-gabal</i> .
<i>na-vaol</i>	Fowl.
<i>na-vatras</i>	Spiny tree fern branch used to grate crops.
<i>na-vavean</i>	Woman.
<i>nu-vean no-mor</i>	Sago palm leaf tile used to make the roof of houses.
<i>nu-velvel</i>	To respect prescription and proscription before contact with the supernatural world.
<i>ne-veoret</i>	Customary gesture made to thank somebody for caring.
<i>ne-verē</i>	Place where human beings live.
<i>ne-veret</i>	Intermediary beams of the roof truss.
<i>ne-vetgēl</i>	Pointed wooden stick.
<i>ne-vetiglöt</i>	<i>Nalot</i> pounder.
<i>nu-vier tewerir</i>	To lay down the leaf for the laplap bundle face toward the ground.

<i>nu-vier vörup</i>	To lay down the leaf for the laplap bundle face toward the paste to be spread.
<i>ne-vilvēal</i>	Kind of tree usedas firewood or sometimes to make roof beams for houses.
<i>ne-vitēl</i>	Banana.
<i>nu-voēsig</i>	To plant.
<i>no-voët</i>	Stone.
<i>no-voët qinqinē</i>	1. Smaller stone of the stone wallls; 2. Pebbles of the stone oven.
<i>no-vol</i>	Moon.
<i>nu-völvölu na-sarop</i>	Prepare the island cabbage leaves for laplap.
<i>no-vonogum</i>	Back side of a house.
<i>no-vösuswon</i>	Aspect of the bush when not cleared.
<i>nu-vu</i>	Kind of spirit, said to move by itself.
<i>nu-Vu nu-roñ</i>	Holy spirit.
<i>ne-vulvuli</i>	Hairs.
<i>nu-vus</i>	Bow.
<i>nu-wea</i>	Good.
<i>nu-welle</i>	To throw pieces of yams to be planted into their holes in the garden.
<i>nu-werwerir</i>	To remove inner flesh of yams to be planted in order to lighten them.
<i>nu-wēs</i>	To tie together parts of the house structure.
<i>ne-wēt</i>	Tie, link, ligature.
<i>ne-winriñ</i>	Circular edge of stone oven.
<i>ne-wismat</i>	Customary gesture made to initiate a work.
<i>no-wo</i>	Hole, also crater.
<i>nu-wol</i>	To pay, to compensate.

<i>no-won</i>	Bush.
<i>no-woras</i>	Bamboo rafters of houses.
<i>no-wōrō</i>	Crabs
<i>nu-wot</i>	To be born.
<i>no-wotoktok</i>	Pregnant woman.
<i>no-wovēn</i>	Lower parts of the yams to be planted.
<i>nu-wunduñ ni-ep</i>	To pile the stones over the lighted fire in the stone oven.
<i>ne-wutil</i>	Sawfish, by extension, pointed bamboo purling on the front roof showing the high status of the house commissioner.

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The materiality of the kitchen house: building, food and history on Mere Lava, northern Vanuatu

VOLUME II: Appendices, maps, tables and figures

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**Thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy**

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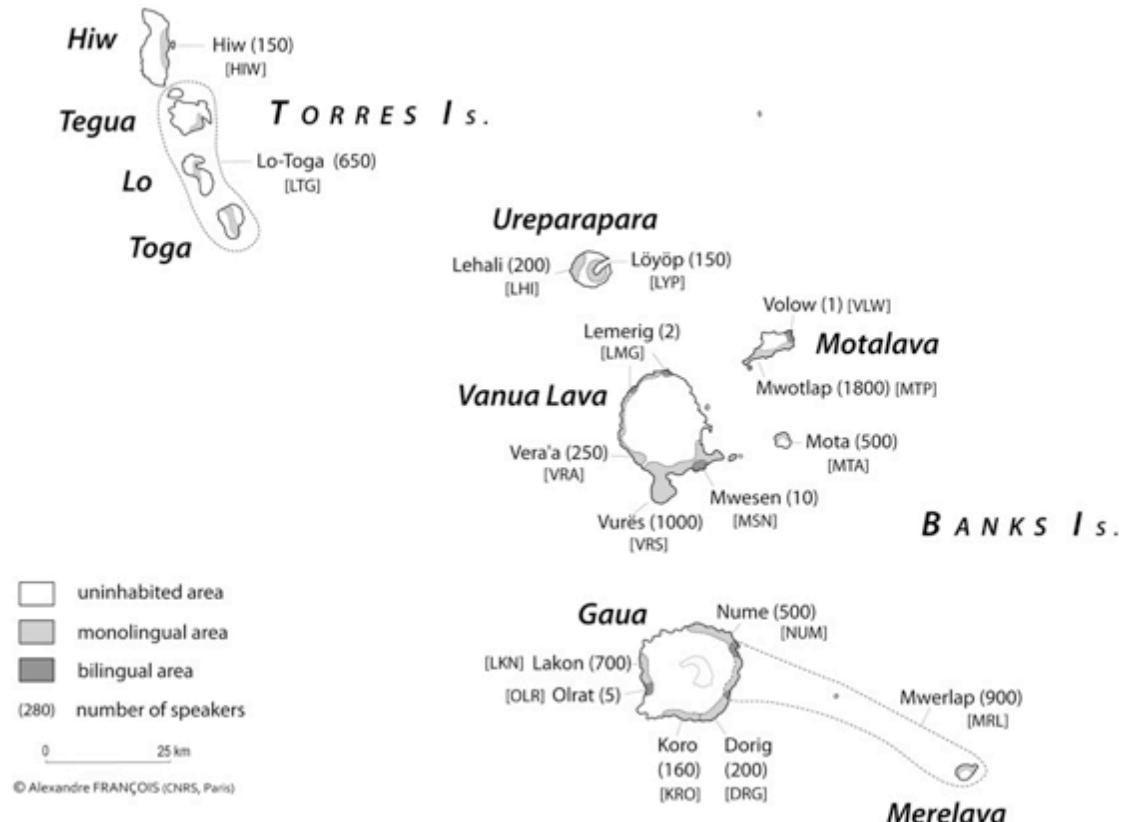
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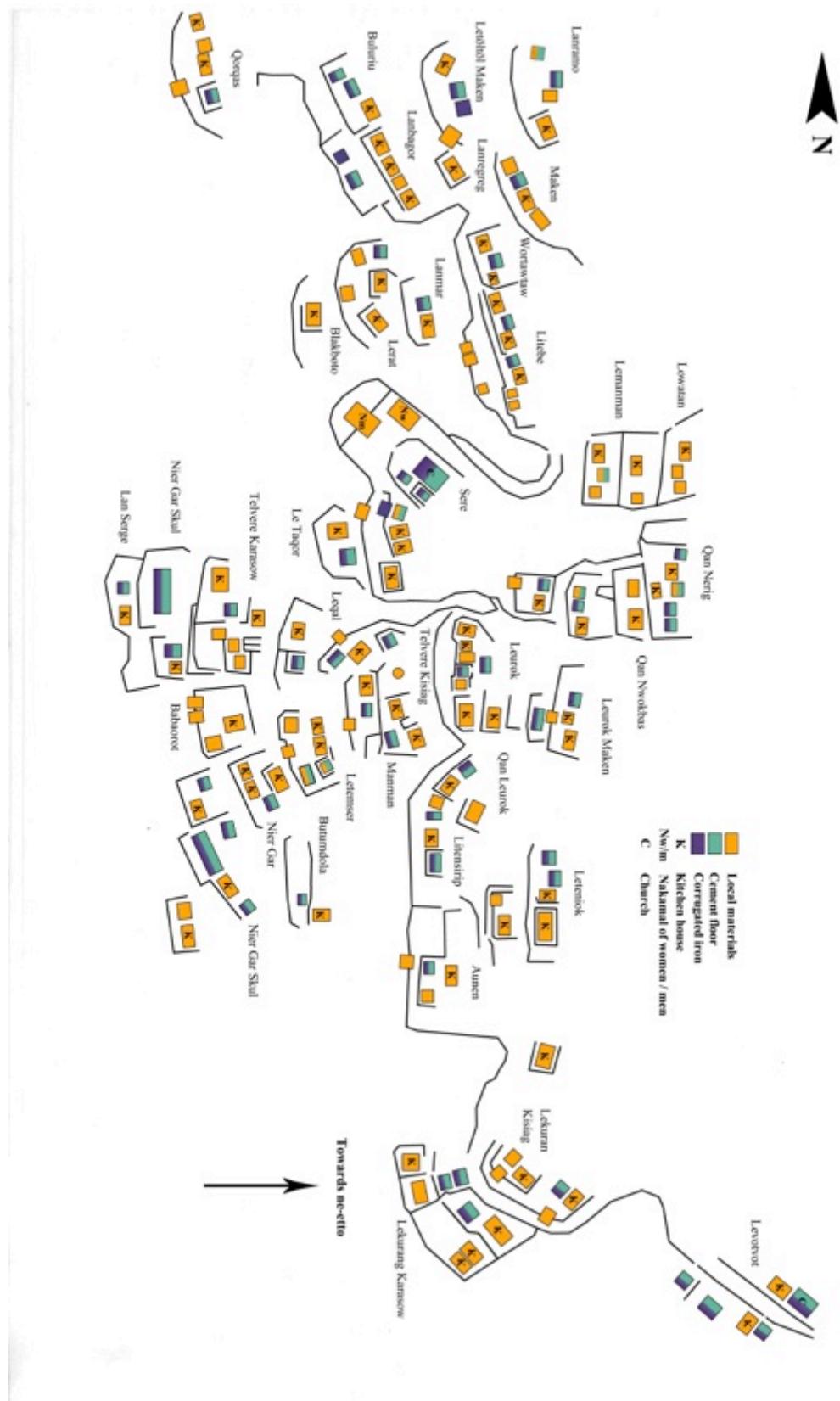
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ADDITIONAL MAPS



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Map 2.01: Sketch map of Tasmat village households, according to house materials and function, 2011.

APPENDICES

Appendix I: Transcriptions

p. 51-52: The arrival of the gospel kastom stori. Deacon Steve Turris, 14/02/2011.

"Mi nem blong mi Steve Turris, mi blong Mere Lava aelan, long Tasmat viley. Long ples ia mi wantem talem stori abaot hao kristianiti i kasem Mere Lava mo wu we i karem kristianiti i kam. Bifo yumi go long hao kristianiti i kam, Mere Lava em i wan aelan we em i stap long saot is blong Torba provins. Mo Mere Lava em no wan flat aelan, em i wan hili aelan mo insaed long Mere Lava em i gat sikis viley mo aot long ol sikis viley ia i gat Tasmat, Levetmisé, Lekwel, Lerat mo Auta mo wan viley Nagar, naoia viley ia i nomo gat man i stap long em. Ok, yumi kam insaed hao kristianiti i kam long Mere Lava. Long 1854, bisop Selwyn em i mekem fes visit blong em i kam long Niu Hebridis. So em i kam em i travel em i kamtru long Mere lava. Taem em i kasem Mere Lava, em i bin kasem long wan eli moning mo em i kasem long eli moning, em i luk aelan blong Mere lava, mo long eli moning ia moning sta em i kamaot long hil blong Mere Lava so Bisop Selwyn em i bin putum nem blong aelan ia se Sta Pik, so Mere lava em i tekem nem blong Sta Pik.

Afta long taem we Bisop Selwyn em i travel long ples ia, Bisop Patteson em i wan yangfala boy em i stap wetem Bisop Selwyn. So Bisop Selwyn em i gobak, em i stap long England, afta, sam yia i pas, long 1857, Bisop John Coleridge Patteson em i folem rod blong Bisop Selwyn, em i travel i kam long Niu Hebridis. So em i kam, em i travel i kam long Torba Provins, so em i pas i kam long Mere Lava. Long rod blong Bisop Patteson, em i kam em i stat long saot em i kamdaon be em i no bin go sor long wan aelan blong yumi long saot. Em i kam em i pastru long Pentikos, em i go sor long Saot Pentikos. Afta long saot Pentikos, em i aot long saot Pentikos, em i travel i kamdaon long nortern part blong Vanuatu. Em i kam, i pas long aelan blong Maewo, taem em i kamtru long aelan blong Maewo em i luk Mere lava em i stap stan, so long ples ia em i disaed se bae em i kam sor long Mere Lava. So long Mere Lava i gat tufala jif, tufala i stap long Mere Lava, jif Qoqo we em i paramaount jif blong Mere Lava aelan mo jif Ringo, em i narafala jif we em i gat rank. Em i stap klosap blong Tasmat viley, em i liv em wan wetem sam mesenja blong em. So tufala jif ia, tufala i stap, long taem ia jif Qoqo em i luk afta long ol Mere Lava, mo long taem ia histri blong Mere Lava olsem ol man ol i liv olsem ol hiten man, ol i no save long kristian, ol i no save lov, wanem; ol i faetfaetem ij ota. So jif Qoqo em i stap long Tasmat wetem 50 pipol, em i no kasem handred, i gat 50 pipol nomo. So jif we i stap long narafala viley, jif Ringo, em i stap wetem 30 pipol, ol i stap long viley ia, ol i luk, tufala jif ia i luk wan sip i kam. Be long taem ia, oli stap luk ol sip be ol i no save se sip ia i wanem, ol i ting se wan kenu em i aot blong Maewo, em i stap kam from Mere Lava. So jif Ringo em i stap long wan viley ol i kolem Rafsara, mo jif Qoqo em i stap long Tasmat. So wan gel em i bin go long garen, em i luk sip ia em i kamaot, em i singsingaot, em i singsingaot bigwan, ol man long haos ol i harem, ol i singaotem jif se :

- Wan woman em i luk wan saen i kamaot, ating wan kenu em i kamaot long Maewo i kam.

So jif ia i tekem ol mesenja blong em, olsem ol sekuriti blong em, ol i wokbaot i go blong go luk. Taem ol i go ol i luk se kenu ia i stap kam klosap. Mo jif Ringo tu em i stap tekem ol mesenja blong em, ol i stap kam from ples we sip Saotern Kros em i stap kam long em. Sip blong Bisop Patteson nem blong em Saotern Kros. So Bisop Patteson em i kamsor em i kam klosap long sor, tufala jif ia i luk be tufala i luk se no i no wan kenu, em i wan difren samting. Long ples ia, tufala i luk se i gat ol man ol i stap aot long sip ol i stap godaon long wan smol bot. So jif Qoqo em i no bin luk jif Ringo, mo jif Ringo em i no bin luk jif Qoqo. Tufala i stap, wan i stap narasaed long ston, wan i stap narasaed long ston, be tufala i no save se tufala tu long ples ia. Tufala i stap wet blong bot i kam sor. Ol kru blong sip ol i pulum wetem Bisop Patteson i kam sor long wan pasis, ol i kolem Nier Lomlap. Long pasis ia, taem ol i pul i kam, kam kam kam klosap long sor, taem bot i saedem ston, ol blak ston long Mere lava, jif Qoqo em i stanap i stap watsem, ale jif Ringo, narasaed, em i holem spea blong em, em i wantem sperem Bisop Patteson mo ol sekuriti blong em tu ol i pulum bonara, ol i holem nahnal blong kilim man, ol i jam blong kilim Bisop Patteson. Bisop Patteson i step i go antap long ston, em i toktok long tufala. Toktok ia we em i sakem em i talem se

- Tolonuwea re tuwtuwok

Toktok ia em i long lanwis Mere Lava we em i minim se "gud moning ol brata". Taem em i gud moning olsem ia, jif Qoqo wantaem nomo i sek long jif Ringo we em i jam gud blong kilim Bisop. Em i jam aot, i jam aot i leftemap lif namwele, i toktok long nrafala jif ia, Ringo, toktok long em, em i talem se :

- He, towsu niak nin diar we tia, sur kisian i tu kamrow

Hemia long lanwis Mwerlap, talem se : Brata, yu no kilim em from em i wan brata blong yumi nomo, em i wan brata blong yumi nomo. Em i save gud lanwis blong yumi. Long ples ia, jif Ringo em i harem nogud tumas, em i sakem wan toktok bakegen long ples ia, em i talem se :

-Akwo, tovsur gor nögok (...) na kamrow na kwaton.

Hemia em i sakem toktok em i talem se :

- Brata sipos yu no stap blokem bae yumi kakae hed blong em.

Long ples ia, jif Ringo em i aot wetem kros blong em, i go bak long Rafsara, ale jif Qoqo i em i welkomem Bisop Patteson, taem em i welkomem Bisop Patteson em i tekem Bisop Patteson i kam long sor em i no bin tekem Bisop Patteson i go long ples we tufala i mitim em long ples ia. Em i singaotem Bisop Patteson se bae i pul i go long nrafala basis. Jif Qoqo i folem sor Bisop Patteson ol i pul wetem em i go long nrafala basis we ol i kolem Nier Qarañar. Long ples ia long Nier Qarañar i gat wan tambu viley i stap long ples ia we em i wan sekret viley we ol jif ol i stap mekem...ol i mekem olsem long lanwis ol i talem mwowmwow, ol i stap wosip long ples ia, ol i wosipim ol hiten god, hao blong kilim man, hao blong sendem devil i go kakae wan man long difren viley....

So long ples ia jif Qoqo i tekem Bisop Patteson i go sor long ples ia, i jam sor afta i tekem em i go antap long smol stasin long ples ia, ale saen we bisop Patteson i luk long taem ia, Jif Qoqo i go putum Bisop Patteson i stanap, ale jif Qoqo i danis raon long wan stamba blong Namwele. I danis raon i singsing i stap makam aksin Bisop Patteson i no save se i stap mekem wanem be long aedi ia we Qoqo i stap mekem long Bisop Patteson em i singsing em i danis i stap talem aot long ol hiden gods blong Mere Lava se i gat wan niufala devel em i kamtru so wetem pis bae yumi holem taet em bae yumi no mekem wan samting long em. From long taem ia hiden laef blong Mere Lava i strong. So em i singsing i danis finis, em i lidim Bisop Patteson i go long men viley we em i aot long em. Taem Bisop Patteson em i go i stap wetem jif Qoqo long Tasmat long wan smol stasin, stasin we em i lidim ol pipol long ples ia, nem long ples ia long Leurok Em is stap long ples ia, long histris Bisop Patteson em i bin stap tri deis wetem Qoqo. Em i bin stap tri deis mo em i stori mo ol man blong Mere lava, long Leurok long taem ia ol i no anderstanem, long Tasmat ol i no andrestanem se Bisop Patteson i talem wanem. So Bisop Patteson em i stap, long nek blong em em i hangem wan nekles be nekles ia em i hangem i gat kros jesus i hang long em long ples ia jif Qoqo i bin askem Bisop Patteson se wanem ia i hang long nek blong yu? Be em i toktok lanwis Mere Lava. So Bisop Patteson em i anderstanem se ol i stap askem wan samting long nek blong em. So em i explanem em i bin talem se saen we i stap long nek blong mi ia em i wan kros. Man ia we i stap long em, nem blong em i Jesus be jesus ia ol i bin kilim em mo ol i nilim em long kros from yu mo from mi we taem we yumi i mekem nogud, ale em nao ol i kilim em blong em i ded from ol nogud blong yumi, ol sin blong yumi. Long taem ia Qoqo i bin girap, i talem aot long ol pipol blong em, from Bisop Patteson em i toktok mo em i mekem aksin, hao ol i kilim Jesus. Afta Qoqo i luk mo em i kros, so em i toktok em i se man sipos mi stap long taem ia, bae mi talem aot long ol soldia bae ol i kilim ol man we ol i kilim Jesus ia. From em i mekem i gud ia, em i no mekem nogud, em i mekem i gud ia, em i kam blong talem aot ol gudgudfala samting be ol i kilim em from?

Mekem se Bisop Patteson i stap, i harem we ol i toktok. Afta we Bisop patteson i spendem tri deis wetem olgeta, em i talem long jif Qoqo se bae em i gobak. Taem em i redi blo go, em i givim wan smol akis wetem wan box matis wetem stik tabak. Taem em i givim ol samting ia long olgeta, ol i askem se blong wanem. Bisop Patteson em i explanem se matis em i blong mekem faea, em i soem long olgeta se hao blong mekem faea long matis, afta i soem akis long olgeta hao blong usum akis, afta tabako i soem long olgeta tabako em i blong wanem, hao yu usum tabako. Taem ol i tekem ol i usum ol wamting ia ol i glad tumas long ol samting ia. Afta Bisop Patteson i tekem rod blong gobak so jif Qoqo i soem rod long em. Taem Bisop Patteson i stap tekem rod blong gobak long solwota, blong gobak long sip, i gat wan boy em i stap go long solwota, i askem mami blong em blong go long solwota blong go sutum crab wetem bonaro. Bisop Patteson i wokbaot i go daon em i kasem long solwota em i godaon em i go long wan basis ol i kolem Mëtel na-vatrag. Long ples ia em i stanap long blakston em singaotem bot blong bot i kamsor long basis ia. Em i lukluk i go daon lo nrafala basis em i luk wan yangfala boy em i stap stanap long ston, em i stap haed from crab. Afta Bisop Patteson em i sefem em i go daon, jamjam folfolem blakston i go daon. I go be bot i stap folem Bisop Patteson i go daon. Gogogo taem i kam kasem long ston ia, boy ia em i stap sutum crab em i no luk se Bisop patteson i go daon. Be boy ia nem blong em Clement Marau. Taem Bisop Patteson i kasem ston ia, bot tu i kam kasem ston, Bisop Patteson i hang long han blong Clement Marau, Clement Marau i sek, em i kik blong ronwe, em i no save ronwe from Bisop Patteson i hang long han blong em finis. Long ples ia, tufala i kik blong Bisop Patteson i pulum Clement Marau i go long bot, Clement Marau i pulum Bisop Patteson blong go bak long sor from em i wantem ronwe. Tufala i trae had gogo Bisop Patteson i winim Clement Marau i sakem em i go long bot, ol kru long bot ol i holem teat Clement Marau, taem ol i holem Clement Marau,

karem em i go, go wetem long sip. Karem em i go, stori se i karem tufala tu, i stilim tufala tu, be narawan, nem blong em i no kamaot klia se em i wu, be tufala tu i go kasem England, tufala i stap skul. Ples i kolkol tumas, brata blong Clement Marau i ded, ale ol i seftem skul i kamdaon long Norfolk, ale Clement Marau em i kam i stap skul long Norfolk, taem i stap skul long Norfolk, em i stap yet, em i no kambak long aelan blong em long mere lava yet, second trip blong Bisop Patteson i kam. Taem Bisop Patteson i kambak long Vanuatu, kam kasem Mere lava, long ples ia em i tekem wan moa boy, long 1872. Long 1872 ia em i aotem William Vaget, em i karem William Vaget i go bak long Norfolk. Taem William Vaget i go long Norfolk, long 1872 ia, Clement Marau i kam, i kam stap long Mere lava. Taem Clement Marau i kam, long taem ia nao, em i bin mekem wok, em i putumap church long Tasmat vilej, long Leurok, mo church haos ia em i no bigwan, em i smol nomo, em wan nomo em i stap wok long ples ia. Em i trenem sam yangfala boy long ples ia, so em i trenem yangfala boy ia, aot blong yangfala boy ol i kasem 13. Afta, Clement Marau em i stap nomo long Tasmat, em i no go long Leqel, Levetmisē olbaot ia, em i stap nomo long Tasmat. Em i aot wetem 13 yangfala boy ia, ol i pul i go long Gaua, em i tekem trifala boy ia ol i go ol i go long Gaua. Ol i go se go putum gospel long Gaua. Ol i pulsor long Gaua long wan ples ol i kolem Votow, ol i stap long ples ia. Afta olgeta 12 ia ol i stap, ale Clemen marau i kambak, taem em i kambak be William Vaget tu i kamtru, em i kambak long Mere lava long 1882. Em i kambak long Mere Lava, ale em i setemap ol church raon long ol vilej. Em i tekem gospel i go long Levetmisē, afta i aot long Levetmisē, i go long Big Ston, William Vaget i go raon wetem, afta i aot long Big Ston i kambak long Leqel, afta i aot long Leqel i em i kam stap bakegen long Tasmat, las vilej blong tekem gospel, olgeta long Auta. Olgeta long Auta ol i jas kam kristian bihaen. Bihaen long William Vaget, taem Clement Marau i ded, afta William Vaget tu i stap smol, emi ded. Em i ded ale, long 1882, William Vaget em i stap olsem wan deacon, em i wok olsem wan deacon, em i no kam pris. Long 1882 ia em i stap olsem wan deacon kam kasem 1892. Afta long 1900, Bisop Wilson i ordenem William Vaget i kam pris. Taem em i kam pris long 1900, long taem ia kristianiti i go strong mo kwaliti blong kristianiti blong Mere Lava, ol hiten man ol i kam kristian, evri samting we ol i mekem, ol hiten gods we ol i stap wosipim bifo, ol stap i lego, mo long taem ia, Kwokwo tu em i kilim pig from kristianiti. Qoqo em i kilim pig em i kasem seven step mo eit step blong em em i kilim from kristianiti. So taem em i kilim from kristianiti, ol aelan blong Mere Lava ol i kam kristian. Afta William Vaget, taem em i ded, Mere lava i kam kristian aelan. Long ples ia church haos ol i bildim raon long Mere lava. William Vaget em i bin ded long 1916. Afta, William Vaget i bin trenem ol yangfala ia, se ol i save hao blong tokbaot god blong kristianiti i kkam bigwan; Mo aot long ol yngfala ia i gat wan we nem blong em Joe Kwia. William Vaget i ded i putum lidasip i stap long han blong Joe Kwia ia. Joe Kwia em i wan man Mere Lava bakegen we em i holem taet kristianiti. So em i tijim ol man, em i go daon long Gaua, em i stap long Gaua long 1904, em i aot long Gaua em i gat 5 pikinini long Gaua. 4 ol i ded ale 1 i tekem i kambak long Mere lava wetem em. Long 1920 Joe Kwia i ded, em i ded, afta long Joe Kwia, i gat sam studen ol i go long Vurias, Bisop Patteson i bin setemap wan skul long Ambae, ol i putum Vurias. Be afta long Ambae i gat wan skul blong church i stap long Vurias long Vanua Lava, so long 1924, skul ia i bin aot blong Vurias long Vanua Lava i go long Ambae. Long ples ia, i gat wan boy bakegen, nem blong em Harry Vanva. Em i kam afta long Joe Kwia, taem Joe Kwia i ded, Harry Vanva i go skul long Vurias Ambae. Em i go skul, em i kambak, em i tekem wok olsem Joe Kwia, mo William Vaget, Clement Marau, em i kam pris, em lukaotem ol kristian long Mere lava. Ol wok blong em i gud em i lukaotem mere Lava gogo, long 1937, em i ded. Long 1937 ia, i gat wan nara man long ples ia, em i tekem ples blong Harry Vanva we nem blong em i Wilson Rong. Em i stap, em i kam pris blong Mere lava, em i luk afta Mere lava. Long 1971, fata Wilson Rong em i ded, em i ded so fata Frank Sovan em i tekem ples blong em, em i kam em i go skul long Kohimarama, em i go skul long Solomon, em i kambak, taem em i kasem long Mere lava, em i go tru long ordinatin blong em long 1971, em i kam pris. Afta 1 yia i pas, fata Thomas langon, em tu i folem Fata Frank, em i kam em i orden pris long 1973 (...)".

p. 53: (Deacon Steve Turris, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011).

"Taem we yu wokem ol samting ia, o sipos no taem we yu werem ol samting ia, be em i olsem se yu kam fren wetem ol devel. Be sipos yu no strong, sipos yu no velvel festaem, bae samting ia i save afeketm woman blong yu o pikinini blong yu".

p. 55: Kastom stori, the Maketuk matriline (Willy Sovan, Auta village, 16/02/2011).

"Mi wokbaot. Mi stap sutum pijin long nabangga. Nao wan ara ia i fas long han blong nabbanga. Ok rus blong nabbanga i fuldaon i ron from han blong wil cane ia, i go, go go kasem graon. Ok Taem mi wokbaot blong go lu fes blong nabbanga ia, nao mi luk olgeta olsem ol pijin ol i kamkam daon, ol i swim, ol i bin kam blong antap long skae. Ol i stap swim nao, mi luk wan woman ia, mi tekem aot win blong em nao, mi haedem. Ale ol i swim gogo finis, ol i kam kam putum, putum wan i putum blong em, wan i putum blong em, gogo em i putum wan mo lukaot gogo narawan ia i krai. Em krai from, krai, krai, krai, olgeta evriwan,

wan i tanem raon i se:

- Hey! Olsem wanem!

- Ho, mi no save se win blong mi wea!

Em i girap i go, em i stap krae. Nao olsem narawan i kam nao.

Nao man ia i kam, i holem em:

- Yu krae from wanem?

- Ho mi lukaot win blong mi mi no faenem!

- No livim! Be em nao i haedem!

Nao tufala i go long haos, tufala i mared, i stap gogo nao pijin i bon i kam nao, em nao gogogo mifala nao."

p. 56: (John Mera Bice, Tasmat village, 15/07/2011).

"*Bono* em i olbaot long ples ia, i not gat wan ples, em i stap long ol ples. I gat fulap win long *bono*, i no gat laet, i no gat aelan, i no gat haos, i no gat wan samting long *bono*, ol samting i flot nomo olbaot olsem, i gat win nomo."

p. 58: *Kastom stori* of Moēn (Norman Philip, Leqel village, Mere Lava, 26/01/2011).

"Mi nem blong mi Norman Philip, mi blong Leqel long aelan blong Mere Lava. Bae mi talem wan kastom storian: storian ia em i blong ples blong mi long Leqel.

I gat wan man, nem blong em Moēn, em i bin, long wan let afternum, em i wokbaot blong sutum flaengfokis. Em i wokbaot blong sutum flaengfokis long ol bredfrut. OK em i wokbaot gogo, em i wet long ol flaengfokis blong ol i kam hang, gogo em i harem se ae blong em i hevi, em i wantem silip. So stret em i fas long wan flae wud, wan wud we ol i katem blong woling blong haos. Em i ledaon antap long em, em i putum banaro blong em longsaed blong em. Ale em i ledaon, i stap silip, i wet long ol flaengfokis bae ol i kam hang. Be long taem ia we em i go wokbaot blong sutum flaengfokis, em i wan 5 dei blong wan brata blong em, brata blong em i bin ded, 5 dei blong em ia nao. So taem we em i ledaon gogo em i silip, em i silip ded. Ale, long taem ia, from long aelan blong mifala long Mere Lava i gat wan kastom we em i stap, long 5 dei bae ol man ol i pas raon wetem niufala ded man ia nao. So long taem we em i stap silip ia, be brata blong em ia we i jes ded ia, ol i pas raon wetem em, ol i kam ol i fas long em we em i stap silip antap long wan wud ia. Ale ol i girap, ol i leftemap em. Em i stap silip stret ia long wan ples we ol i stap kolem Loluwor. Afta ol i leftemap em, i gat wan ples bakegen bae ol i go daon, stret Loluwor ia i go daon, nem blong ples ia Nelow. Long Nelow, festaem i gat wan tri we ol i stap katem banaro long em, mifala i kolem *na-ar*. Ale ol i go daon ia, long ples ia nao wea bae ol i flae wetem. Taem we ol i leftemap man ia we i stap silip ia, be brata blong em ia i pusum hed blong em i go daon long sorae blong em, i lanwis long em se :

- Brata yu ia, yu stap long ded finis be bae mifala i go daon wetem yu naoia, taem yu harem se bae mi talem long ol fren blong mi ia se : "yufala i leftemap smol !" ; ale taem mifala i leftemap i go antap long ol wud we if fasfas ia, ale yu hang long wan han blong wud ia, be yu hang strong wan taem !

Ale em i ledaon, ale ol i wokbaot wetem, ol i stap sloslo wetem i go daon. Be ples ia naoia we i stap ia we ol i bin pas long em long ol wud we i fasfas, naoia ples ia i klin finis, ples ia ol i kolem Nelow. OK, taem ol i stap wokbaot i go daon, be samfala i stap askem se:

- Bae bigfala mit blong yumi ia, bae yumi kakae wea ?

Samfala ol i talem se :

- Bae yumi kakae long wan...

From i gat tufala ston ia i stap stret long Auta long area blong Big Si long Auta, be tufala ston ia i gat nem blong tufala, narawan em i Vatrañ Lap, narawan em i Vatrañ Rig, long bislama ol i kolem se ... ating wan em i olsem wan bigfala ston afta narawan em i wan smol ston.

OK taem we ol i stap wokbaot o go daon wetem man ia we i stap silip ia, samfala i askem se :

- Bae yumi kakae long wanem ston ?

Afta narawan i se :

- Bae yumi kakae long smol ston.

Ol Narawan i se :

- No bae yumi kakae long bifala ston.

Ol i stap go daon, ol i gogo ale taem man ia we i jes ded ia em i se :

- Yufala i leftemap smol !

Taem ol i lefetemap be man ia i hang strong. Ale ol i go daon ol i kasem long poen ia we bae ol i flae ia be oli tekof wetem bigfala wud ia nao. Ol i flae gogo taem ol i land long wan bigfala ston ia we long narasaed long Big Si ia, ol i putum bigfala pis wud i go daon ia be man ia i nogat long em. Ale ol i kros ol i sakem

wud ia i stap, ol i flae i kambak. Taem ol i flae i kambak ol i kasem ples ia we em i bin hang long em ia, be brok delaet, man ia i go daon ia i go kasem haos. Ale storian ia i end long ples ia nao.

p. 59: (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 23/11/2010).

"I gat tri man, olgeta ol i stap long wan spesel ples wetem ol headdreses we ol i stap mekem. Ol i stap singsing oltaem from ol i no wantem se ol hat ol i atakem olgeta. Be long wan taem ol i luk se ol i nomo gat solwota, mekem se 2 man ol i tingting se bae ol i godaon long soa blong karem solwota i kam bak. Long taem ia, nrafala man i stap wetem ol hat ia, be ale em i harem se em i wantem silip, em i save se em i no mas silip be em i harem se silip ia i strong tumas, ale em i stap silip. Be hat ia i laev from em i stopem singsing ia so hat i kakae ae blong man ia. Afta, tufala nrafala man we ol i go long solwota finis, ol i stap kambak, ol i harem singsing i kamaot long haos ia, be ol i save wantaem se wan samting we i nogud i bin hapen long ples ia. Ol i kam i go insaed long haos, ol i luk ol blod i ron mo ted man ia i ded."

p. 59-60: (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 23/11/2010).

"Sipos yu wokbaot, narawan i wokbaot wetem yu, sipos yu pul, be narawan i pul wetem yu, sipos yu fis narawan i fis wetem yu tu, mekem se taem yu luk se hamas fis be i gat fulap long end blong dei ia."

p. 63: (Jif Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 17/06/2011).

"Na-sagean em i olsem wan win i blu long wan samting ale mi save smel, olsem wan man i pas, afta win i karem smel blong em i go. Smel ia i save go insaed long man i save afektem man. Be smel ia i save go insaed, i save afektem kakae tu. Afta, sipos wan man i kakae kakae ia, bambae em i kam sik."

p. 66-67: Kastom stori (Luc Wokot, translated in Bislama by Janet Philip, Tasmat village, recorded by Monika Stern, 27/07/2005).

Mi nem blong mi Janet Philip, mi laek blong transletem stori we jif Luk Tula Wokot i bin talem long lanwis. Mi laek blong talem stori ia abaoi wan laen long aelan ia long Mere Lava, ol i kolem se Rowneoluñ. Afta, laen we em i Rowneoluñ ia em i wan laen we em nao i fes man blong Mere lava we mekem se em i kasem mifala tede. So mi laek blong talem olsem ia.

"Long taem bifo we i nogat man, ol man i no gat long aelan ia long Mere Lava, i gat sevenfala woman ol i stap long aelan ia Mere Lava. Be ol i stap ia, ol i stap long wan viley long Levetmisë. Long Levetmisë ia, sevenfala woman ia ol i stap. Ples blong olgeta long Mak Wilgen, i gat wan stamba blong nabbanga we em i stap long wan krik longsaed blong Mak Wilgen ia. I gat wan ston long ples ia, so sevenfala woman ia nao ol i kamaot blong ston ia. Afta ol i stap stap long Mak Wilgen, be taem ol i stap olsem ia ol i stap maredem flaenfokis. Mo flaenfokis taem i kam long olgeta, sevenfala woman ia ol i bin stanemap ol bambu, sevenfala bambu stret long haos long olgeta, wan flaenfokis i kam, em i save stan long top blong bambu, afta i go insaed long haos. Bambu ia i stikaot long haos ia. Taem i go insaed long haos mekem se ol flaenkokis ia ol i stap maredem olgeta.

Gogo wan dei, i gat wan man em i flot i kam long wan ne-tembià, ne-tabëa ia em i dis blong kakae o blong mekem nalot.

Wanem aelan we em i flot i kam blong em ? Em i flot i kam blong Santo, long wan ples ol i kolem Port Olry. Wan man blong ples ia em i flot i kam. Em i stap long bus be em i flot long riva, i go kasem solwota, ale em i flot i kam. Taem i flot i kam gogo kasem long ples ia long Mere lava, em i stap long ? From i nogat man. Afta i faenem wan fenis blong pig we ol woman, sevenfala woman ia ol i stap fidim. Ol pig i stap long ples ia long Mak Wilgen ia.

Taem ol i kam sakem kakae blong pig long fenis, afta man ia em i stap ronemaot ol pig afta i stap kakae ol haf kakae blong pig. Gogo ol i luk se pig blong olgeta ia, bodi blong olgeta i godaon, ol i bunbun. Afta ol i askaskem olgeta bakegen se:

- Hey wanem em i mekem se ol pig blong yumi we ol i bunbun olsem ia !

Be ol i no save se wan man i haed long fenis blong pig ia, i stap kakae haf kakae blong pig. Afta wan taem, wan woman blong olgeta i kam, em i sakem ol kakae blong pig afta i haed. Taem i haed olsem ia be em i luk, i harem ol pig i singsingaot from man ia nao i stap ronemaot ol pig. Ronemaot ol pig afta em i kakae haf kakae ia. Afta woman ia i se:

- Hey ! Yu ia nao yu stap kakae haf kakae blong pig blong mifala !

Afta em i mekem saen long han blong em se bae em i stap kwaet, from em i fraet long samfala man, nogud samfala man long ples ia bae em i kilim em.

- Hey Yu kwaet, mi mi fraet ia, nogud sam man bae i kilim mi!

- Hey i nogat man, i nogat man !

- Tru ? Yu talem se tru i nogat man ?

- Yes i nogat man, mifala i gat sevenfala woman nomo.

- Be yufala Yu stap olsem ia ?

- No mifala i stap maredem ol flaenfokis.

- Yu giaman !

- Si tru ! Yu kam long haos !

Afta em i haedem em long haos blong em. Taem em i haedem em long haos blong em, long naet, taem naet olsem ia, ale ol flaenfokis ol i kambak. Ol i kambak, ol i stap long top blong bambu. Afta i kalkal i folem bambu ia i go insaed long haos.

Afta woman ia i se:

- Hemia nao man blong mi. Yu kilim em !

Afta man ia i girap i tekem wan nahnal, ale i bangem long foret blong flaenfokis. Afta flaenfokis ia i ded.

Afta em i stap wetem woman ia nao. Be taem em i stap stap wetem woman ia, sikisfala woman ia i luk woman ia se bodi blong em i gud. Be olgeta ol i gat sikras blong flaenfokis we flaenfokis i sikrasem olgeta. Sikisfala woman ia i askem em se:

- Hey olsem wanem blong Yu, bodi blong Yu i smut nomo, be mifala i gat ol sikras blong fleanfokis i stap long mifala !

- Si si em i semak ! I gat man blong mi, flaenfokis i stap kam long mi yet !

Be wehem, em i stap haedem wan man long ples ia ia !

Mekem ol i sek nomo em i gat bel. Taem em i gat bel olsem ia se:

- Hey Yu Yu haedem wan man ia !

Em i se:

- Si, wan man insaed ia ia.

- Ho ! Yumi mas lovem em blong em i kilimaot ol flaenfokis ia from ol i stap givim soa blong yumi ! Mekem se taem fes woman ia i gat bel, afta em i stap wetem sikifala woman ia. Evriwan i gat bel, man ia i kilimaot evri flaenfokis mekem se flaenfokis i nomo maredem ol woman.

Afta sevenflala woman ia ol i stap go mekem garen blong olgeta long Aondo.

Mekem se vilej hemia i kam fulap long aelan ia long Mere Lava, tru long wan man ia nao we em i aot blong Santo aelan we i kamaot long ples long Port Olry i kam.

Mekem se i gat plenti man tede long Mere Lava, mo samfala aelan tu, we ol man ol i kamtru long samfala laen, mekem se i gat hamas laen blong mifala long Mere Lava.

Be fes laen we em i blong Mere Lava em i Rowneoluñ, second laen em i na-Ondo.

Hemia nao. Tankiu."

p. 69: (Glenda Lois, Tasmat village, 16/06/2011)

"Nao mifala i stap usum graon ia from se bubu blong olfala man ia, i bonem mama blong em be em wan nomo em i nogat brata. Olfala man, papa blong em blong ples ia, em i sud usum graon long ples ia be stret mama blong em em i nogat wan brata mekem se em i bonem wan pikinini blong em ia nomo i gat wan wan nomo, em wan nomo, mekem se sipos em i folem papa blong em nomo be graon blong mami blong em bae i olsem wanem? Bae i stap nomo olsem? Ale, mekem se mifala i godaon blong usum graon ia from se mami blong em i nogat brata afta i bonem em wan nomo, ale mekem se mifala i usum bigfala graon ia."

p. 75: (Adam Valuwa, Palon area, Espiritu Santo, 29/11/2010).

"Ol papa, ol i givim sam samting, hemi blod, be ol uncles ol i bigwan ol i givim evri samting, from ol i tij from insaed blong nakamal."

p. 84: (Luk Wokot, Tasmat village, 13/01/2011).

"Bifo ol woman ol i stap silip long haos olsem, be ol man ol i stap go long nakamal blong olgeta wetem boy blong olgeta. Festaem, ol woman ol i no save entarem long nakamal, be taem we skul i kam soa, afta taem ia, ol waetman oli talem se i no stret nating olsem mo se bae naoia man i mas silip mo kakae long sem haos wetem ol woman blong olgeta. Afta, wan woman, nem blong em Roselbemweg em i entarem nakamal blong

Leurok, em i mekem olsem be em i soem long ol man ia, ale ol man ol i harem save se ol samting ol i mas jenj nao. Ale ol i go ol i stap long haos wetem ol woman ia nao."

p. 90: (Masten Philip, Tasmat village, Mere Lava, 12/02/2011).

"Mi wantem kakae raes evri dei, long evri kakae!"

p. 102: (Rosalyn Mary, 22/01/2011, Tasmat Village).

"Pikinini ia em i kamdaon long wan hill antap, so mifala i kolem se pikinini i kamdaon samples long To-
Qetvar o To-Lekurañ, em i karem fulap samting long bak blong em, so em i karem, heu mifala i kolem se *ne-leaf* o *na-vatras* si *ne-wetbava*, em i karem fulap ol ting long baksaed blong em so mi mas sakem pikinini ia long wan sista blong mi se em i mas holem taet pikinini ia nao. So wu ia bae i tekem?".

p. 105: (Jif William Sal, Luwör, Leqel village, 03/01/2011).

"I gat wan minim blo haos ia, Minim em i se haos em i save protektem ol man we ol i stap insaed wetem ol samting blong olgeta. Be haos em i mekem se ol man ol i save haed ol samting blong olgeta tu. Sipos yu gat wan haos blong yu, bae yu save putum ol samting i go insaed, ale bae i no gat wan man se i save mekem nogud long yu ia. Sipos yu no gat haos blong yu, be i minim se yu no save putum ol samting long wan gud ples. Bae yu go long garen, be taem we yu kambak bae yu putum ol kakae olsem wanem? Bambae yu no save silip sef, bambae ol samting blong yu i flot nomo, ale ol win blong devel i save kasem yu tu, mo you save kam sik."

p.105: (Hilda Roñ, Matliwar, Auta village, 15/06/2011).

"Ne-gēt ia, gudfala basket ia we i no brok, yu go long garen bae yu fulumap gudfala kakae i go insaed i kambak long haos. Bambae ol man ol i no save mekem nogud long rod from kakae blong yu i stap insaed long ne-gēt ia. Kakae i stap insaed be ol man ol i no save lukluk se i gat wanem. Be sipos basket blong yu i brok, olsem sipos i nogud, bambae ol kakae i go olbaot, ol man bae ol i luk, mo tu ol rat bambae l i save kakae. Tru long basket, yu save karem ol gudfala samting i kam insaed long haos. Wan gudfala tingting, yu save fulumap insaed blong kipim gud. Hemia minim blong basket ia we i nogat nating insaed we mifala i givim long PEO long taem ia. Mifala i givim basket ia from se bae toktok blong em i save go insaed, olsem bambae i no flot o i no go olbaot."

p. 111: (William Sal, Leqel village, 03/01/2011).

" hemia olsem wan man we i go wetem wan woman taem we tufala i mared, ale i gat kastom ale tugeta i kam wan".

p. 112: (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/06/2011).

"Woman i mas lukaotem ol pikinini insaed long hao, em i mas lukaotem olgeta long kakae blong olgeta se bodi blong olgeta i kam strong, em i mekem kakae rere blong ol man long haos ia, olsem em i mas gat kakae blong ol famli tu, we i stap kam long haos ia. Hemia bae i soem *na-tamtam* se bambae famli bae i stap gud, olsem bae i stap wan nomo. Bambae ol pikinini i gat rod blong olgeta i stret nomo. Wok blong papa mo mama hemia nomo, blong wok long garen, blong strettem rod blong pikinini wetem ol uncle blong olgeta, mekem se pikinini blong tufala bambae i folet stret rod nomo, ale i kam strong."

p. 112: (Luc Wokot, Tasmat village, 29/12/2010).

"Mi ravem fes blong olfala woman ia, from se bae em i tingbaot taem we mifala i no go tugeta yet. Long taem ia i no gat haos, i no gat pikinini yet. Mifala i stap nomo olsem."

p. 115: (Judah Tula, Lekurañ, Tasmat village, 07/02/2011).

"Ne-kuteg ne-kutegi, niak sa kuteg ne tultula, nan na da ne-wol-gemel, no-wol-eañ, nan lakan, sa bas, lakan ne tultula na mate ivēang a I tamang, bobosnie, lakan se nu-da na mate, ker nu-sigit no-wok, nware gorgor ne-met-tam lan".

p. 116: (Philip Gen, Tasmat village, 06/06/2011).

"Bambae ol pikinini ol i save liv from ol samting i gat insaed long haos mo from ol garen mo ol tri. Bae pikinini ia i kam strong mo pikinini blong olgeta tu i kam strong from ol i stap insaed long graon."

p. 120: (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 16/05/2011).

"Taem we ol man i kampas long haos be i gat kakae. Sipos i no tan finis ale bae mi talem se ol i wet smol, se ol i save testem kakae, ale mi givim kakae. Be i gat man be taem we yu go long haos blong olgeta, be ol i no mekem olsem, ol i talem se ol i sori be i no gat kakae we i tan yet, olsem se ol i no save givim. Be yu luk, sipos i gat man we i askem from hemia [crab], from se em i save se bambae mi go from, be taem mi kambak wetem, bambae mi tingbaot gud long em. Sipos mi go long garen or sipos i gat fish be wan man i pas i askem be mi mi mas givim long hem. Be samtaem taem yu yu askem nrafala samting olsem fis, from se yu harem se man ia bae i go from fis, man ia i talem se i no gat, se i no gat fis. Olsem i no gud fasin. Ol man ol i sud mekem gud, be sipos mifala i mekem gud be ol nrafala man i no mekem olsem, ol i mekem se relationsip i kam nogud. Bambae ol man ol i jusum se bae ol i no givim kakae bakegen. Ol man we ol i mekem nogud olsem, bambae ol man ol i save jusum se bae ol i nomo talem se blong kam insaed long *n-eañ kuk*, bae ol i nomo givim kakae."

p. 128: (Leo Swithun, Palon area, Espiritu Santo, 27/04/2011).

"Ok, bae mi talem olsem se bifo yu go insaed long nakamal, olsem se yu wantem kam wan bigfala man longsaed long kilim pig, so yu mas tingting plenti mo tam we yu go insaed long nakamal, hat blong yu i mas bi strong blong tekem wanem kakae we em i stap insaed long nakamal. From wanem? From se kakae we yumi luk long em evridei, i no hemia.. Hem i nara kaen kakae we blong ae blong yu bae yu luk taem we i go insaed long tingting blong yu, be weta bae yu kakae o yu no save kakae. O tingting blong yu i se bae yu tekem kakae ia, bae yu fulap o bae yu no fulap. From se yu go insaed ia yu end from wanem we yu wantem yu go antap long step ia so yu mas kakae kakae ia nao be sipos yu no save kakae kakae a be yu no save go antap long step. (...)

From se...bae mi talem olsem wanem... from se kakae ia em i wan...wanem... wan samting very secret insaed long nakamal mo em i no, em i no wan kakae we i kamaot lo graon, we i kamaot long ol frut tri o whatever. Hemi kakae ia em i wan charcol faea, wan samting olsem nomo. (...). From se yu end blong go insaed ia, be yu mas kakae kakae ia nao. Be sipos i hard blong yu, olsem se papa em i bin talem, se ol i fel long samting ia from hemia nao, ol i no bin folem rule blong go tru long nakamal ia ale go antap long step ia."

p. 130: (Adam Valuwa, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 21/04/2011).

"Ol bigfala jif blong bifo ol i gat rispek, mekem se narawan tu ol i gat rispek long olgeta. Olgeta ol i save blong mekem ol samting se i stret, ol i kipim se ol samting ol i stret, ol i mekem se ol man ol i pem rank blong olgeta. Taem we ol i sakem wan toktok, be toktok ia ol man ol i folem. Taem we ol i askem wan samting, be ol man ol i aktem stret. Hemia from wanem long taem we ol man ol i kilim pig be i stret mo equality i stap. Naoia, ol jif ol i nomo kilim pig, mekem se ol samting i nomo gat rispek mo i nomo stret, i nomo equal nating."

p. 132: (Marsden Harris, 18/09/2012, Barvēt, Gaua).

"Everi samting ia i jenj taem we tufala gavman i putum asesa long evri aelan. Al kastom i stap lus, ol jif i go bihaen nao, ale asesa i stanap festaem, long 1960 olsem i kam antap. (...). Ol jif ol i nomo gat rank nao, asesa i lukaotem evri samting raon long aelan. Kilim pig i finis long taem ia nao."

p. 133: (John Norman Turris, 11/07/2011, Tasmat village).

"Uncle em i ki from em i soem rod, be papa em i soem graon o wanem i gat blong famli blong em. Sipos uncle blong mi i gat rate lo *ne-gemel* o long *na-salagor*, be papa blong mi i save mekem kastom long em se em bae i karem mi i go insaed, be sipos papa blong mi i gat rate, be uncle blong mi i save mekem kastom long papa blong mi se em bae i karem mi i go."

p. 133: (Deacon Steve Turris, 17/06/2011).

"Kakae inside long *na-salagor*, ol i usum rus nomo. Ol kaen kakae blong *salagor*, i klosap semak wetem kakae blong huriken, yu mas velvel. Devel i kakae wetem ol man insaed long *salagor*, ol man ol i no save luk be devel i stap tu. Olsem sipos haf kakae i stap, be yu mas sakem nomo, i nogud from devel i tekem blong em finis. Yu luksave hemia from fes blong kakae ia i difren (olsem fis i sopsop nomo). Devel afektem kakae, afta kakae ia i afektem ol man. Long *salagor*, mifala i kolem brata long ol devel ia from se ol i kakae wetem mifala, mifala i stap wetem olgeta olsem sipos olgeta famli ia nao."

p.139: ." (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/02/2011).

"Long taem blong tatoo em i wan tambu dei blong ol man insaed long vilej, ol i mas stap kwaet insaed long haos blong olgeta, mekem se i nogat wan man blong disturbem. *Ne-ñweter* em i 'velvel' (em i stap kwaet long haos). Sipos ol i mekem stret olsem, bae bodi blong *ne-ñweter* ia bae i no soa. *Ne-ñweter* em i mas kilim pig mo sakem yam, ale afta em i gat tattoo."

p. 139: (Luc Wokot, 13/01/2011, Tasmat village).

"Long taem ia ol man ol i mas fidim ol waef blong em, em i no olsem narafala taem we ol woman ol i fidim ol man, be narasaed, ol man ol i fidim ol woman."

p. 142: (Hilda Roñ, Auta village, 15/02/2011).

"Mother's Union is in charge of the help for the sick persons, the children; ne-ngweter em i difren, em i jif blong ol woman."

p. 143: (Hilda Roñ, 15/02/2011, Auta village).

"Wok blong *ñweter* em i longsaed long haos, em i gat evrisamting i redi, ples blong silip, kakae... Taem ol man ol i kam, em i mas karem evri samting, lukaotem sipos i nogat samting long nakamal, em i mas provaedem. I gat plenti *ñweter* bifo be ol i folet man we i gat hae rank. Naoia, i gat niufala *ñweter*, jif ol i bin putum *ñweter* bifo, naoia ol woman ol i jusum, mi mi stap long yia ia nao, be inaf blong mi from mi bin mekem 4 yia finis. I nogat kastom blong putum wan niufala *ñweter* naoia, ol woman ol i jusum nomo afta ol i wokem wan kakae, ale, yu mas mekem wok ia nao. Longsaed long wok blong naoia, yu mas provaedem evri samting tu olsem bifo. Janet i bin gus longsaed long *ñweter* from Philip i stap be mi man blong mi i nomo stap, em i lus finis, so mi nomo save mekem gud. Mi stap go long mitim blong ol jif long Qet Varê area Council blong ol jif, mi olsme voice blong ol woman. Mi gat wan vaes long area Council sipos mi no save go. Afta i gat 2/2 woman long wanwan vilej olsem wan presiden mo wan vaes presiden mo sekretary mo tresurer tu."

p. 147: (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 07/06/2011).

"i gat trifala ting yu save put antap long *n-eañ kuk* blong yu. I gat *nu-wutil* mo *ni-bis* mo ol ston we i stap long foret. Trifala samting ia i minim se yu wan Paramount Jif, be yu mas pem raet festaem, yu mas pem raet long uncle blong yu. *Nu-wutil*, em i minim maot blong sofis. from se taem we yu hukum fis ia be sipos yu mestem, be yu mas lukatem gud. From se afta sofis ia bae i tingbaot gud. Taem yu go fisim, bae sofis ia i atakem yu wanteam.

Ol ston long foret i minim se keregear, olsem bigfala ston we i stap long stamba blong wol. i minim se jif we ol i kipim gud ol narafala ston we ol i stap antap long hem, ol i mekem se olgeta i stret. Trifala samting ia i stap long haos blong ol jif blong bifo. Be naoia, sipos yu pem raet, be yu save putum trifala samting ia long *n-eañ kuk* blong yu nao. Hem i soem se haos ia bambae i stap strong from se man ia em i waes, bae em i advaes gud ol pikinini blong em mo ol *vonangi*."

p. 147: (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 07/06/2011).

"Man em i hed blong famli. Woman em i boss longsaed long kitchen."

p. 156. (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 03/01/2011).

"*Ne-wismat* em i smol mani. Smol kastom ia bae yu givim long wan man we bae em i bildim haos blong yu. Yu mas givim mani ia long wan man we i stap long narasaed, long laen blong waef blong yu. From yu no save spoilem laen blong papa blong yu. Yu save tokplei wetem ol man blong narafala nakamal, be *ne-wismat* i go long laen ia from se i had."

p. 159. (Jif John Norman Turris, Tasmat village, 11/05/2011).

"I minim se sipos wan samting ol i mekem wetem save, bae narafala man i kam, bae i luk luk, bae i laekem. Bae em i sapraes tumas se i luk gud tumas olsem. Em i olsem taem yu mekem wan haos, yu tekem wan wud, em i kurket we em i kurket, ale yu *leqger*, ale yu luk se i stap olsem *nu-ttareas* nomo nao, be ol man ol i no save se yu bin mekem olsem wanem, *no-ñwog* hemia nao."

"er' em i olsem brekem, mekem i bigwan. Yu luk se i gat wan smol samting nomo be yu yu mekem i bigwan."

p. 163: (Philip Gen, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 06/12/2010).

"Taem blong planem garen em i taem mun i raes. Taem blong ful mun, em i nogud blong planem, em i taem blong planem banana nomo. Ale taem afta ful mun, em i taem blong widim, klinim nomo garen ia mo taem blong mekem haos. Sipos yu planem long taem ia, bae kakae i nogro gud. Be taem we mun bae i go ded, em i gud taem blong katem wud blong mekem haos. Sipos yu katem wud taem we mun i raes, bebete bae i kakae from wud ia i gat wota blong em, afta ful mun, wud i nogat wota, mekem se bebete bae i no kakae. (...). Taem afta ful mun, solwota i kam hot, yu go fisim, be yu save kasem plenti fis. Bifo ful mun, solwota i kolkol, yu no save kasem wan fis sipos yu go blong fisim."

p. 179: (John Hubart, Leverē village, 13/05/2011).

"Sipos i gat pikinini, bambae olgeta pikinini i soem gud long tufala olfala blong olgeta se hemia wok blong ol man, ale hemia wok blong ol woman."

p. 182: (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 10/12/2010).

"Bae yu luk, taem yu go long aelan, bae yu kakae gud, bae yu testem kakae we i gud tumas. Ol man ol i strong nomo from se graon i laet, graon ia i laet from i gat fulap sol i stap insaed. Ol kakae i gud olsem from se i gat sol i stap insaed nomo. Bae yu testem nangae. Kastom blong mifala ia. Bae yu kakae fis we i kamaot long solwota nomo, mo crab mo naora, bae yu luk ! Ha... Mi tu sipos mi save go wetem yufala, bae mi laekem blong go ia. Yu yu lucky ia!"

p. 182: (Clementine Mat, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 12/12/2010).

"Aranis ia bae yu givim long Guillaume, ol sids hemia blong Riño, wetem smol makas blong kava ia mo narawan ia blong olfala man. Yu no fogetem blong givim evri samting ia, ale bae yu askem olgeta blong sendem wan basket nangae. Ale, bae yu talem Jack se em tu em i mas tingbaot blong karem wan basket nangae blong Susie i kam."

p. 186: (Matias Rañ, Leverē village, 17/01/2011).

"Garen em i hot gud nao, kakae bae i gru gud."

p. 188: (Timothee Wilson, Gaua, 21/09/2012).

"Abaot putum wael ken afta, nu-burbur, narasaed minim blong em em i se na-tam, lov, taem we em i jes gru, yu putum n-bur ia, be yu putum na-tam. Olsem wan pikinini, yu ams lukaotem gud, yu mas wid gud."

p. 190-191: (Simon Pita, Auta village, 17/02/2010).

"Nem blong me Simon, mi blong Auta viley, long Big Sea. Mi wantem talem wan stori, stori blong yam, taem yam i stat long aelan.

Wan man em i stap gogo i mared, em i mared nao, gogo woman blong em i karem bel, karem bel gogo tufala i stap gogo woman ia bebe i bon, em i boy. Trifala i stap gogo pikinini ia i stap bigwan nao, taem em i stap wokbaot nao mama blong em i ded. Mama blong em i ded finis nao, oraet papa blong em i lukaotem em.

Lukaotem em gogo em i bigwan nao, inaf blong wok em wan nao.

Papa blong em i se:

- "Yu go lukaotem garen blong yu!"

Nao em i go, emi go, em i brasem garen finis, kambak i se:

- Papa mi brasem garen blong mi finis, bae mi planem wanem?

Oraet papa i se:

- No i stap, yu wet, bambae yu planem. Yu go katem daon ol wud blong garen blong yu.

Em i go, go katem daon finis. Kam mekem rere, oraet em i mekem rere blong drae nao.

Oraet garen ia i drae ale bae yu go bonem. I stap gogo, em i luk, go luk, papa blong em i se:

- Yu go luk se i drae o no!

Em i go luk se i drae. Oraet em i kam talem long papa blong em, papa blong em i se oraet yu go bonem.

Be tingting blong boy ia i se:

- Bae mi mi wok olsem, bambae mi planem wanem? I no gat samting blong planem!

Oraet i go, hemia nao, em i go bonem finis, oraet em i kam talem long papa blong em i se:

- Mi bonem garen ia blong mi finis!

Em i se:

Ale yu stap 5 dei ale yu go mekem graon blong planem.

Em i stap gogo 5 dei, ale em i go go nao, brekem graon finis, ale kambak, kam talem long papa blong em:

- Mi brekem graon finis blong planem!

papa blong em i se

- Ale go yumitu go.

Tufala i go long garen. Papa blong em i se:

- Ale yu kilim mi, yu kilim mi mi ded, nao bambae yu katem smosmol mi. Oraet yu planem long ol graon ia nao, yu mekem rere.

Em i se:

No! Mi no save kilim yu nao, papa blong mi yu!

Em i se:

- No! Sipos yu no kilim mi, bae yu no save kakae ia.

Oraet em i kilim em, katem, berkbrekem smosmol. Ale ol pis blong hemia nao i stap sakem long hol ia blong planem.

Oraet yu planem finis, 10 dei yu kam yu luk.

Oraet, em i go nao em katkatem ol pis em i sakem long ol hol ia, finis, ale em i go go home nao.

Em i kaontem dei blong papa blong em nao, kaontem 10 dei ale em i go luk ol yam ia. Hey ol yam, ol wanem ia i go luk.

I go luk ia, be i luk se ol yam ia, we evriwan i gru, olgeta samfala i red, samfala waet.

Em i se:

- Oraet mi save karem ol wok blong garen blong mi nao.

Taem em i luk finis, be yam i goheda nao."

p. 206: (Deacon Steve Turris, Jif luc Wokot and Plilip Gen, Tasmat village, 17/05/2011).

"Em i olsem wan woman we i go wetem man".

p. 206 (Jif Judah Tula, Tasmat village, 13/02/2011).

"Ol samting olsem, ol i sud folem graon. taem wan papa i ded, bae i pasem olgeta i go long pikinini blong em, ale taem pikinini ia i ded, be bae i pasem olgeta baken long pikinini blong em, gogogo olsem."

p. 207: (Philip Gen, Tasmat village, 09/02/2011).

"Hemia from se wok blong famli ia. Ol man ol i wok tugeta long garen blong tugeta, mekem se ol kakae i gru gud. Hemia wan had wok."

p. 212: (Jif William Sal, Leqel village, 12/06/2011).

"*Gen tēqē-eañ* em i se yu laetem faea finis long *n-eañ kuk* blong yu. Haos i finis nao, yu komplitim haos ia finis."

p. 222: (Manlē Turris, 07/01/2011, Tasmat village).

"Be hemia nao. Yumi mekem histri ia nao!"

p. 223: (Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 24/04/2011).

"Waet man taem i stap wetem ol samting antap mo i godaon, olsem sipos yu luk wan tri yu no save stat wetem ol han blong em, yu mas stat wetem ol rus blong em, be waet man i stat wetem ol han. Olsem se wan pikinini i mas stat smol afta i gru bigwan i no save stat bigwan wantaem."

p. 225: (Manlē Turris and Leo Swithun, 26/04/2011, Luganville, Espiritu Santo).

"Mifala i askem se em i gobak long ples blong em."

p. 227: (Eilin Ben, 02/02/2011, Tasmat village).

"Dres ia blong sista blong mi ia. Em i laekem we em i laekem em. Hemia from wanem mi bin putum dress ia i go long foret long haos ia, olsem wan memori. From se mi mi gat fulap rispekmo lov long em... em i bin lukaotem mi i gud tumas mo i mekem se mi gat rispek. Long taem we i laev yet be pikinini blong mi ol i tula mi long em, ale em i bin mekem semak wetem pikinini blong em. Taem we em i lu mifala i bin mekem *damatē* long famli blong em. Ale mi putum dres ia olsem wan memory from em i bin wan gudgudfala woman."

p. 230: (Jif Colin, 01/07/2011, Leqel village).

"Olgeta pikinini ol i kam bigwan long hemia. Be ol i mas priperem gud festaem, i no se hariap nomo, ol i mas mekem garen festaem, ale wok longsaed long famli mo longsaed long komuniti. Mifala i talem se olgeta i mas aktem long graon, afta, olsem tu o tri yia olsem, ale olgeta ol i save pem haos we i gud. Be Rambu, em tu em i mekem i gud nomo. From se fulap mani ia we i kam wetem from New Zealand, be mani ia i go long fulap man, em i bin serem olsem long fulap famli. Olsem bae mani ia i save helpem fulap man long ples ia. So em i oraet. mifala i agri long hemia. Tru long haos ia, Rambu bae em i stap insaed long graon tu mo bae pikinini blong em bae ol i stap insaed tu. Hemia wanem mi bin explaneme long ol man tede, from se mi wantem se ol i harem save gud wanem ia kastom ia, olsem witnes."

p. 232: (Gresline Matthew, 06/07/2011, Tasmat village).

"Mifala i mas givim wan graon long olgeta se ol i save kakae from graon ia. Sipos olgeta ol i kakae from stoa nomo, bae ol i no filim gud long ples ia, bae olgeta ol i no wnataem se stap longtaem olsem. Olsem bae ol i no filim lov wetem care. Taem ol i wantem se ol i givim kakae bakegen long narafala haos be i difren, samtaem ol i no save mekem. Histri blong olgeta bae i stap nomo longwe long aelan blong olgeta. be afat, long ples be i had blong ol pikinini, from se ol i nomo gat tija we i stap, ale ol i no gat gudfala edukesen."

p. 233: (Glenda Lois, 05/07/2011, Tasmat village).

"Ol bun blong fis mo ol bun blong pig, mifala i putum olsem wan memori blong bigfala kakae ia, we mifala i bin sarem ma kakae tugeta. Taem wan man bae i luk, be bae i tingbaot gud long lafete ia, olsem em i bin kakae, wetem wu, samting olsem. Samtaem wan boy nomo i kasem wan bigbigfala fis, ale em i sarem, ale em i wantem se ol man ol i tingbaot long hemia, ale i putum bun long foret long haos ia."

p. 233: (Gresline Matthew, 15/01/2011, Tasmat village)

"Samfala man ol i laekem blong mekem olsem from se ol i wantem mekem flas blong olgeta. ol i soem se ol i kakae gud olsem. Olgeta tingting blong olgeta se ol man bae ol i luksave se wan bigfala man ia, be ol i mekem flas nomo."

Appendix II: Operational Sequences

A. Building a *n-eañ* *kuk*.

1. *Ne wismat moëtup verē*. This is a *kastom* made by the commissioner of the house to the man who will lead the work, and to his co-workers. It engages them to complete the house.

Tools: *no-som*, hands.

Agents: Commissioner to the chosen specialist (*no-ñwo tadun*).

Comments: The specialist was traditionally chosen inside of the same *tēgētēgē* as the commissioner's father (e.g. inside of his *tavalsal*). This *kastom* is most of the time made on an informal way, *Vatu* (around 500VT) or shell-money (*no-som*, a length going from the hand to the shoulder, *banan*) being given from hand to hand without any special display of kinship links. This specialist would subsequently choose a team of people to build the house and would direct them during the work.

Duration: variable

2. *Gēl ne-gēteañ* / *Wok ne-verē* (cf. NTB2: 125-126; 12/05/2011). Making the terrace.

Tools: Hands, shovel (4), wheelbarrow (2), pointed iron sticks *ne-vetgēl* (6), mallet, tree-trunks and large branches, ropes (2)

Agents: 26 people, of which one child, 2 young men, 11 women, 14 men

Operational sequence:

2.1 Break the ground

2.1.1 *Ne-vetgēl* are used to break the ground of the slope in order to create a flat space. Men's work. The *ne-vetgēl* is two-handed and planted in the soil with a vertical percussion move, the agent faces the slope downwards.

2.1.2 Leaving the pointed end inside of the soil the handle is pushed backward and upward 2 or 3 times in order that one part of the ground detach and fall.

2.1.3 Repeat 2.1.1 and 2.1.2 until a significant part of the ground falls down the slope.

2.3 Throw downwards into the creek the biggest rocks (*levta no-voët*)

2.3.1 Break the ground accretions attached to the rock in order to lighten it. One man using a mallet stands over the rock top or over close rocks, vertical or oblique percussion move x 10-20 until a significant part of the stone breaks down.

2.3.2 Throw the broken parts of rock into the creek. The parts are carried with two hands in front or it are lifted with two hands to be carried on the left or right shoulder, the height lying on the trapezius muscle.

2.3.3 Repeat 2.3.1 and 2.3.2 until all the accretions are removed from the rock.

2.3.4 Tie the ropes around the rock, slip knot.

2.3.5 Put down tree-trunks on the ground in front of the rock to be moved, it will help it to slip on the ground. 5 or 6 trunks are thus placed parallel to each other.

2.3.6 Move the rock. Everybody comes to help pulling the ropes (20-21 persons). 3 or 4 men place themselves behind the rock and exert a lever pressing on it with their *ne-vetgēl*. The leader of the work combines everybody's efforts at the same time thanks to a "wo-ooop" shout.

2.3.7 Repeat 2.3.4 to 2.3.6 until the rock is close to the terrace limit.

2.3.8 The last push is usually given with *ne-vetgēl* employed as lever by men placed behind the rock. Ropes have been removed.

2.4 Throw smaller stones and ground into the creek downward, using shovels and wheelbarrows. Men drive the wheelbarrows, women and men shovel. Child and women carry middle-sized stones with hands. Stones judged to be proper and strong (*mermer*) are kept aside and piled to build the supporting the stone walls of the terrace.

2.5 Build the stone walls. Men's work exclusively. A shallow trench is dug into the slope with shovel and bigger stones (*ne-keregēar*) are then carefully arranged inside, one next to the other, with hands. Then smaller stones (*nu-wine*) are chosen and placed individually so that the structure is stable, straight and strong (*ttareas*).

2.6 Ground taken from the fallen slope is thrown up the newly made stone wall in order to compensate the slope and create or enlarge the flat terrace.

Comments: To complete this work, the entire community of one village is generally asked to contribute to what they called 'komuniti wok' (*nu-sul*). The chiefs announce the date on the public place during the general village gathering, which happen every Sunday after Church. The work is then directed by the *kapten* of the house.

Duration: 5 consecutive hours of work x up to 5 different days on the basis of 1 day work per week.

3. *Tar quoer*. (ref. NTB2: 140; 18/05/2011). Cutting the tree-fern posts.

Tools: Axes, ropes, *ne-vetgēl*, *ne-gisel lap*

Material: 7 tree-fern trunks

Place: Leteniok Lap, Tasmat

Agents: 2 men Matias Rañ, old Basil, 2 women Eirin Basil and Rina Basil.

Operational Sequence:

3.1. Once at the proper place (a place upon which Basil has rights), choose the tree to be cut. Matias and Basil did that together, discussing it while looking at the situation and shape of the trees.

3.2. Clean the area surrounding the first tree to be cut with *ne-gisel lap*. Oblique slashing move of the right hand while the left hand grab and maintain the vegetation to be cut. Matias and Basil did it.

3.3. Cut the tree fern (1 person for 1 tree), *tar quoer*.

3.3.1 Oblique alternate percussion move downwards and upwards to make a triangular cut on one side of the trunk.

3.3.2 Oblique alternate percussion move downwards and upwards to make a triangular cut on the other side of the trunk, opposite to the first cut realised.

3.3.3 Push the trunk with hands or foot in order to make it fall down the slope.

3.3.4 Remove the palms and the upper part to clear the trunk, axe and *gisel lap*, Matias and Basil.

3.4 Push the tree-trunk down the slope by pulling on and pushing it in order to make him slip. Eirin and Rina, sometimes helped by Matias and/or Basil. Tree-trunks are first gathered in a close area, ready to be pushed and pulled down the slope until the main path (*ne-met-sal lap*).

3.5. Make a hole (*ne-wēs*) in the upper part of the tree-fern trunk in order to pass a rope through it. This would help to pull down the trunk.

3.5.1 Vertical percussion move with *ne-vetgēl* hold with the two hands on one side of the trunk x 3 or 4.

3.5.2 Turn the trunk. The agents bend in two and hold the trunk with two hands.

3.5.3 Vertical percussion move with *ne-vetgēl* hold with the two hands on the other side of the trunk x 3 or 4.

3.5.4 Push the end of the rope through the created hole and tie it with a slip-knot.

3.5.5 Repeat 5.1 to 5.4 x 7, as there were 7 tree-fern trunks.

3.6. Push and pull on the trunks down until the main path

3.7. Once on the main path, each trunk is lifted up with two hands and carried on until the place of house-building on one shoulder, the weight resting on the trapezius muscle.

Comment: This is generally a men's task carried on by the team of men engaged in the building of the house. Here Eirin and Rina supported Matias and Basil since there were no other men to help them. Women are rather in charge of the preparation of food for these men. Lois and I also accompanied the party in order to cut *na-vatras* (tree-fern branches) intended to be used in a memorial meal to celebrate the first year of Janet's death the following day.

Duration: Approximately 6 hours. Leteniok Lap is a creek at about 30mn walk up the volcano slopes from the place where the house was built (Qorqas).

4. *Tar tenkē* (ref. NTB2: 128; 13/05/2011). Cutting the timbers needed for the house's structure.

Tools: Axe, ropes, *ne-gisel lap*

Material: *no-tor* or *ne-vilveal* trees.

Place: Akqēang, Tasmat.

Agents: John Norman Turris, his sons (*naton*) Ipson and Manson Turris, Sera Turris, Mari Turris. His nephews (*vonangon*) Pol and Rodni.

Operational Sequence:

4.1. Choice of the *no-tor* to be cut, John Norman Turris.

4.2. Clean the area surrounding the tree, with *ne-gisel lap*. Rodni, Pol, Ipson, John Norman.

4.3. Cut the *no-tor* tree (*tar no-tor*)

4.3.1 Oblique alternate percussion move downward and upward to make a triangular cut on one side of the trunk.

4.3.2 Oblique alternate percussion move downward and upward to make a triangular cut on the other side of the trunk, opposite to the first cut realised.

4.3.3 Push the trunk with hands or foot in order to make it fall down the slope.

4.4. Cut the upper branches in order to help to facilitate the pushing and pulling of the tree through the creek's bush and then down the slopes until *ne-met-sal lap*. Manson with *ne-gisel lap*.

4.5. Push and pull on the trunk down until the main path, everybody helps.

4.6. Once on the main path, the trunk is lifted up with two hands and carried on by two or three agents (depending on its weight) until the house-building site. Weight resting on the trapezius muscle.

4.7. This sequence is repeated 5 times so as to get ready all the pieces of wood needed to rise the house (*ne-qeti*, 2 x *ne selgēasig*, 2 x *ne-sigsig*, *no-wolwol*, *ne-bal get-tam*, *ne-veret rig*, *ne-veret lap*, *ne-ker get-tam*, *ne-qet get-tam*).

Comment: This is generally a men's task carried on by the team of men engaged in the building of the house. Here Sera and Mari supported John Norman and his sons since there were no other men to help them. Women are rather in charge of the preparation of food for these men.

Duration: Variable duration of working sessions, depending on the number of trunk cut. The set of woods were gathered in 5 non-consecutive days. Akqēang is a creek situated at approximately 40 minutes walk up the slope from the place of the new house to be built (Langramo).

5. *Lēat no-mor* (ref. NTB3: 33; 07/07/2011). Cutting the wild cane sticks needed for the roof panes.

Tools: *ne-gisel lap*, hands, *na-garias*.

Material: *no-mor*

Agents: Masten Philip, Philip Gen, Me.

Place: Letanlap, Tasmat.

Operational sequence:

5.1 Choose the proper bush of *no-mor*. Masten and Philip. It must not be too dry or too green.

5.2 Cut the *no-mor*, *lēat no-mor*.

5.2.1 Grab 2 or 3 canes with the left hand

5.2.2 With an oblique slashing move of *ne-gisel lap*, cut the basis of these hands of cane while pulling on with the left hand.

5.2.3 Cut the upper end of the *no-mor* at the point where it becomes too supple, same oblique slashing move of the right hand with *ne-gisel lap*.

5.3 Throw the 2 or 3 cut cane on the ground

5.4 Repeat 5.1 to 5.3 until a bunch of 200 or 300 *no-mor* is cut.

5.5 Pull out the leaves in order to clean the stick of cane, *sirsir*.

5.5.1 Maintain the end of the cane with the left hand while the right hand is pulling out the leaves

5.5.2 Discard the removed leaves in the closest bush.

5.5.3 Pile aside the clean cane, placing its basis up the slope in order to be pull on the path later.

5.6 Climb back to the path and pull on the bunch of cleaned cane

5.7 Bind the bunches to be carried down

5.7.1 *Rañrañ na-garias* (see step 13 of OS building house). Go to the creeks to collect *na-garias* vines.

5.7.2 *Tep na-garias*. Remove the shoots from the main vine

5.7.3 *Ev na-garias*. Supple the vine.

5.7.4 Tie the basis end of the bunch, with the two hands while it is maintained vertically between the head and the shoulder of the agent. The vine secured by being tightly coiled (no knot).

5.7.5 Tie the upper end of the bunch in the same way. The bunch is maintained vertically only with the hands.

5.8 Lift the bunch on the shoulder. The agent bend down holding vertically the bunch of cane and he lifts it up on his shoulder (left or right depending on the direction of the slope). The bunch place is then adjusted in order to find the proper balance and maintained during the walk by one extended arm/hand only, the other hand being free to grab plants and tree branches up the slope to avoid falling down on the slippery slopes.

5.9 Carry back the bunch of cane until the main path and then the place of the new house building

5.10 Leave at a place where sun will dry the canes before use (one week or a little bit more if rainy weather are necessary).

Comment: the number of canes needed is known before starting work and bunches are generally made accordingly with 100 x 2 canes, for one 'cane unit' is in reality made of two canes (*no-mor i tuwel* thus designates in fact a set of two canes, which will be used together to make roof panes).

Duration: Approximately 5h on one day to gather around 400 canes. Letanlap is situated at about 1h walk up the slopes from the place of the new house building (Leteniok).

6. *Tow n-eañ*. (ref. NTB3: 14; 30/06/2011). Measuring and marking the house.

Tools: Bamboo sticks, strings, pointed wood branches.

Agent: 2 men, here the commissioner also acted as foreman. He was thus in charge of the measurements. Helped by his brother.

Operational sequence:

- 6.1. Plant a pointed branch inside the ground at one intended corner of the house. Vertical percussion move downward with the pointed branch hold with the two hands.
- 6.2. A bamboo stick, cut at the length of two times the extended arms of the leader of the work, is used to measure the appropriate length of the side.
- 6.3. Plant a pointed branch inside the ground at the second corner. Vertical percussion move downward with the pointed branch hold with the two hands.
- 6.4. Tighten a string between the two sticks.
- 6.5. Tighten a string on the diagonal.
- 6.6. Plant a pointed branch inside the ground at the third corner, at the intersection of the diagonal string and the bamboo stick length put down the measure the length of the backside. Vertical percussion move downward with the pointed branch hold with the two hands.
- 6.7. Tighten a string between the second and third corner
- 6.8. Take the measurements of the first diagonal and duplicate this length on another string.
- 6.9. Tighten the string on the second diagonal from the second pointed branch.
- 6.10. Plant a pointed branch inside the ground at the fourth corner, at the intersection of the second diagonal string and the bamboo stick length put down the measure the length of the front side. Vertical percussion move downward with the pointed branch hold with the two hands.
- 6.11. Tighten a string between the third corner and the fourth one.
- 6.12. Tighten a string between the fourth corner and the first one.
- 6.13. Checking and adjustments by eyesight and with a string length. The four corners are checked one after the other (re-tighten strings, re-plant the branches if necessary).
- 6.14. The place of the front shelter is marked. The leader of work places his extended arms face to the ground and marks the ground with his thumb at the appropriate place.
- 6.15. Plant a pointed branch inside the ground at one side of the shelter. Vertical percussion move downward with the pointed branch hold with the two hands.
- 6.16. Repeat 14 and 15 to mark the second shelter side.
- 6.17. One side length is divided in two by folding a string of the side length in two.
- 6.18. Plant a pointed branch inside the ground to mark half of the side length. Vertical percussion move downward with the pointed branch hold with the two hands.
- 6.19. Repeat 17 and 18 on the other side.
- 6.20. General check of all the lengths by eyesight and with a string length (re-tighten strings, re-plant the branches if necessary).

Comment: The body of *no-ñwo tadun* is the reference for the calculation of the dimension of the house.

Duration: Approximately 3 hours.

7. *Tur n-eañ* (ref. NTB2: 154-158; 01/06/2011). Making the house structure.

Tools: Adze, axes, ne-vetgil, shovel, wheelbarrow, saw

Materials: Tree-fern and wood posts and timbers

Agents: 9 men pertaining to the commissioner's relatives. The leader of the work is Matias Rañ, the commissioner's grand-daughter's husband.

Operational sequence:

- 7.1 Dig all the holes of the posts with a shovel. 2 men. The ground is dug, then discarded in the pig's fence with the wheelbarrow.

7.2 *Momtu ne-rēmting* of one side, erect the *ne-rēmting* posts

7.2.1 Cut the posts at the appropriate height. This is done by 2 men, one cut the trunk with an axe while the other is maintaining it on the ground to avoid it moving too much. One end is cut with a V shape to be placed upward and support the *ne-selgasēg* timber.

7.2.2 The post is grabbed with two hands and one end thrown into one of the dug holes.

7.2.3 The base of the post is temporarily fixed with stones thrown into the holes.

7.2.4 Repeat 7.2.1 to 7.2.3 3 times, starting from the back and front posts, then putting the middle post.

7.3 *Tur ne-selgasēg*, put the *ne-selgasēg* timber

7.3.1 *Leqquer ne-selgasēg*, straighten the *ne-selgasēg* timber.

7.3.1.1 With an adze, used to remove knots and extra width. The agent stands up over the timber, having it between his legs. The adze is swung upward and downward in order to scrape the timber.

7.3.1.2 Cut the timber with a saw where the timber is curved. One or two men facing each other move the saw back and forth. The timber is settled over a small piece of wood in order to raise its height. One or two other men maintain the timber.

7.3.1.3 Hammer inside of the cut small pieces of wood (*ne-vinvin*) with the backside of an axe in order to modify the line of the timber. Vertical percussion move.

7.3.1.4 Cut the protruding *ne-vinvin* parts with a *ne-gisel lap*, oblique slashing move.

7.3.1.5 Repeat 7.2.1.2 to 7.2.1.4 till the leader of the building judge that the timber is properly straighten.

7.3.2 Lift up the *ne-selgasēg* timber over the *ne-rēmting* posts. 2 men lift up the timber on their shoulder and put it over the posts.

7.3.3 *Wēs ne-selgasēg*, tie the *ne-selgasēg* timber to the posts. This is done with *na-garias* vines. The vine is coiled around the *ne-selgasēg* and pushed through the holes made at the upper end of the posts

7.4 *Kuteg gor ne-rēmting*. The posts' bases are buried with stones and ground using hands and shovel.

7.5 Repeat 7.2 to 7.4 for the other side of the house.

7.6 *Momtu ne-bēr*. Erect the *ne-bēr* posts of one side.

See 7.2

7.7 *Tur ne-sigsig*. Put the *ne-sigsig* timber over the *ne-bēr*.

7.7.1 *Leqquer ne-sigsig*

See 7.3.1

7.7.2 *Wēs ne-sigsig*. Tie *ne-sigsig* timber to the *ne-bēr* posts

See 7.3.3

7.8 *Kuteg gor ne-bēr*. Bury the basis of *ne-bēr* posts.

See 7.4

7.9 *Momtu ne-señiep*. Erect the two *ne-señiep* posts.

See 7.2

7.10 *Tur ne-qeti* (or *qet-ean*). Put the *ne-qeti* central timber over the *ne-señiep* posts.

7.10.1 *Leqquer ne-qeti*. Straighten the *ne-qeti* timber.

See 7.3.1

7.10.2 Build a ladder from tree-trunks and branches tied together with *na-garias* vines.

7.10.3 *Wēs ne-qeti* Tie the *ne-qeti* to the *ne-señiep* posts

See 7.3.3

7.11 *Kuteg gor ne-señiep* posts. Bury definitely the basis of the *ne-señiep* posts.

See 7.4

7.12 *Tur no-wolwol*. Put the transversal middle beam of the front side.

7.13 *Tur ne-bal get-tam*. Put the transversal beam of the back side.

7.14 *Tur ne-qet get-tam*. Put the transversal beam of the front side.

9 *Var no-woras* (ref. NTB2: 159; 02/06/2011). Tie temporarily the bamboo rafters *no-woras*

Tools: Hands, pandanus straps (*ne-gēvow*).

Location: Qorqas

Agents: 6 men, Matias Rañ (foreman), 2 young men coming from Bulurig hamlet and part of Matias extended family (Austin, Sensa), Howard (Aunen), Masten (Leteniok), and Matias's father Basil (Qorqas).

Operational sequence:

9.1 Untie the bamboo bundles. Matias and Basil untied the coiled *na-garias*.

9.2 *Var no-woras*. Set the rafters *no-woras* on top of the roof truss.

9.2.1 Sensa and Masten climb onto the roof truss, lifting themselves with hands. They then place themselves on either sides of the roof.

9.2.2 Two *no-woras* are respectively given to them by Austen and Howard, Matias direct them to put the *no-woras* at the proper place. He chooses at the same time the proper places for *na-masa*, where the roof tiles will overlap, *tul na-masa*.

9.2.3 *No-woras* are fastened together at their upper end, over *ne-qeti*, with pandanus straps *ne-gēvow*. Their lower end are let to rest on the *ne-selgasēg* beam. The tying is made with an "8"-shaped loop repeated about 5 time and then blocked by being passed under the previous looped parts of the strap.

9.3 Repeat 9.2 x 7 times to set all the *no-woras*. The space between two rafters is about 80 centimetres, except for *na-masa*, where the space is reduced to about 25 centimetres.

Duration: About 1 hour to set all the *no-woras*.

Comment: It seems to be a quite informal work and rather a preparation to the *tuptup* than a crucial step. For larger houses, the space separating two rafters can reach 90 centimetres.

10 *Tur ne-veret rig and ne-veret lap*. Tie the two in-between timbers.

Tools: Hands, pandanus straps (*ne-gēvow*).

Location: Qorqas

Agents: 6 men, Matias Rañ (foreman), 2 young men coming from Bulurig hamlet and part of Matias extended family (Austin, Sensa), Howard (Aunen), Masten (Leteniok), and Matias's father Basil (Qorqas).

Operational sequence:

10.1 *Tur the ne-veret rig* of one side. The beam hold by Austin and Sensa is placed between the *ne-selgasēg* and the *ne-sigsig* of one side and maintained while Basil and Howard fasten it with *ne-gēvow* to the rafters. The binding consists of coiling the pandanus straps over the rafters and the beam several times (around 5 to 7 times). The end is secured under the previous loop.

Matias direct the work and proper placement of the beam.

10.2 *Tur ne-veret lap* of the same side between the *ne-sigsig* and the *ne-qeti*. The method is similar but the two men fastening the beam to the rafters are standing on top of the roof truss.

10.3 *Tur ne-veret rig and ne-veret lap* of the other side. Repeat the technical moves made in 10.1 and 10.2, but on the other side.

Duration: Approximately 1h10mn.

Comment: It is possible for men to climb over the roof structure, but not for women although in rare cases Matias' wife told that women did it when no men could do it.

11 *Sassal*. Definitely fasten the bamboo rafters of the roof.

Tools: Hands, *na-garias* vines.

Location: Qorqas

Agents: 6 men, Matias Rañ (foreman), 2 young men coming from Bulurig hamlet and part of Matias extended family (Austin, Sensa), Howard (Aunen), Masten (Leteniok), and Matias's father Basil (Qorqas). 3 women (Glenda Lois, Rina Basil and Eirin Basil)

Operational sequence:

11.1 Women prepare *na-garias* vines to be used to fasten the rafters and the beams that had been added. See below 15.2.

11.2 The 6 men form one row to tie all the rafters lower end of one side to the *ne-selgasēg* over which it rested. The knot used is an "8"-shaped crossed loop repeated 6 times and which end is secured underneath the previous loops.

11.3 Fasten the *ne-veret rig* to the rafters definitely. Technique similar to 11.2

11.4 Fasten the *ne-veret lap* to the rafters definitely. Technique similar to 11.2 as well, but only Masten and Sensa do it, standing over the roof truss.

11.5 Definitely fasten the rafter upper ends together and with *ne-qeti*. Technique is again similar to 11.2 with only Masten and Sensa doing it.

11.6 Repeat 11.2 to 11.4 on the other side of the house.

Duration: Approximately 1h30mn.

12 *Sepsep* (ref. NTB3: 58, 16/07/2011). Cutting the sago palm leaves (necessary to make the roof tiles)

Tools: *ne-gisel lap*, axe (2), wooden branches, *na-garias* vines, hands.

Location: Qañ Sawar, Tasmat

Agents: Philip Gen, Masten Philip, me.

Materials: Sago palm trees, and branches (na-taqor).

Operational sequence:

12.1 *Tar na-taqor*, cut the sago palm tree. This was effected by Masten and Philip, each of them working specifically on one tree. See 3.2 to 3.3.3 for the operational sequence. Three trees were cut down.

12.2 *Sepsep*, cut the sago palm leaves.

12.2.1 Cut the branches which present leaves of an appropriate length (from 1.20 metres to 1.80 metres) and freshness. This was done by Masten and Philip with *ne-gisel lap*.

Slashing oblique move. Palms were then piled up down the creek in the rocky clearing where we had settled, for me to remove the leaves.

12.2.2 Tear out the sago palm leaves. This is made with the right hand grabbing the basis of the leaf while the left hand maintain the palm, holding it by its central stem. Each palm is cleared after the other, the hand working alternatively on one side and the other of the palm. The handful of leaves are piled up next to the agent along the work and temporarily fastened with vines taken from the neighbouring bush in bundles. The duration of this action for one palm is approximately 3 minutes.

12.3 Repeat 12.2 until a sufficient quantity of leaves regarding to the number of person to carry them back home seems appropriate. In this case, around 40 palms were cut and cleared out from their leaves.

12.4 Make the backpack leaves bundles. Masten made it.

12.4.1 Cut 6 branches of burao.

12.4.2 Plant 4 of the cut branches in the ground to form a small rectangular space.

12.4.3 Clean out the 2 other branches of burao in order to remove the inner bark skin, keep these skins aside.

12.4.4 Pile up ferns or other big size leaves taken from the neighbouring bush on the ground into the rectangular space created by the 4 burao sticks.

12.4.5 Pile up half the sago palm leaves over it in the middle of the rectangular space. This device will allow maintaining the leaves together and thus ease their fastening into a dense bundle.

12.4.6 Put ferns and other big size leaves over and around the sago palm leaves of the bundle. These leaves are intended to 'block' the bundle so that the strong stems of the sago palm leaves do not break during their carrying back home and to avoid the carrier's back of to be hurt.

12.4.7 Definitely fasten the bundle by pressing it firmly to reduce its dimension and compress it, while encircling its two ends with *na-garias* vines taken from the neighbouring bush. Two person usually do that, as one is compressing the bundles with hands, while the other tie the *na-garias* vine around it.

12.4.8 Make the bundle into a back-pack by fastening two handles made of the burao skins to the *na-garias* vines at both ends.

12.5 Carry the leaves backpack back to the hamlet.

Comments: In the past, this task was associated with men but today, the rules are loosened and most working parties include both men and women. In this case the men are usually in charge of cutting down the sago palm trees while women *sepsep*, tear out the leaves from the branches.

Duration: The creek was situated about 1 hour walk from the hamlet where the kitchen house roof had to be fixed. Then approximately 1h30mn to complete the task.

13 *Bēs nu-duw*, collect the sago palm thorns (*nu-duw*).

Tools: hands, inner bark skin of burao.

Location: Qañ Sawar, Tasmat

Agents: Philip Gen, Masten Philip, me.

Materials: Sago palm trees, and spathes (*na-taqor*).

Operational sequence:

13.1 Detach the rotten spathes from the fallen sago palm trees with hands. Masten. Tearing move from both hands holding the spathe.

13.2 Tear out the outer bark in order to make appear the inner thorns *nu-duw*. Masten, Philip and me. Gentle tear out move in order not to damage the thorns.

13.3 Remove the thorns one by one by pulling it vertically and pile them up on the close rocks.

13.4 Make a bundle with the thorns and fasten it with inner burao bark. The tying has to specifically cover most of the length of the bundle, to avoid the thorns' breaking during the bundle's transportation back to the hamlet.

Comment: Once arrived at home the thorns are left to dry to the sun before they would be used. It will strengthen the thorns and help clean them from the last remaining parts of spathe's rotten flesh still attach to it.

Duration: Approximately 1 hour to make a bundle of about 100 thorns.

14 *Da selmet ne-vean no-mor* (ref. NTB3: 75-76, 23/07/2011). Making the sago palm leaves tiles.

Tools: Hands

Location : Lañramo

Agents: 56 persons of which 25 men and 31 women + children

Materials: *do-taqor*, *no-mor*, *nu-duw*.

Operational sequence:

14.1 *Sinsina no-do tagor* (Women)

14.1.1 Break the central stem. The leaf is removed from its bundle and handled vertically. The stem is broken at about two third of the leaf's length by folding its tip back and forth.

14.1.2 The strongest part of the stem is progressively removed by pulling gently on it with the right hand while the left hand maintain the core of the leaf. The very basis of the stem is then teared out with a firmer move and piled up next to the agent. (Bundles of these stems will be kept and fastened together to make brooms).

14.2 *Veanvean* (Men). Men usually sit together to complete this task.

14.2.1 One sago palm leaf, grabbed with the right hand is folded over two wild cane culms (*no-mor i tuwel*), maintained with the left hand so that the longer part of the leaf covers the shorter part.

14.2.2 Another leaf is grabbed with the right hand, the left hand still maintain the wild cane and the first folded leaf. The leaf is folded so that half of it covers half of the previous leaf.

14.2.3 A *nu-duw* thorn is manipulated with the right hand and pinned in the part where the two leaves overlap, just underneath the wild cane culms in order to fix the leaves together and over the culms. The extra length of *nu-duw* is left to protrude and will be broken only as the work goes on, in order to pin the following leaves.

14.2.4 Repeat 14.2.1 to 14.2.3 x about 40; one tile is usually made of about 40 leaves.

Comment: This stage should last one day with a general family meeting (*biriñbiriñ* = both associated lineages from the two sides). It is concluded with a shared meal. Men and women work separately and the raw materials or other things needed are carried back and forth by children under the age of 10-11. The older children are usually already working with either women or men, although in a looser ryhtm.

Duration: One leaf takes about 3 seconds for its central stem to be removed. About 25 minutes for one tile take. Work should be completed in one day.

15 *Rañrañ na-garias*. (Ref. NTB3: 106, 29/07/2011). Collecting the *na-garias* vines.

Tools: hands, *ne-gisel lap*.

Location: Tenerig, Tasmat.

Agents: Glenda Lois, Rosalyn Mary, Eirin Basil, Rina Basil

Materials: *na-garias* vines

Operational sequence:

15.1 The vines are uprooted by pulling on it firmly with two hands.

15.2 Upper parts of the vines are desentangled from the bush to which they grew through by pulling them hardly. When the length obtained is judged long enough, the upper parts of it are slashed with *ne-gisel lap*.

15.3 Each length of *na-garias* vine is folded with successive loops maintained by coiling the end of the vine around the central part of the loops.

15.4 The folded vines are gathered into bigger bundles tied in order to be carried back to the hamlet with a shorter length of vine.

Comment: Each woman is working individually on her own bundle, but collaboration also occurs to pull on very entangled vines.

Duration: The place from where the vines were taken is situated one hour walk from Tasmat. Then 3h30mn were dedicated to gather the vines before the trip back to the hamlet.

16 *Tuptup* (ref. NTB2: 178-179; 14/06/2011). Fastening the sago palm leaf roof tiles onto the roof truss.

Tools: hands, ladder, *ne-gisel wirig*

Materials: *na-garias* vines, *ne-vean no-mor*.

Agents: 55 persons, of which 24 women, 32 men + children.

Location Luwör hamlet, Leqel village.

Operational sequence:

16.1 Prepare the *na-garias* vines. (Women)

16.1.1 *Teptep na-garias*, cut the vine. This is achieved by cutting the basis (*nu-kuteugi*) and tip (*nu-ulsi*) as well as the shorter shoots (*no-qoron*) that start from the main vine, to obtain a clean length of vine. Women hold the length of vine in the left hand and cut these parts with a *ne-gisel wirig*. Pression move of the blade onto the vine.

16.1.2 *Evev na-garias*. Supple the vine. The vine is handled between thumb, index and middle finger and gently moved in order to supple it. The all length of each vine is treated this way before the vine is judged suitable to use.

16.1.3 Stick the vine's basis into a small hole in the ground or in-between two stones. Bundles are then created that are brought to the male workers by children.

16.2 Tuptup. Tie the roof tiles. (Men)

16.2.1 Building a ladder. Two V-shaped branches are sank into the ground following lengthwise the middle ridgepole. Over this 'posts', a central timber is lifted and fastened with pandanus roots inner bark (the ropes also used to fasten the laplap in certain ceremonial time). Wooden thinner branches are then settled obliquely onto the central timber, their end resting on the ground and trasversal timbers are finally fastened at different heights. A ladder is obtained that allow men to climb high enough to reach the *ne-qeti* while tying the roof tiles. The same work is reproduce to obtain a ladder on the other side of the house.

16.2.2 *Tuptup*. One *ne-vean no-mor* is given to the workers standing onto the ladder by one or two men (no specific designation for them), while the foreman direct the exact place where the tile needs to be fastened, and notably the proper linearity of the front and back side og the roof.

Tuptup is made with two hands, one hand is sticking the pointed end of the vine into the tile while the other controls its correct direction on the outer side of the roof in progress.

16.2.2.1 First stick underneath the previous tile no-mor

16.2.2.2 The left hand grab it on the outer side and drive it on the opposite side of the rafter.

16.2.2.3 The right hand stick the vine again in the tile so that it also goes through the middle of the *no-mor* (in between the two culms) structure of the previous tile.

16.2.2.4 The left hand grab it on the outer side and drive it again on the opposite side of the rafter, but this time it is passed through the loop of the already coiled vine so that it creates a simple knot and fix the vine.

16.2.2.5 Another tile is added 2 to 3 cm up the previous one and overlapping it.

16.2.2.6 Repeat 16.2.2.1 to 16.2.2.5 until reaching *ne-qet-ean*.

16.3 *Da ne-nogum*. Make the backside. (men)

16.3.1 If it had not been made already while erecting the house (*tur n-ean*), the back transversal beam (*ne-bal get-tam*) is set, resting over the ends of the two *ne-sigsig* beams of either sides. It is lifted up by several men and then bound (*wēs*) with *na-garias* vine.

16.3.2 The back wall rafters are put in a similar way than those of the sides (see 9 to 11 but without the stage of the *ne-veret rig* and *ne-veret lap*). These rafters can be

specifically linked to patterns associated with *temet*. It is in these case called *no-woras belesē temet*, or 'the jawbone' of the *temet*.

16.3.3 Sago palm leaves tiles are then fastened onto the backside truss in the same way as it was made for the two sides of the house.

16.4 *Da ne-qed sagear*. Make the sheathing of the ridgepole. (Men)

16.4.1 A thinner beam, called *ne-bem töwur* is added over the ridgepole and the upper crossing of the bamboo rafters. It is lifted in front of the house, then pushed in place lengthwise and tied to the ridgepole with *na-garias* vines at regular intervals.

16.4.2 A cover of plaited coconut mats (today), *ne-bagear*, or excavated tree-fern trunks (in the past) is added all over along the *ne-bem töwur*, and overlapping with the upper sago palm leaves tiles of both sides of the roof.

16.4.3 *Ne-bagear* is definitely fixed with, pointed wooden sticks of 20-30 cm long, called *ne-si bagear*, which are pinned transversally through the *bagear* cover.

Comment: This task should last one day with a general family meeting (*biriñbiriñ* = both associated lineages from the two sides). Ideally it would also include the completing of the backside of the house (*ne-nogum*) and of the sheathing of the central ridgepole (*ne-qed sagear*). However, sometimes these two last tasks are accomplished later, for time is too short to complete the all work in one day.

Duration: Approximately 7 hours work.

17 *Da ne-birsin*. Building the sides stonewall.

Tools: Hands

Materials: Bigger (*keregear*) and smaller (*nu-wine*) stones.

Agents: The house masculine working team

Operational sequence:

See 2.5

Comment: While women are busy cooking food for the male members of the working team, making the stone wall is exclusively a male task.

Duration: Approximately 6h-7h work for a *ropva tavalem* kitchen house.

19 *Tur ne-met-tam*. Erecting the front side.

Tools: hand, axes, *ne-gisel lap*, *na-garias* vines

Materials: Depending on the technique used to make the walling, bamboo split straps, wild cane or wooden planks.

Agents: Men of the working team.

Operational sequence:

19.1 If it had not been done already while erecting the structure of the house (*tur n-ean*), the front transversal beam (*ne-qed get-tam*) is set, resting upon the two *ne-sig-sig* beams on either sides.

19.2 *Ne-ker get-tam* threshold is then set. In this aim a shallow trench is dug transversally into the ground, marking the front side. The beam is then simply put down this trench by two or three men, directed by the foreman.

19.3 *Ne-turtur*.

19.3.1 Wooden planks are usually taken from older houses and re-used to build the new one. However when it is not the case. New planks are cut from bush trees (*no-tor*).

19.3.2 Erect one side plank. The plank is cut to the proper dimension and shape with axe and *ne-gisel lap*, then the 4-5cm lower end is sank into the ground, behing the *ker get-tam* beam and tied through a hole pierced into its upper end to a rafter of the roof.

19.3.3 Repeat 19.3.1 to 19.3.2 until the larger part of the front side (*ne-turtur lap*) is completed.

19.3.4 Repeat 19.3.1 to 19.3.3 to make the smaller part of the front side (*ne-turtur rig*).
Duration: Approximately 4 hours if not carving new planks. Approximately 3 days if carving new planks.

20 *Gen tēqē-eañ*. Eat for house's completion.

21 *Wol-eañ moëtup verē*. Kastom made by the commissioner of the house to his wife and by his wife to him. More significantly, kastom made by the commissioner, associated with his wife and children, to the foreman, his team and all the other people who helped during the building process (women who brought raw materials or cooked for the workers are also given small amount of money for their efforts).

Tools: *no-som*, *vatu*, hands

Agents: Commissioner, his wife and children to the foreman (*no-ñwo tandun*), his team and other helpers.

Operational sequence:

21.1 Lineage relatives of the commissioner gather behind his shoulder and express their association to him by putting one of their hands onto the shoulder of persons preceding them.

21.2 The commissioner calls the name of the foreman, while presenting shell-money or cash money in his extended hand.

21.3 The foreman comes and acknowledge the 'payment' by touching the extended hand of the commissioner and his closest relatives. He then take the money and go back to his place in the audience.

21.4 The commissioner calls the name of the foreman's main helper and the step 2 to 3 are repeated with him.

21.5 Steps 2 to 3 are repeated again until every person who helped during the building is properly compensated for his/her effort.

Comments: The amount of shell-money that such a kastom necessitated in the past was very important. Today it is most of the time replaced by *vatu* cash money (the amount vary from 1000 or 2000 *vatu* to 10 000 or 20 000 *vatu* given to the foreman), which nevertheless should be accompanied by a length of *no-som*. This is a *biriñbiriñ*, gathering all the relatives from both sides of the family. Other kastom also occur at this occasion in order to be publicly acknowledged, it is notably the time of the *tula* kastom strengthening the relationships between siblings or between children and their father.

Duration: Variable depending on the number of other kastom (*tula*, etc...) made at this occasion.

B. Digging yams. *Gēlgēl no-dom* (ref. NTB2: 119, 11/05/2011)

Place: Leverē, Leqel village.

Agents: Glenda Lois, Rina Basil, Eirin Basil, Me.

1. Cleaning the area. *Gurva no-won*.

Lois and Rina, *ne-gisel lap*. Slashing move with right hand holding the *ne-gisel lap*.

Duration: 10mn.

2. Digging yams. *Gēl no-dom*.

Tools: *ne-vetgēl* (pointed wood taken from the garden and sharpen with *ne-gisel lap*), hands.

Agents: Lois and Rina.

Operational sequence:

The *ne-vetgēl* is hold with two hands and repeatedly planted in the ground, followed by a scraping move back and forth in order to extract the ground around the root, hands are used to evacuate the ground and to push it again to fill in back the hole once the roots have been dug. Hands are pressed gently underneath the tuber to carefully detach it from the soil. Then the tuber is piled up next to the hole and the agent go on with another yam.

Total duration: Approximately 1h30mn.

3. Cleaning the tubers. *Tegteg no-dom*.

Tools: *ne-gisel wirig* (or split bamboo if there isn't *ne-gisel wirig*).

Agents: Me and Eirin

Tep ne-vulvuli or *vulvul no-dom* = remove the tubers' hairs. The sharp side of the *ne-gisel* scrape the yam's skin. The move is done toward the body trunk on the agent. Then lever move with the thumb and *ne-gisel wirig* to grab the hairs and cut them with the blade. Hand hold the *ne-gisel* by the blade and the second finger press the blade in order to cut the hairs maintained with the thumb.

Duration: 15 second to 3 minutes, depending on the size of the yam to be cleaned and the amount of hairs on the tubers.

Total duration: 45 mn.

4. Filling up the *ne-gēt*. *Gēteg ne-gēt*.

Tools: Hands

Agents: Lois and Rina.

Operational sequence:

Women grab the tubers one by one with their hands and carefully place them in the basket. Small yams go first, then longer and bigger yams are put over them.

Duration: 15mn.

(*Toqo no-dom* = putting some tubers aside, and cover them with leaves. These tubers would be planted. Lois told me she would carry them back to her house the next time she would come).

C. Making a *no-lok* (ref. NTB1: 90-92; 08/12/2010)

1. *Gēl no-qor*. Digging wild yams tubers, *no-qor*.

Agents: Clementine Mat

See OS-B. Digging yams.

2. *Tep no-dom*. Peeling *no-qor*.

Tools: *ne-gisel wirig*, hands, *ne-tembēr* tray, *do-vor* (to protect the already peeled parts from dirty hands), plastic dish.

Agents: Me and Clementine with a and small knife *ne-gisel wirig*, plastic dish and *do-vör*.

Operational sequence:

Ne-gisel wirig is held in the right hand, blade directed towards the agent and the tuber is gradually turned so that the blade goes around it. When about two third of the tuber is skinned, one uses a *do-vor* to hold it.

Duration: Approximately 30 mn.

3. *Rasa no-qor*. Grate the tubers *no-qor*.

Tools: metal grater, metal dish, hands.

Agent: Adam Valuwa.

Operational sequence:

The metal grater is hold in the left hand firmly while pieces of yams are grated with the right hand moving up and down. He stops to make the paste going down by tapping the end of the piece of yams on the metal grater (3 or 4 times).

Duration: About 45 mn.

4. *Da nu-um*. Making the stone oven.

Tools: hands, stones, shovel and coconut shell

Agents: Susie Swithun helped by Clementine at the end.

Operational sequence:

Susie first dug with the coconut shell in the right hand, tracing the edge of the stone oven with ashes. Then, Clementine dug deeper with the shovel. Bigger stones are put on the edge to form a ring, *nu-bölösum*. Smaller stones, *nu-winriñ* are arranged on the bottom and sides of the hole.

Duration: Around 15 mn.

5. *Bulian ni-ep*. Lighting fire. Piling the pebbles, *Wuduñ ni-ep ne no-voët qinqinē*.

Tools: firewood, stones and matches

Agent: Clementine.

Duration: 7mn.

6. Going to the garden to search for *do-ptēl*.

Tools: *ne-gisel lap*.

Agents: Susie and I went to Leo Swithun's garden.

Duration: Around 15 mn.

7. *Sir na-mato*. Scraping coconut inner flesh.

Tools: Pointed wood, wood/metal coconut grater, plastic dish, *ne-tembēr* tray.

Agents: Abraham.

Operational sequence:

7.1 *Gos na-mato*. The pointed wood is set almost vertically and blocked with stones. The nut hold with two hands is hit on the pointed wood. The point enters the coconut shell at about one third of its length. A quarter of the shell is then removed by pressing down the nut on the pointed wood. Right hand maintain the nut while left hand hold the quarter of the shell to be removed. (x4).

7.2 Cleaning the fibres left on the coconut inner shell with hands.

7.3 Cutting the nut in two halves with a *ne-gisel lap*. The nut is hold in one hand. The unsharpened side of the blade is used to hit the nut on the middle until the shell breaks. When the nut breaks, the two halves are slightly separated so that coconut water pour into a dish placed underneath.

7.4 *Sir na-mato*. Grating the coconut inner flesh. The agent sits on a specific tool with protruding metal scraper. Coconut halves are handled with two hands, one after the other. The flesh is scraped with a turning move of the hands, pressing the nut on the scraper. The empty shell is thrown in the empty stone oven or kept in a corner of the kitchen house to feed cooking fires.

Duration: About 1 hour.

8. *Ririg no-do ptēl*. Heating the leaves banana.

Tools: hands and fire.

Agent: Susie.

Operational sequence:

Banana leaves are passed over the fire to supple them and then folded and piled aside the stone oven.

Duration: 3 or 4 seconds (20 mn for 15 leaves).

9. *Sinsina no-do ptēl*. Cleaning the banana leaves.

Tools: Hands, *ne-gisel wirig*, *na-gabal*.

Agents: Sanson and Susie Swithun.

Operational sequence:

Susie hold the leaf at one end and cut half the width of the central stem at its basis, then she pull it out with one hand until the all length of the stem is removed. Sanson just hold on the other end in order to facilitate the operation. The leaves are then folded in two and piled again. Some of the stems are kept and put over the fire to supple them. Then they are flatten with a *na-gabal* stick. The other stems are discarded. Susie alone made this work on the stems

Duration: 5 mn.

10. Going to the garden to pick up *na-sarop*.

Tools: *ne-gēt*, hands.

Agent: Clementine.

Duration: About 45 mn.

11. Prepare the side ingredients.

Tools: hands, *ne-gisel wirig*, plastic dish, plate.

Agents: Clementine, me, Susie.

Operational sequence:

Cutting the *na-sarop* leaves, *völvölu na-sarop*, separating the bigger ones from the smaller ones. I did it with 2 plastic dishes.

Dividing the small tomatoes in two, Clementine did that with her *ne-gisel wirig* and a plate.

Cleaning the *kapsikum*. Susie did it with a plastic dish. The ends of the *kapsikum* are removed and discarded.

Duration: About 15 mn.

12. *Kel no-lok ne bē*. Add water and brass the laplap with it.

Tools: Cup and hands.

Agent: Clementine.

Operational sequence:

Clementine add a little bit of water, pouring it in the plastic dish full of no-lok from the cup. Then, she brass the no-lok from the edge of the dish towards the centre with a specific gesture of the hand said to be characteristic from women.

Duration: 3mn.

13. *Vier ne-gē, vier no-do*. Putting the tying ropes and the leaves.

Tools: hands

Agents: Clementine and Susie.

Operational sequence:

A first layer of leaves are put to cover the floor, the ropes are added over it. Clementine was in charge of the arrangement of ropes and leaves.

A second layer of banana leaves are put in star, with the end of each leaf folded.

A third layer is finally added, leaves disposed on the reverse side, also folded at their ends. (Clementine and Susie).

Duration: About 4 mn.

14. *Rumbus no-lok*. Putting the food inside of the bundle

Tools: hands

Agents: Clementine, Susie.

Operational sequence:

1 layer of *na-sarop* with bigger leaves

1 layer of *no-lok qor* (note the very characteristic move of the hand to do it)

1 layer of small *na-sarop* + the other ingredients

1 layer of *no-lok qor*.

Duration: About 10mn.

15. *Lok loqöt*. Closing the leaf bundle.

Tools: hands.

Agents: Clementine and Susie.

Operational sequence:

Clementine and Susie placed on diametrical opposite of the *no-lok*. They unfold one after the other the banana leaves and join their end in the middle to cover the *no-lok* and close the bundle.

Duration: 2 mn.

16. *Wēt gor no-lok*. Fastening the bundle with the ropes.

Tools: Hands

Agents: Clementine and Susie

Operational sequence:

The ropes are crossed in the middle of the bundle and knotted along the edge of it.

Clementine and Susie are placed on the diametrical opposite of the *no-lok*.

Duration: 1 mn.

17. *Belet no-voët*. Removing the hot pebbles from the stone oven.

Tools: *Na-gabal*.

Agent: Masten.

Operational sequence:

Masten holds the *na-gabal* with both hands and pick up one after the other the red-heated pebbles from the inner stone oven. He quickly pile them on the corner of the kitchen house, next to the stone oven. Then the bottom of the stone oven is trimmed so that stones come over the red ashes (that would prevent the *no-lok* bundle to burn).

Duration: 4 mn

18. *Momsow no-lok*. Putting the bundle inside the stone oven.

Tools: hands.

Agents: Clementine, me, Sanson, Susie

Operational sequence:

All agents grab the bundle with hands on its edge and ropes. It is quickly lifted up and put

inside the hot stone oven. Finally it is arranged so that it rested as flat and evenly as possible in the oven.

Duration: 5 seconds.

19. *Wuduñ*. Putting the hot stones over the *no-lok*.

Tools: *na-gabal*.

Agent: Clementine.

Operational sequence:

Clementine grabs the red-heated stones with *na-gabal* and carefully disposes them on top of the *no-lok* bundle, in the stone oven. The stones have to be regularly arranged so that they do not fall down during the baking and so that the *no-lok* is cooked evenly on all its surface.

Duration: 4mn.

20. *Töru no-lok*. Covering the oven with leaves.

Tools: hands

Agents: Susie and Clementine

Operational sequence:

Susie and Clementine carefully dispose leaves, *do-ptēl* or *do-vor*, over the oven in order to cover it entirely. Several layers are added so that the steam would be kept inside and so that the no-lok would be properly baked.

Duration: 2 mn.

D. Making a *no-löt* (ref. NTB1: 194; 18/01/2011)

1. *Ow no-lok te bë löt*. Removing the cooked *no-lok* from leaf packets

Tools: *no-got*, hands

Agent: Glenda Lois

Operational sequence:

The packets are stuck from the pot with the *no-got* and *do-vor* leaves are removed quickly with hands. The hot *laplap* square is finally put on *ne-tabēa* with the point of the *no-got* to avoid burning one's hands.

Duration: 10 mn

2. *Qēsē no-löt*. Smashing the *no-löt*.

Tools: *ne-vetiglöt*, hands, *ne-tabēa*

Agent: Matias Rañ.

Operational sequence:

The agents hold with two hands the *ne-vetiglöt* and smash the cooked tuber paste on the wooden dish until the *no-löt* has become soft. 3 or 4 successive vertical elevation and percussion moves followed by 3 or 4 leverage and turning moves. When a sufficient mound of soft paste is created it is pushed aside on the opposite end of the *ne-tabēa* and another mound is started.

Comments: this specific gesture is to be associated with similar gesture using *ne-vetgēl*.

Duration: 25 mn.

3. *Rañ no-löt*. Assembling the two mounds.

Tools: *ne-vetiglöt*, hands, *ne-tabēa*

Agent: Matias Rañ.

Operational sequence:

The two mounds are gradually integrated one with the other with the same gestures as before.

Duration: 3 mn.

4. *Gos no-löt*. Making the central hole.

Tools: *ne-vetiglöt*, hands, *ne-tabēa*

Agent: Matias Rañ.

Operational sequence:

A hole is made in the centre of the mound and *ne-ñiēkur* are delicately pushed inside the hole with the end of *ne-vetiglöt*.

Duration: 3 mn.

5. *Tep ne-tenisi*. Cutting the *ne-tenisi* pieces.

Tools: *no-got*, hands

Agent: Glenda Lois

Operational sequence:

The outer parts of the mound's basis are cut with *no-got* and dipped into the *ne-ñiēkur* paste. Considered good pieces, they are given to all the people assisting to the *no-löt* preparation who immediately eat them as delicacies.

Duration: 2mn.

6. *Ris no-löt*. Making a ring covered with nuts.

Tools: *ne-vetiglöt*, hands, *ne-tabēa*

Agent: Matias Rañ.

Operational sequence:

The hole in the centre of the *no-löt* mound is gradually enlarged with *ne-vetiglöt* until a ring of paste is created. This is mixed with the *ne-ñiēkur* paste in order to cover all the surfaces with nuts.

Duration: About 4mn.

7. *Kona no-löt*. Flattening the ring.

Tools: *ne-vetiglöt*, hands, *ne-tabēa*

Agent: Matias Rañ.

Operational sequence:

The ring is hammered with the *ne-vetiglöt* until it is completely and evenly about 2 centimetres thick and the central hole disappeared.

Duration: 1mn.

8. *Tep no-löt*. Cutting the *no-löt*.

Tools: *no-got*.

Agents: Glenda Lois and Melissa Matias.

Operational sequence:

The *no-löt* is cut in radiating pieces and then each triangle is cut again in small square pieces, then piled in the centre of the *ne-tabēa*.

Duration: 10mn

FIGURES



Fig. 1.01: Drawing of an old woman wearing two waistbands on Mere Lava. Journal of missionary C.H. Brown, 1877. Archives of the Church of Melanesia National Archives of Solomon Islands, Honiara.



Fig. 1.02: The Southern Cross, Melanesian Mission ship at Nier Makuvu (Mission Pasis). Photography by J.W. Beattie, 1906. Courtesy of Vanuatu Cultural Centre.



Fig. 2.01: The various spaces of the island. Drawing of Philip P. Sovan, 9 year's old, Auta, 25/06/2011. Modified 25/07/2012.

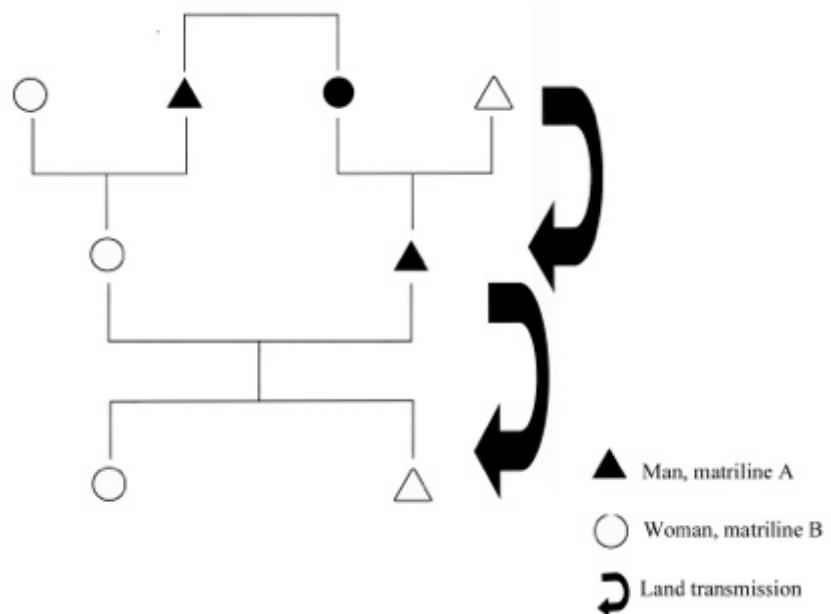


Fig. 2.02: Transmission of land between matrilines, according to ideal marriage conventions.

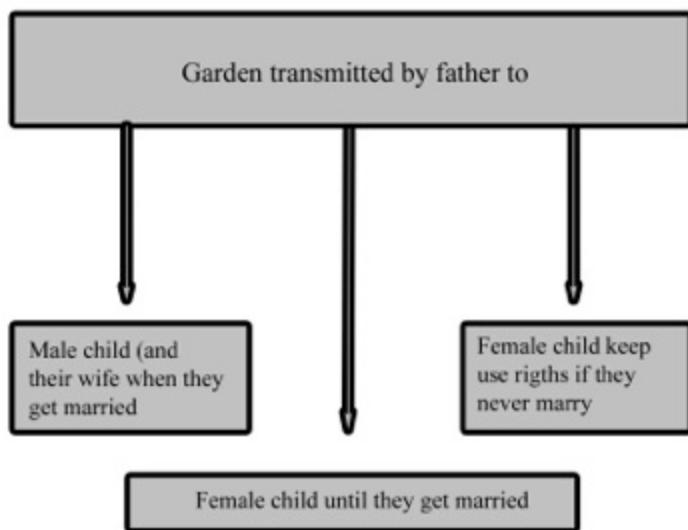


Fig. 2.03: Gendered transmission of land from father to children.



Fig. 2.04: *Ne-gemel mu remel-ñwarat*, central public place, Sere, Tasmat village, Mere Lava, 01/02/2011.



Fig. 2.05: *N-eañ bë moëtur*, Matliwag, Auta village, 28/02/2011.



Fig. 2.06: *N-eañ woqoqē*, Auta village, 27/02/2011.



Fig. 2.07: *N-eañ lenledu*, Gafsara, Tasmat village, 21/04/2011.



Fig. 2.08: *N-eañ tes*, Bēop, Tasmat village, 17/01/2011.



Fig. 2.09: A couple in front of their house, Tasmat village, Mere Lava. Photography by J.W. Beattie, 1906. Courtesy of Vanuatu Cultural Centre.



Fig. 2.10: A house on Mere Lava. Photography by J.W. Beattie, 1906. Courtesy of Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

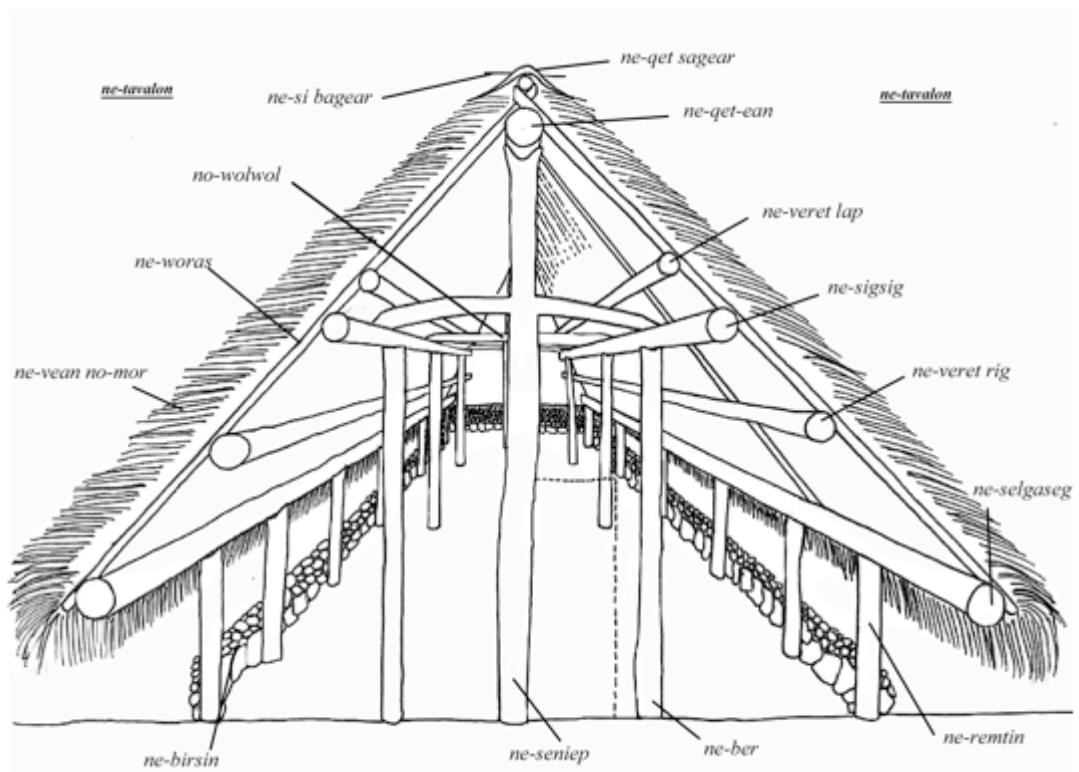


Fig. 2.11: Sketch of a *n-eañ kuk*'s structure.

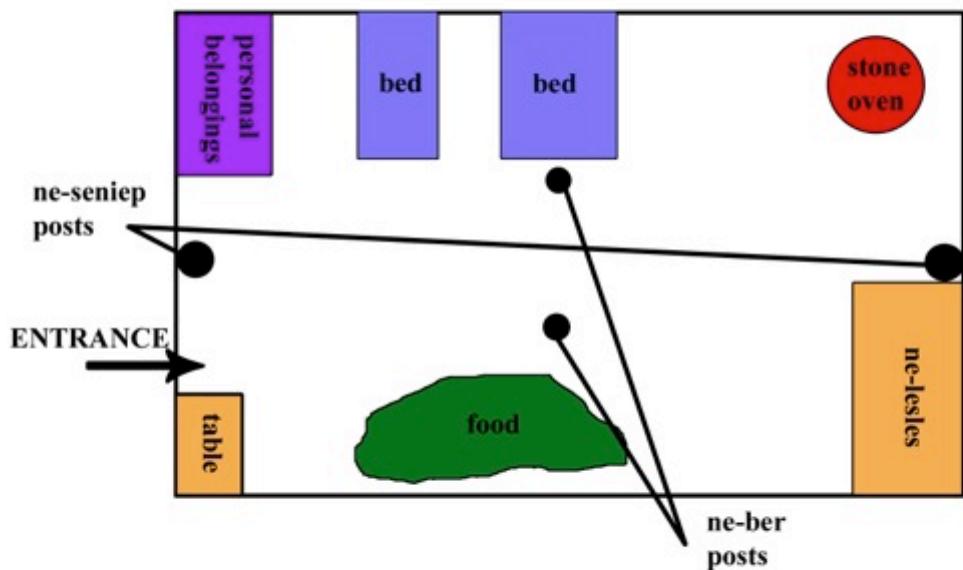


Fig. 2.12: Typical organisation of space in a Mere Lava *n-eañ kuk*.



Fig. 3.01: Baptism of Matchén Matthew by Mama Rosen Manias Tasmat village, 24/12/2010.



Fig. 3.02: *Ne-veoret moëtup verē*, compensation of the midwife's work, Lañgmar hamlet, Tasmat village, 16/05/2011.

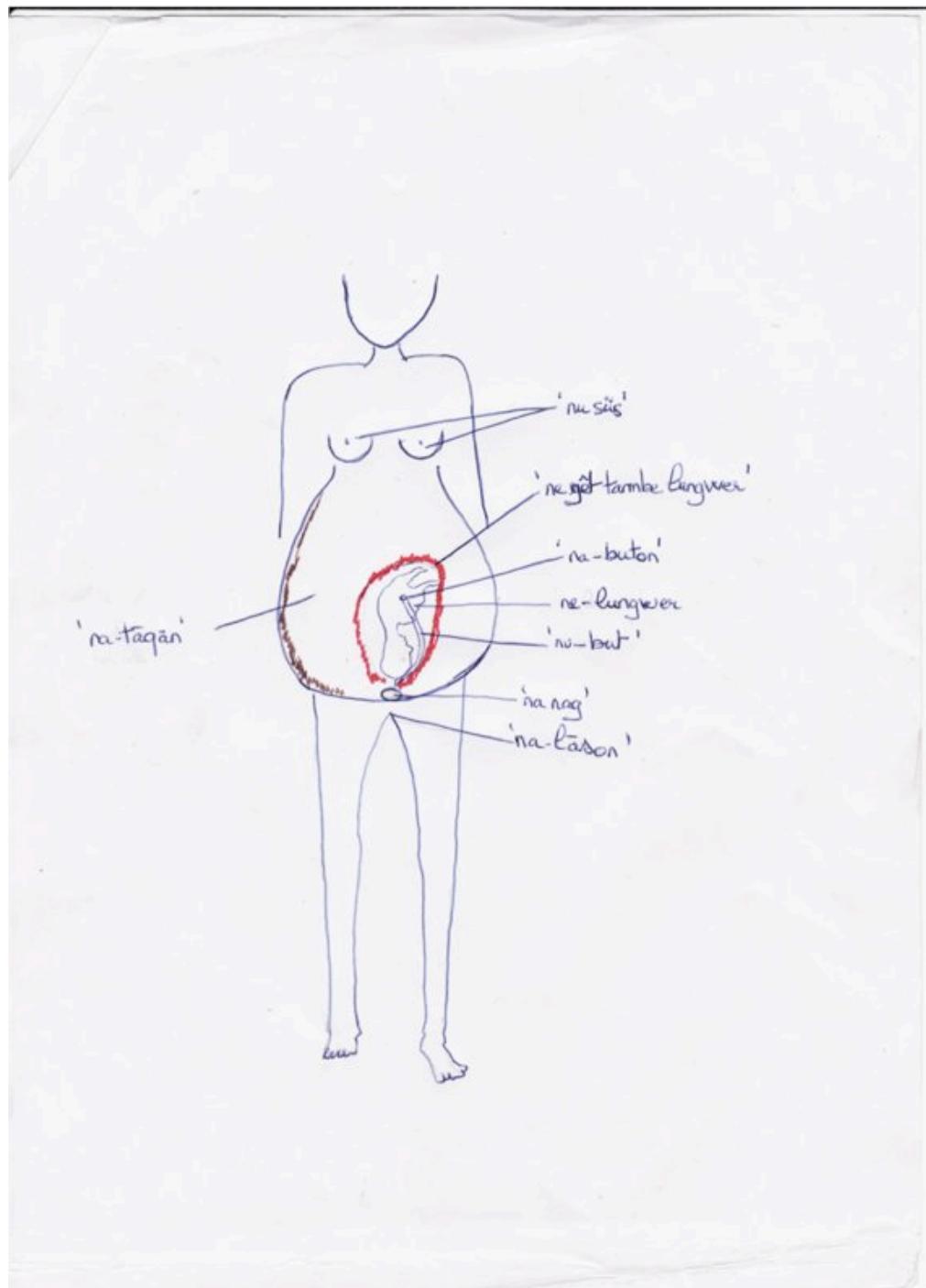


Fig. 3.03: Sketch of a pregnant woman's belly. Drawing by Glenda Lois and Judith Roler, Leurok hamlet, Tasmat village, 22/01/2011.



Fig. 3.04: Norris and Melvin in front of a *no-wolwol kastom* post, *no-tom*. Lañmar hamlet, Tasmat village, 19/02/2011.



Fig. 3.05: Church wedding of Kingley Stefan and Lin Gloria, Sere, Tasmat village, 29/12/2010.



Fig. 3.06: No-wolwol transversal wooden beam, *n-eañ kuk* of Leo Swithun, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 22/04/2011.



Fig. 3.07: *Da-matē moëtup verē*, Lekurang hamlet, Tasmat village, 10/01/2011.



Fig. 4.01: Two young initiated circled by other *ne-temet* dancers, *no-qöt* dance, Saint Paul's day, Leqel village, 25/01/2011.

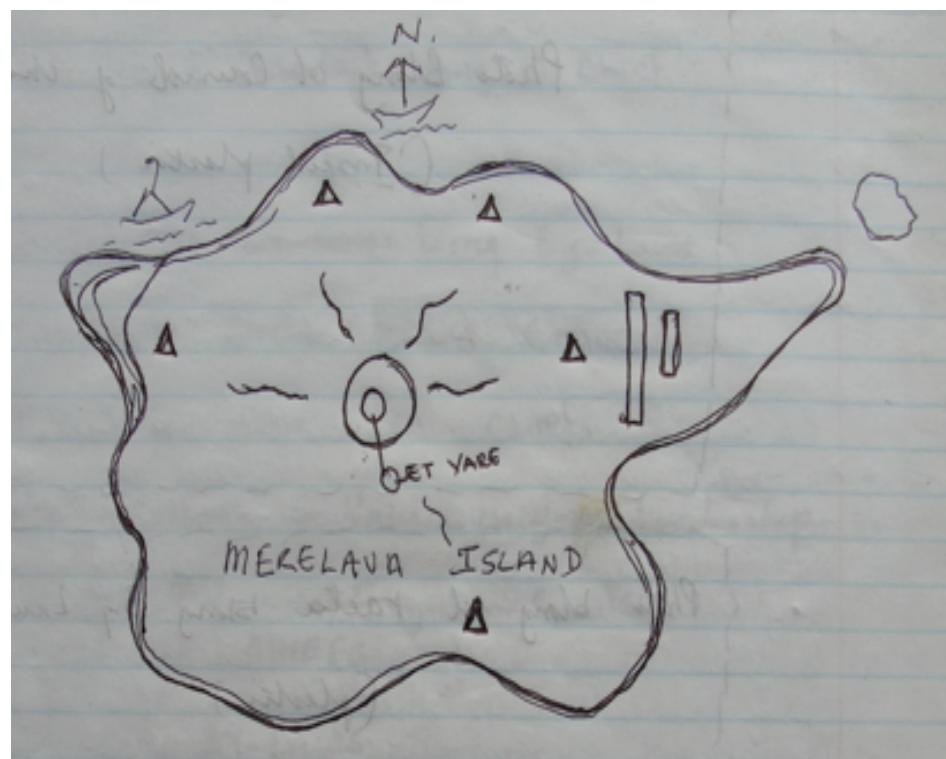


Fig. 4.02: Title page of Qet Varē Mere Lava By-Laws, drawing by Jif William Sal.

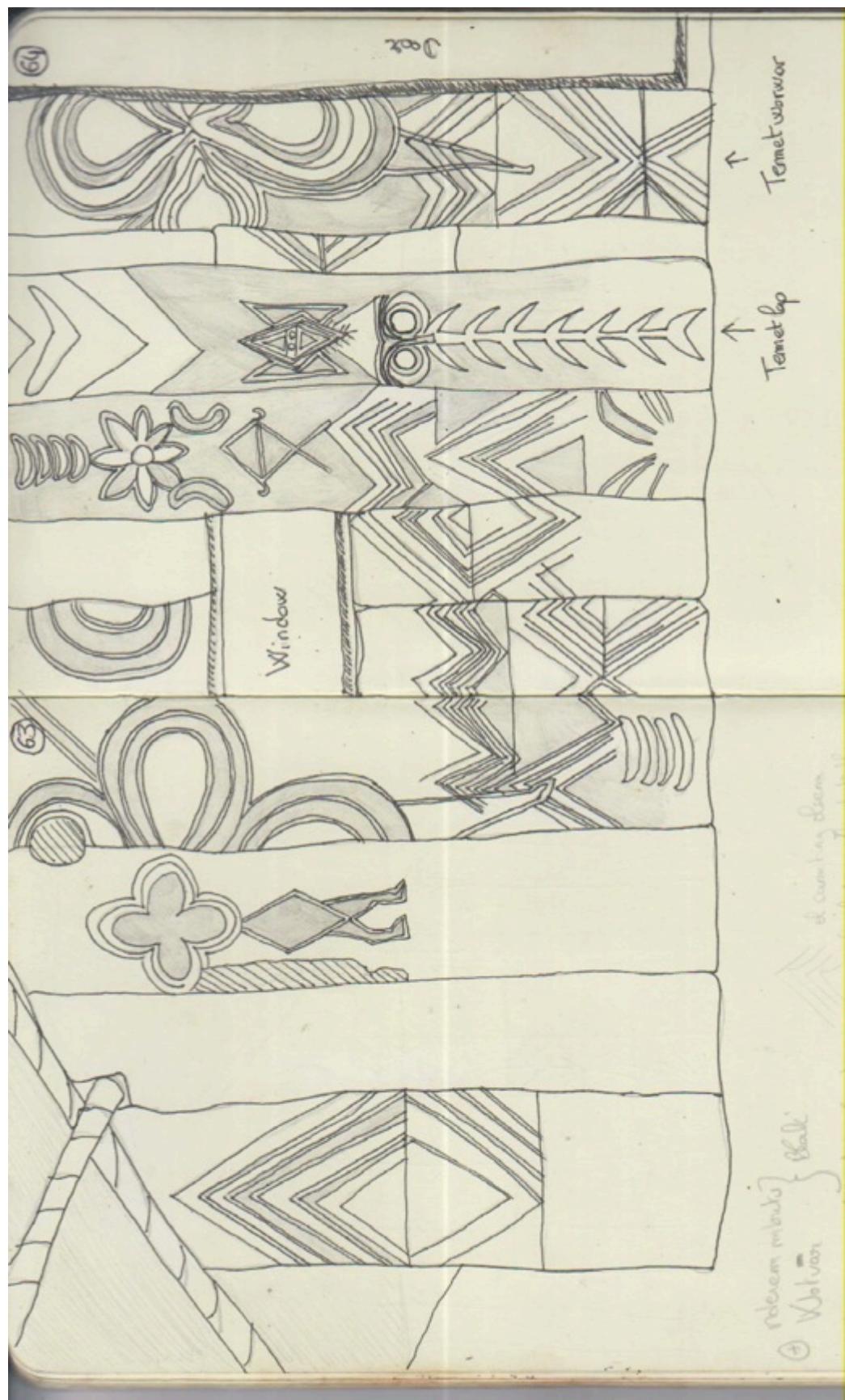


Fig. 4.03: Sketch of patterns painted and carved on Leverē hamlet's kitchen house, Leqel village, 23/05/2011.

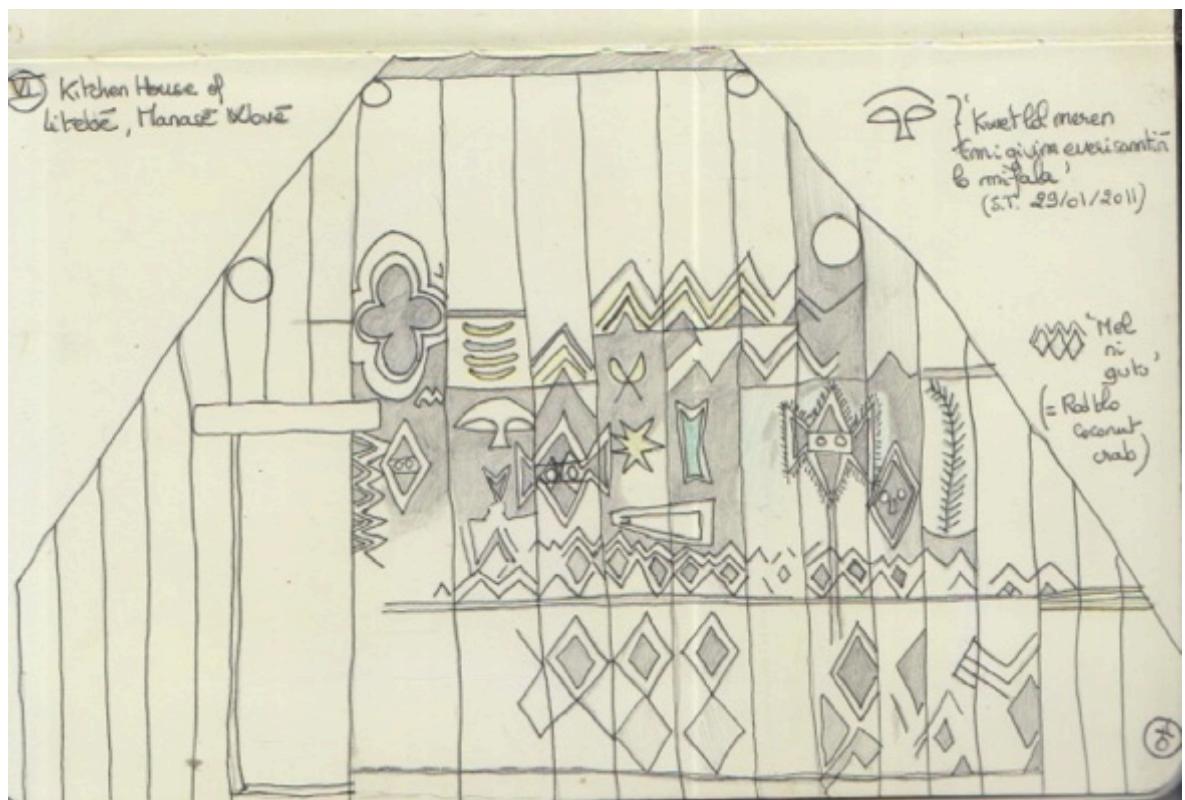


Fig. 4.04: Sketch of patterns painted on Litebē hamlet's kitchen house, Tasmat village, 21/05/2011.

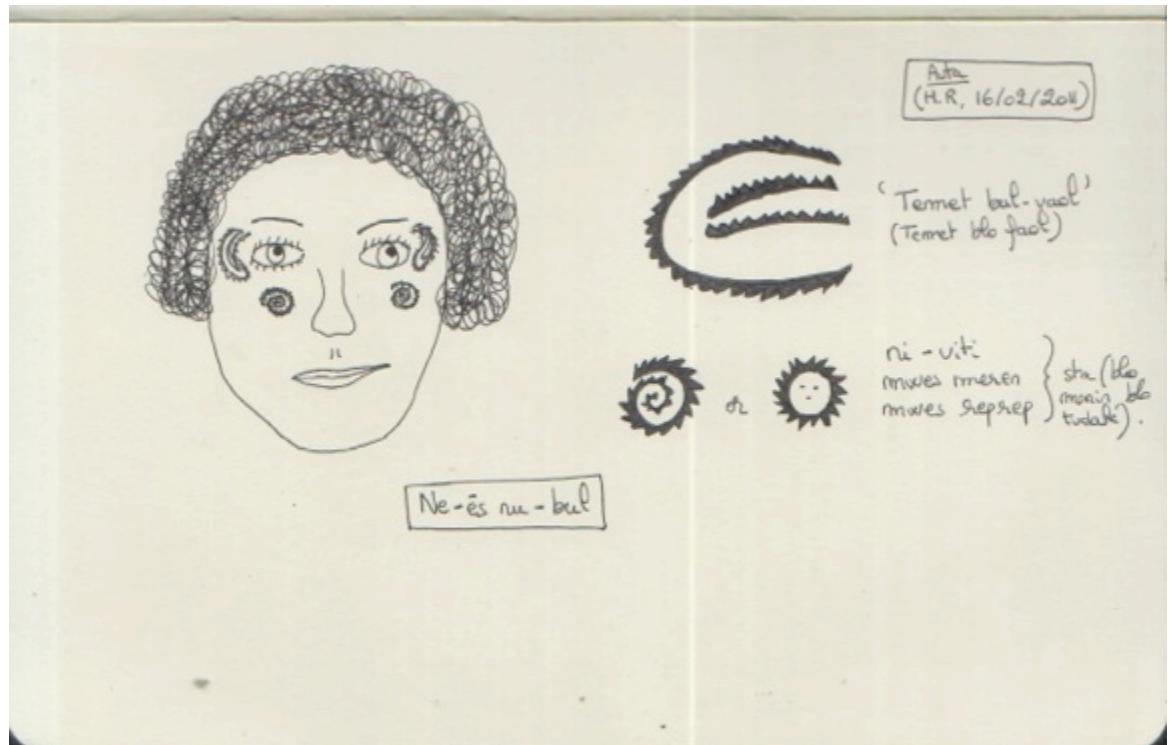


Fig. 4.05: Sketch of *ne-ñweter*'s face tattoos, 16/02/2011.



Fig. 4.06: Front wall of the house of a high-ranking woman, Tasmat village. Photography by J.W. Beattie, 1906. Courtesy of Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

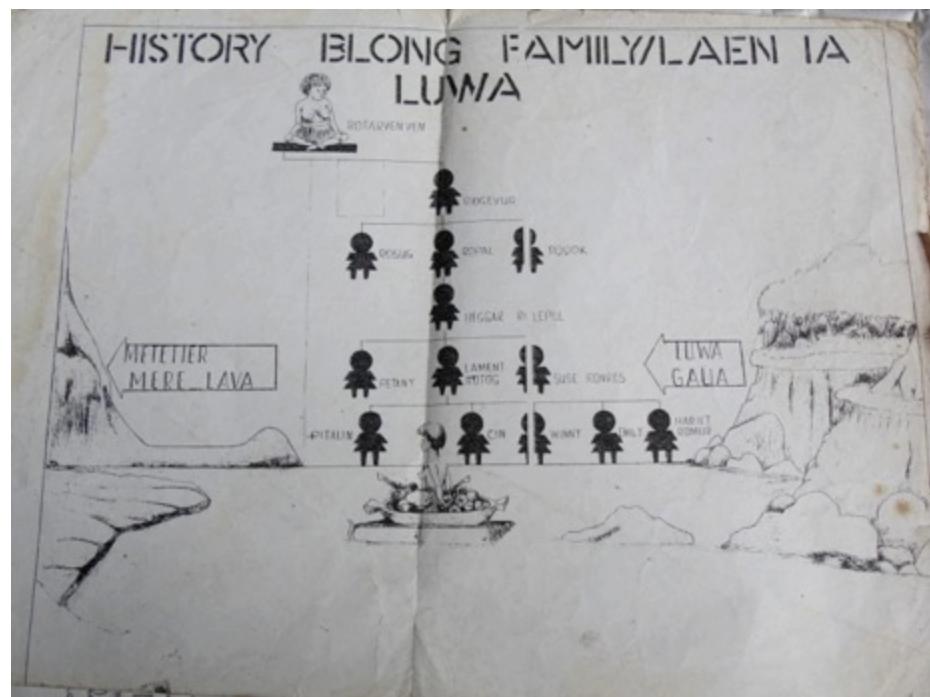


Fig. 4.07: Drawing by Amos Malkam , The history of the matriline Luwa, Barvēt, Gaua, photograph 18/09/2012.



Fig. 4.08: Attaching *nu-wutil* bamboo to the *n-eañ kuk*, Luwör hamlet, Leqel village, 27/06/2011.



Fig. 5.01: Making the terrace, *gēl ni-gēt-eañ*, Qañ Nerig, Tasmat village, 11/05/2011.



Fig. 5.02: Pulling a stone to make a terrace, Qañ Nerig, Tasmat village, 11/05/2011.



Fig. 5.03: Newly made stone wall, Qañ Nerig, Tasmat village, 11/05/2011.



Fig. 5.04: Jif John Norman Turris carrying back the future ne-qeti for the kitchen house he was building, Akqeāñ creek, Tasmat village, 12/05/2011.



Fig. 5.05: Marking and measuring the house, *tow n-eanī*, Lañramo hamlet, Tasmat village, 30/06/2011.



Fig. 5.06: Howard, Austen and Matias Rañ straightening one beam, *leq̄er*, Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, 01/06/2011.



Fig. 5.07: Noel and Matias Rañ digging holes to erect the house's posts, Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, 01/06/2011.



Fig. 5.08: Adjusting one side *ne-rēmtiñ* posts and *ne-selgasēg* beam, Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, 01/06/2011.



Fig. 5.09: Complete kitchen house structure, with breadfruit leaves attached to it, Lañramo hamlet, Tasmat village, 25/07/2011.



Fig. 5.10: Luisa Rosep and Violette Rotañ removing the central stem from sago palm leaves, sinsina, Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, 21/05/2011.



Fig. 5.11: John Hubart and Bill Walter making the leaf-tiles, *ne-vean no-mo i tuwel*, Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, 21/05/2011.



Fig. 5.12: Women preparing the *na-garias* vines, *tep na-garias* for *tuptup*, Luwör hamlet, Leqel village, 14/06/2011.



Fig. 5.13: *Tuptup*, Luwör hamlet, Leqel village, 14/06/2011.

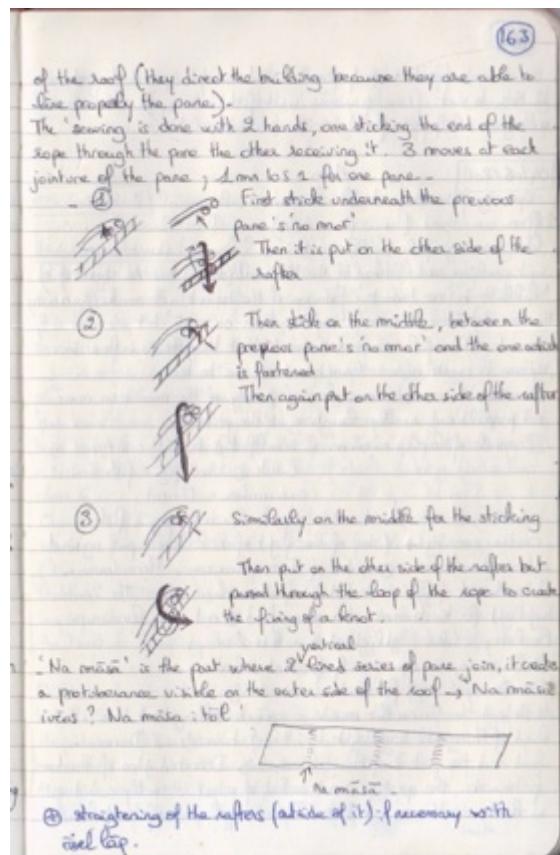


Fig. 5.14: Extract from NTB2: 163, sketch of the loops used to fasten sago palm leaf tiles to the roof truss, 03/05/2011.



Fig. 5.15: *Wol-eañ*, Glenda William receiving money for her help and hard work in the building of the kitchen house, Luwör hamlet, Leqel village, 01/07/2011.



Fig. 6.01: Clearing a garden patch, *no-oñonñ*, Qañ Suwas, Auta, 17/05/2011.



Fig. 6.02: Inner garden division fence separating *no-götom*, Qorqas garden, Tasmat village, 16/12/2010.



Fig. 6.03: Burnt garden patch, Tasmat village, 21/05/2011.



Fig. 6.04: *Werwerir no-dom*, Nancy Mwol, Ledawar, Gaua, 20/11/2012.



Fig. 6.05: Planting yams, *voësvoësig no-dom*, Nancy Mwol, Ledawar, Gaua, 20/09/2012.



Fig. 6.06: Preparing *no-lok vas*, Ledawar, Gaua, 20/09/2012.



Fig. 6.07: Yam vines starting to coil around its stake, Matafanga, Gaua, 23/09/2012.



Fig. 6.08: Yam vines growing on their stake, Tenerig garden, Tasmat village, 26/01/2011.



Fig. 6.09: Glenda Lois digging *no-qor* yams, Qañ Sawar, Tasmat village, 29/01/2011.



Fig. 6.10: Glenda Lois and children cracking *ne-ñiē* nuts, *qal ne-ñiē*, Wortawtaw hamlet, Tasmat village, 26/01/2011.



Fig. 6.11: Luisa Rosep and Sera Turris making *do-titea* leaf covers, Sere, Tasmat village, 01/02/2011.



Fig. 6.12: Grating crops, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.13: Preparing the leaves, *ririg no-do*, to make the no-lok leaf bundles, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.14: Making *no-lok dom*, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.15: *No-lok* bundles ready to be put in the stone oven, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.16: Young men removing hot pebbles from the stone oven, *belet no-voët*, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.17: *No-lok* piled up in the stone oven, *ne-teqes*, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.18: Food sharing according to places, Sere, Tasmat village, 04/02/2011.



Fig. 6.19: *No-löt* making, Palon, Espiritu Santo, 24/04/2011.



Fig. 6.20: Jif John Norman Turris making *no-löt*, Lekurañ hamlet, Tasmat village, 06/01/2011.



Fig. 6.21: Leo Swithun carving a *ne-kēr*, Palon Espiritu Santo, 05/09/2012.

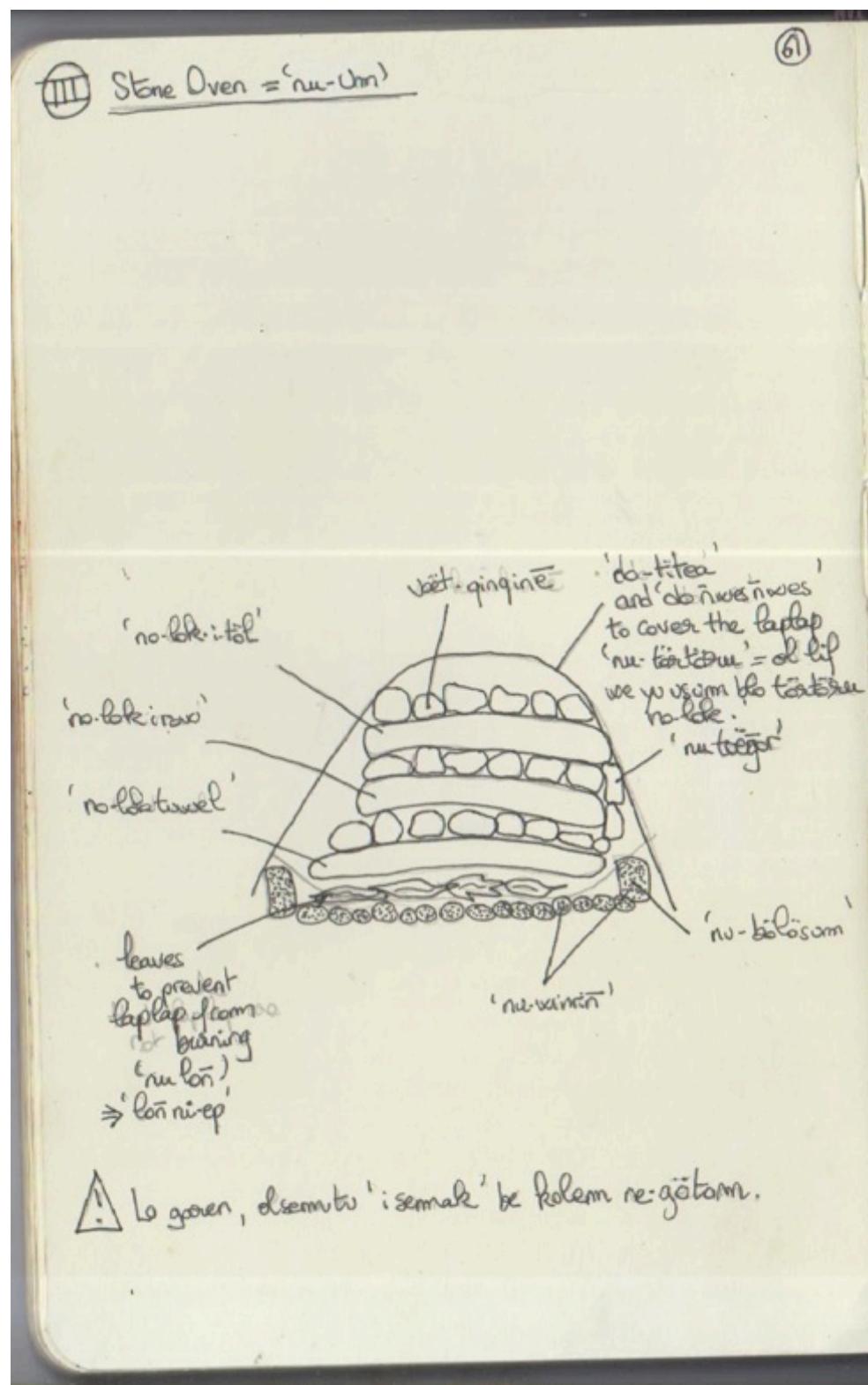


Fig. 6.22: Sketch of a stone oven structure, 05/05/2011.

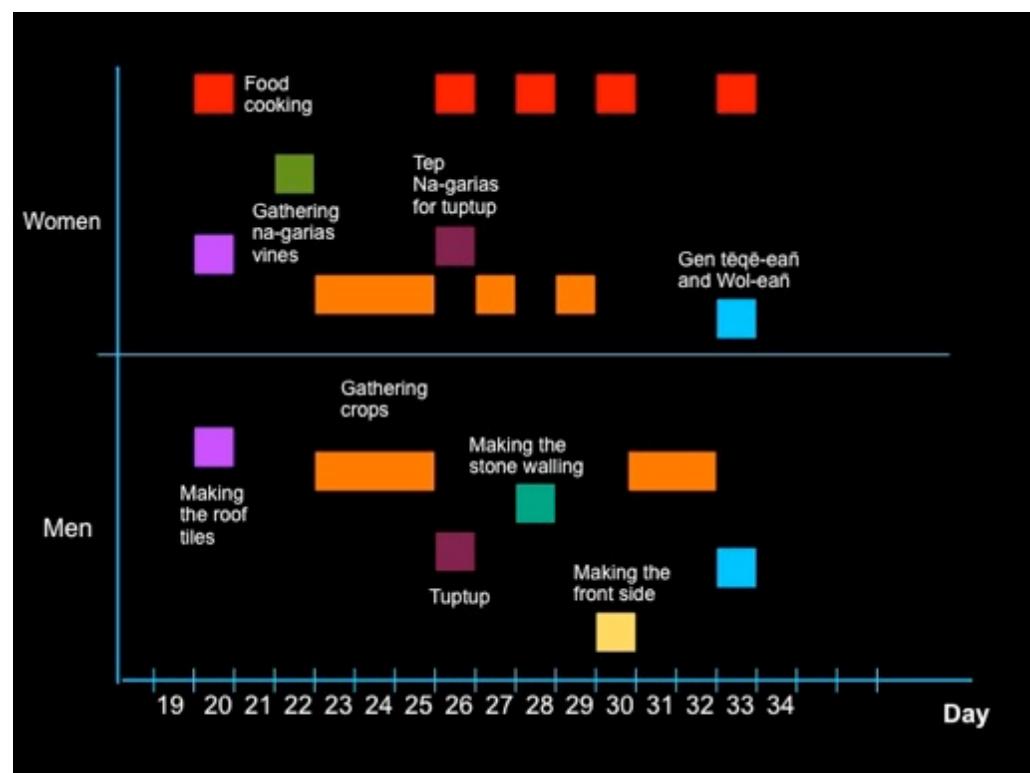
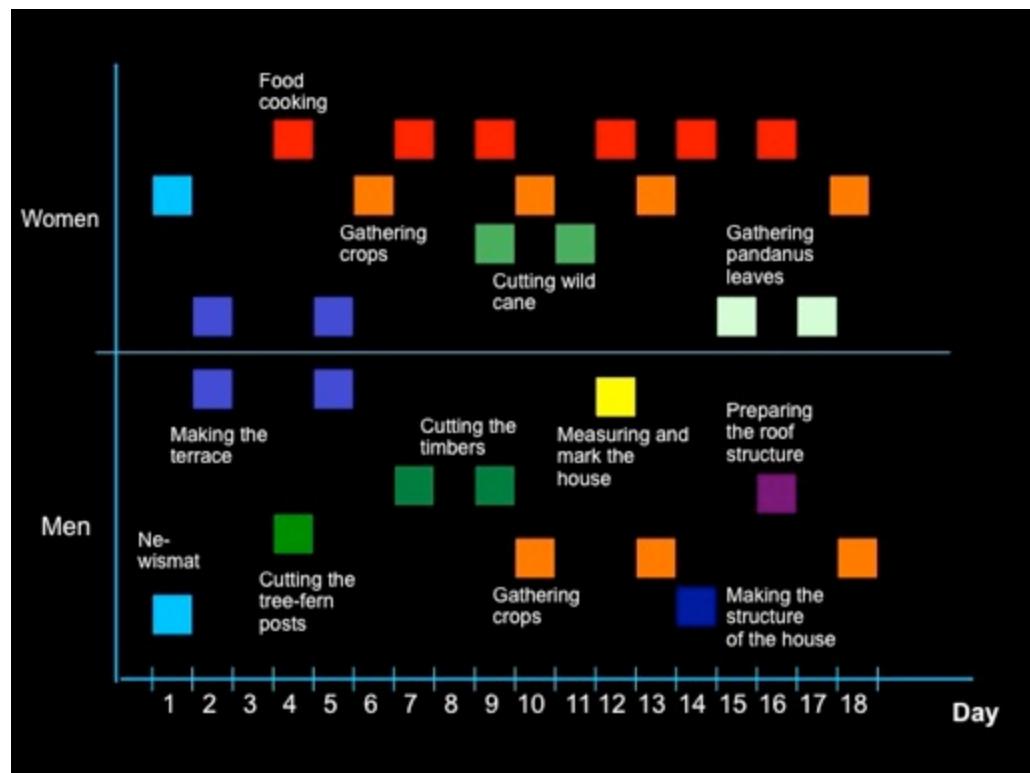


Fig. 6.23: Organisation of tasks according to gender during a house building process. Bulurig hamlet, Tasmat village, enquiry realised in June/July 2011.

TABLES

Table 1. Marriages according to matrilines (55 marriages recorded).

Men Women	Rownēoluñ	Luwe	Niumweu	Nabe	Ondo	Saran-e-mmē	Dulap	Vaslap	Maketuk	Saran-Nier-Gar	Makroro
Rownēoluñ											
Luwe				1		6		1	1	4	
Niumweu											
Kerevea										1	
Nabe											
Ondo						4				2	
Saran-e-mmē	3	6		1	5						
Dulap											
Vaslap	1										
Maketuk											
Saran-Nier-Gar	2	5	4	1	3						
Makroro		2			3						

Table 2. Mere Lava relationship terminology.

Same Moiety terms	Abbreviations
1. <i>Vep</i>	M, FZ, MBW, WM
2. <i>Muruk</i>	MB, FZH, MFBS, MMZS
3. <i>Vonañuk</i>	ZS(ms), ZD(ms)
4. <i>Natuk</i>	S(fs), D(fs), ZS(fs), ZD(fs), BS(fs), BD(fs)
5. <i>Tesik</i>	yB(ms), yZ(fs)
6. <i>Tuwok</i>	eB(ms), eZ(fs)
7. <i>Tötok</i>	eB(fs), eZ(ms), yB(fm), yZ(ms)
8. <i>Kwalēg</i>	WF (sometimes but more often called <i>muruk</i>), WM (as generally identified during fieldwork, also often called <i>vep-</i> see <i>robua</i> below)
9. <i>Tewerig</i>	SW
10. <i>Tubuk</i>	MM, FF, SS, SD, MMM, MFF, FMF, FFM, SDS, SDD, DSS, DSD
Opposite-moiety terms	Abbreviations
11. <i>Mam</i>	F, FB
12. <i>Ronatuk</i>	W
13. <i>Taumio</i>	H
14. <i>Rowel</i>	BW, WZ
15. <i>Weluk</i>	ZH, WB
16. (<i>Robua</i>)	WM (but recognised as an old fashioned term, during fieldwork most often WM was identified as a <i>kwalēg</i> and called <i>vep</i>)
17. <i>Welēg</i>	DH
4. <i>Natuk</i>	S(ms), D(ms), BS(ms), BD(ms)
10. <i>Tubuk</i>	MF, FM, DS, DD, MMF, MFM, FMM, FFF, SSS, SSD, DDS, DDD

Table 3. Working timetable of one household, Qorqas hamlet, Tasmat village, 10/09/2012-23/09/2012.

Date	People of which the activities were described	Type of activity	Time	Place	Comment
10.09.12	Basil	Stayed at home (sick)	All day	Qorqas	Basil is Matias' father
	Rina and Eirin	Cleaned a garden	Morning till middle afternoon	Gafsara	Eirin and Rina are Matias' unmarried sisters and live in Qorqas hamlet as well.
	Lois, Janeti, Morrisson and Ditshey	Planted a graden kumala	Morning till middle afternoon	Gafsara	Janeti, Morrisson and Ditshey are Lois and Matias child, Janeti the oldest being 7 years old
	Matias and Noel	Went fishing	All day till 5pm	Gafsara	Noel is Matias' classificatory brother
11.09.12	Basil	Stayed at home (sick)	All day	Qorqas	During the day, Rina went back to Qorqas in order to take care of her father
	Eirin, Lois, Matias, Janeti, Morrisson, Ditshey	Burned a piece of garden previously cleaned and let to dry	Morning till middle afternoon	Gafsara	They all had spent the night in a garden house in Gafsara.
	Gresline and Mathew	Plant banana	Morning till middle afternoon	Gafsara	They joined the Qorqas party to share food at lunch and dinner time but worked in their own garden.
12.09.12	Matias	Cut firewood	Afternoon	Gafsara	
	Eirin, Lois, Janeti, Morrisson, Ditshey	Weed a kumala garden planted the week before	All day	Gafsara	
	Gresline and Mathew	Plant yam in their new garden	All day	Gafsara	They had slept with the Qorqas party and ate with them as well
13.09.12	Rina	Took care of Basil	All day	Qorqas	
	Matias, Eirin, Rina,	Plant yams in	All day	Gafsara	They all joined together regarding to the size of the

	Lois, Janeti, Morrisson, Ditshey, Gresline and Mathew	the biggest garden of Lois and Matias			garden. Eat night they shared the <i>no-lok vas</i> , specific laplap eaten at plantation time. Pieces were sent to Basil and Philip, Lois' father, through Eirin who went back to Qorqas in order to stay with Basil.
14.09.12	Matias, Eirin, Rina, Lois, Janeti, Morrisson, Ditshey, Gresline and Mathew	Plant yams in the garden of Gresline and Mathew	All day	Gafsara	Similarly to the day before a no-lok vas was prepared and shared at the end of the day.
15.09.12	Lois, Rina, Morrisson, Ditshey	Weed a kumala garden planted two weeks before.	Morning till middle afternoon	Gafsara	Sandrela and Rosalyn, both Lois' classificatory sisters and living in Qorqas neighbouring hamlet took care of the old Basil in the village
	Eirin and Janeti	Burned the garden cut on the 10 th .	Morning till middle afternoon	Gafsara	
	Matias	Went for firewood, then went fishing	Morning then afternoon	Gafsara	
	Gresline and Mathew	Went back to help Mathew's family with their garden.	Left on the morning	Letemser	
16.09.12	Matias, Lois, Rine, Eirin, Gresline, Mathew, Janeti, Morrisson, Ditshey, Matchēn	Spent the day fishing	All day	Gafsara	Gresline and Mathew had come back after the Sunday morning prayer, bringing their small daughter matchen with them.
17.09.12	Lois, Matias, Sandrela, Rosalyn, Roler, Noel, Gabi, Janeti, Morrisson, Ditshey, Gabi's baby	Plant yams in Lois's grand parent's garden, luisa Rosep and John Hubart	Morning until late afternoon	Leverē	Luisa Rosep and John Hubart, without children, looked after Lois' mother and Sandrela's, Rosalyn's and Roler's mother at the same time. Nowadays they all consider of their duty to carfully take car of these two elders. Luisa Rosep, Gabi, Morrisson, ditshey and Gabi's baby stayed at home and prepared

					food for the others working in the garden.
	Eirin and Rina	Stayed at home	All day	Qorqas	Looked after their father.
18.09.12	Gabi and Janeti, Gabi's baby	Stayed in Leverē	All day	Leverē	Had been left to help the two elders during the week.
	Lois, Sandrela, Roler, Rosalyn	Plant manioc and kumala	Morning till middle afternoon	Letanlap	All of them planted in her respective garden but they all went together and came back together
	Ditshey, Morrisson, Eirin, Rina	Plant yams	Morning till early afternoon	Qorqas	Planted in the garden close to the hamlet, garden of their father Basil.
	Matias	Went fishing	Morning until middle afternoon	Nier Salap	
19.09.12	Lois Eirin, Rina, Matias, Morrisson, Ditshey	Planted yams	Morning until middle afternoon	Qorqas	In the garden of the old Basil.
	Sandrela, Rosalyn, Roler	Clean a garden patch	All day	One of Rosalyn's garden	
	Noel	Went fishing	Morning until middle afternoon	Nier Makuvu	
20.09.12	Matias, Eirin, Rina, Basil	Stayed at home	All day	Qorqas	Day of heavy rain
	Lois, Morrisson, Ditshey	Visited family	Morning / Afternoon	Buluriu (Qorqas neighbouring hamlet) / Leteniok, Aunen Litensirip (Hamlets of Lois' father and classificatory sisters on the other side of the village)	
21.09.12	Sandrela, Rosalyn, Lois, Matias, Morrisson, Ditshey, Walter,	Went to plant yams	Morning till late afternoon	Philip's garden	They all gathered in Lois' father place Leteniok and went to plant yams, and then afterward had a shared meal with no-lok vas, rice and chicken at that place before going back home. Rotang is

		Rotang, Gresline and Mathew			Lois' classificatory sister and Walter her husband. They live in Leteniok neighbouring hamlet.
22.09.12	Matias and Eirin	Went for firewood	Morning	Letanlap	
	Lois and Rina	Went to plant manioc	Morning	Letanlap	They all came back with Janeti, Gabi and her baby.
	Morrisson and Distshey	Left with Rosalyn	Morning	Buluriu	Rosalyn also took care of bringing food to the old Basil in Qorqas.
23.09.12	Sandrela, Rosalyn, Roler, Gabi and most of other members of the Buluriu hamlet, Noel, Philip, Rotang, Walter, Luisa Rosep, John Hubart, Gresline, Mathew.	Family gathering	All day	Qorqas	Organised for the close leaving of Matias, who planned to go back on Gaua in order to build a house for his uncle (John Hubart's brother).

Table 4. Tasmat Village, Household composition, May 2011.

Age repartition:

0-11 years old = A / 12-20 years old = B / 21-50 years old = C / 51-70 years old = D / 70 + years old = E

Hamlet name	No. of Houses			No. of Inhabitants	Age repartition
	kitchen house	sleeping house	other		
Qorqas	2	3	-	10	4A 1B 4C 1D
Bulurig I	1	-	1	-	-
Bulurig II	1	1	-	8	3A 3C 1D 1E
Bulurig III	1	1	-	6	2A 2C 2D
Lañbagor	1	1	-	6	1A 3B 1C 1D
Lañregreg	1	-	-	4	2A 1B 1C
Letöltöl	1	3	-	4	2A
Makēn					1B 1C
Makēn	1	2	1	-	-
Lañramo	1	1	1	7	2A 3B 2C
Wortawtaw	2	1	-	2	2E temporary
Litebē I	1	2	-	-	-
Litebē II	1	2	-	6	4A 2C
Litebē III	1	2	-	-	-
Lañmar	1	-	-	7	2A 1B 4C
Lerat I	1	2	-	8	5A 2C 1D

Lerat II	1	-	-	2	1A 1C
Blakbutu	1	-	-	6	3A 1B 2D
Lemanman	1	2	-	5	2A 1B 2C
Lowatan I	1	1	1	3	1A 2D
Lowatan II	1	2	-	4	1A 3C
Le taqor	1	1	-	1	1D
Bēop I	1	3	-	4	1A 2C 1E
Bēop II	1	-	-	-	-
Qañ	1	2	-	-	-
ñwokbas I					
Qañ	1	2	-	2	2C
ñwokbas II					
Qañ ñwokbas	1	1	-	-	-
III					
Qañ Nerig	1	2	2	5	1B 2C 2E
Lañ Sergē	1	1	-	11	5A 2B 3C 1D
Telverē	1	1	-	-	-
karasow I					
Telverē	1	3	1	8	2A 2B 3C 1D
karasow II					
Letaqor	1	1	-	4	2A 2C
Telverē	1	3	-	5	1A 2B 1C 1D
Kisiag					
Leurok I	1	1	-	3	1A 2C
Leurok II	1	2	-	5	2A 1B 2C
Leurok III	1	1	-	5	3A

					2C
Eurok IV	1	-	-	2	2D
Makēn (Eurok) I	- (related to Judith and Philip's kitchen house in Eurok I)	1	-	1	1D
Makēn (Eurok) II	1	3	-	6	3A 2C 1D
Nier Gar I	1	1	-	-	-
Nier Gar II	1	1	-	-	-
Nier Gar III	1	2	-	5	2A 1B 2C
Bambaorot	1	2	1	6	3A 1B 2C
Nier Gar IV	1	1	-	4	2A 2C
Nier Gar V	1	-	-	5	2A 2C 1D
Butumdola	1	1	-	-	-
Letemser I	1	3	1	8	4A 2C 2D
Letemser II	1	1	-	4	2A 2C
Manman I	1	2	-	6	4A 2C
Manman II	1	1	-	2	1B 1C
Manman III	1	1	-	3	1A 1A 1C
Qañ Eurok	1	2	-	-	-
Litensirip	1	3	-	5	2A 1B 2C
Aunen I	1	3	-	-	-
Aunen II	1	1	-	4	1A 2C 1E
Leteniok	1	2	-	2	1C 1D
Lekurañ I	3	1	-	7	3A 1C

					2D
					1E
Lekurañ II	1	3	-	8	1A 5B 2C
Lekurañ III	1	2	-	3	1A 2D
Lekurañ IV	1	2	-	3	1B 2D
Levotvot I	1	2	1	1	1B
Levotvot II	1	1	-	-	-

Table 5. Tasmat buildings according to their materials, 2011.

Type of house	Kitchen house	Sleeping House	Other	Total
General number %	72 41,8%	91 52,9%	9 5,3%	172 100%
Do Taqor number	72	35	5	112
a = % for types of houses	100% (a)	38,5% (a)	55,5% (a)	65,1% (a)
b = % for materials	64,3% (b)	31,2% (b)	4,5% (b)	100% (b)
Imported Materials number	0	41	4	45
a = % for types of houses	0% (a)	45% (a)	44,5% (a)	26,2% (a)
b = % for materials	0% (b)	91,1% (b)	8,9% (b)	100% (b)
Mixed Imported materials and Do-taqor number	0	15	0	15
a = % for types of houses	0% (a)	16,5% (a)	0% (a)	8,7% (a)
b = % for materials	0% (b)	100% (b)	0% (b)	100% (b)

Table 6. Mere Lava major edibles.

Name in Mwerlap	Name in Bislama	Latin name	Place of collection	Comment
no-dom	yam	<i>Dioscorea alata</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i>	Yam cultivated in the gardens. kastom stori of the red yam <i>ne-surbēn</i> . kastom stori of the origin of yams. Appropriate to be exchanged and eaten at funerals
no-qor	wael yam	<i>Dioscorea nummularia</i>	creek areas <i>ne-qan̄</i>	Must stay quiet while digging up the tubers. Appropriate to be eaten at funerals
na-tavap	wovile	<i>Dioscorea esculenta</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i>	Distinguished from other yams.
ne-bēg	?	<i>Dioscorea bulbifera</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i> or old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i>	One can eat the aerial tubers or the root parts
ni-miniaik	maniok	<i>Manihot esculenta</i>	old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i>	Considered as a weaker food. Eaten when yam is not available.
nu-butēt	kumala	<i>Ipomoea batatas</i>	Id.	Appropriate food for young children.
nu- bōtō	bredfrut	<i>Altocarpus altilis</i>	creeks <i>ne-qan̄</i> and low bushy areas close to the village, <i>lañ-viar</i>	
ni-vitēl	banana	<i>Musa spp</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i> , old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i> , low bushy areas close to the village, <i>lañ-viar</i>	Appropriate food for young children.
na-sarop	kabis aelan	<i>Abelmoschus manihot</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i> , old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i>	Considered as meat. Usually planted at the boundaries of gardens. Given to young mothers for their lactic effects.
no-got	kabis aelan	?	creeks <i>ne-qan̄</i> and bush areas.	Considered as meat. Given to young mothers for their lactic effects.
ne-luququer	han blong blak pam	<i>Caryota ophiopelis</i>	Id.	Id.
nu-wuñweli	kabis aelan	<i>Polyscias spp.</i>	Id.	Id.

ne-tuwel	<i>kabis aelan</i>	<i>Cyathea sp.</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-balak	<i>kabis aelan</i>	<i>Pseuderanthemum sp</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-wis bōtō	<i>top blong bredfrut</i>	<i>Altocarpus altilis</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-ñiē	<i>nangae</i>	<i>Canarium spp.</i>	creeks <i>ne-qan̄</i> and bush areas.	Eaten fresh or dried. Specific baskets <i>no-tok</i> , kept in <i>na-bugor</i> storage houses.
na-mato	<i>kokonas</i>	<i>Cocos nucifera</i>	boundaries of paths and gardens, low bushy areas <i>lan̄-viar</i>	Considered as meat. Less used than <i>ne-ñiē</i> . Juice also drunk as snack during the day.
ne-watag	<i>navel</i>	<i>Barringtonia sp.</i>	creeks <i>ne-qan̄</i> and low bushy areas <i>lan̄-viar</i>	Eaten as snack during the day.
na-talias	<i>namambe</i>	<i>Inocarpus fagifer</i>	Id.	Considered as a delicacy dish.
nu-mango	<i>mango</i>	<i>Mangifera indica</i>	Id.	Eaten as snack during the day.
na-kavika	<i>nakavika</i>	<i>Syzygium malaccence</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-aranis	<i>aranis</i>	<i>Citrus macroptera</i>	Id.	Id.
nu-pomelo	<i>pampelmus</i>	<i>Citrus grandis</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-lēs	<i>popo</i>	<i>Carica papaya</i>	Id.	Id.
na-gatabol	<i>nakatambol</i>	<i>Dracontomelon vitiense</i>	Id.	Id.
nu-ananas	<i>ananas</i>	<i>Ananas comosus</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-melon	<i>wota melon</i>	<i>Citrullus lanatus</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-avokado	<i>avokado</i>	<i>Persea americana</i>	Id.	Id.
ni-bin	<i>grin bin</i>	<i>Vigna unguiculata</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i> or old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i>	Considered as meat and eaten aside staple food.
ni-bin	<i>bin</i>	<i>Adenanthera pavonina</i>	old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i> , bushy boundaries of paths	Id.
nu-kukumba	<i>kukumba</i>	<i>Cucumis sativus</i>	new gardens <i>no-oñ</i> or old gardens <i>ne-töltöl</i>	Id.
nu-kapsikum	<i>kapsikum</i>	<i>Capsicum anuum</i>	Id.	Id.
ne-onian	<i>onian</i>	<i>Allium cepa</i>	Id.	Id.
nu-jinja	<i>jinja</i>	<i>Zingiber officinale</i>	Id.	Sometimes used to add flavour to the dishes, especially with rice.
no-to	<i>sugaken</i>	<i>Saccharum officinarum</i>	Boundaries of gardens or paths	Eaten as snacks, very appreciated with kava.
na-vaol	<i>faol</i>		Domesticated but not kept in fences.	Killed only occasionally, often to celebrate specific events or to honour a host.

<i>na-ratva</i>	<i>pik</i>	Domesticated, kept in the low bushy areas, sometimes in fences.	Killed only occasionally, often to celebrate ceremonial events. Exchange valuable
<i>ne-niag</i>	<i>fis</i>	Different species	Sea areas, <i>na-nag</i> Eaten almost on a daily basis. Appropriate to offer to hosts.
<i>no-tokna</i>	<i>nawita</i>	Id.	Considered a delicacy.
<i>ne-wirēat</i>	<i>nawita</i>	Id.	Considered a delicacy.
<i>ne-reis</i>	<i>reis</i>	Bought from stores	Considered a valuable food because of its price. Considered a weaker food. Appropriate to offer to hosts.
<i>no-sok</i>	<i>suga</i>	Id.	Optional food bought only when extra money is available.

Table 7. Labour timetable, Wortawtaw hamlet, Tasmat village
25/01/2011-09/02/2011.

Date	People	Type of activity	Time	Place	Comments
25/01/2011	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ Masten Philip Jeff Turris Richard Swithun Moriane Matias John Hubart Philip Gen	Went to St Paul's day	Morning until middle afternoon	Leqel village	Calendrical feast in which all village communities are invited to share a day of festivities including a common meal, dances and theatrical comic plays
	Melissa Matias Janeti Matias Morrisson Matias Luisa Rosep	Went to help their classificatory grand-mother to dig up manioc tubers	Morning until middle afternoon	Leverē hamlet, Leqel village	Janeti and Morrisson aged 7 and 5 years old respectively, were there to be looked after by their classificatory grand-mother. Melissa, aged 13 years old, was expected to work actively
	Glenda Lois Melissa Matias	Carried back home the baskets of manioc harvested during the day	Late afternoon	From Leverē hamlet to Wortawtaw hamlet, Tasmat village	The manioc had been harvested in preparation for the funerary feast of Janet Philip, Glenda Lois' mother, to be held the 10th of February.
	Jeff Turris Matias Rañ	Went to <i>ne-töltöl</i> garden to collect firewood	Late afternoon	From the garden situated above Leverē hamlet to Wortawtaw hamlet, tasmat village	Firewood collected for the daily cooking.
	Masten Philip Richard Swithun			Luwör hamlet, Leqel village	Decided to stay for a few days at the place of their maternal uncle Jif William Sal.
26/01/2011	Glenda Lois	Went to	Full day	Gafsara	Manioc this time

27/01/2011	Melissa Matias Janeti Matias Morrisson Matias Rina Basil	weed a garden of sweet potatoes and harvest manioc		was intended for daily consumption. Rina and Eirin were both unmarried sisters of Matias Rañ, they were not living in Wortawtaw hamlet but at their father's place
	Matias Rañ Moriane Matias Jeff Turris Eirin Basil	Went fishing	Full day	Nier Gafsara
	Rina Basil Eirin Basil Glenda lois Moriane Matias	Went to search for crabs	Overnight	Creeks of Gafsara area
	Philip Gen	Went to discuss about a pig with a classificatory brother of him	Afternoon of the 26th	Tasmat <i>taval metqan̄ sigēlēg</i>
28/01/2011	Richard Swithun Masten Philip	Went to work on the airfield construction site	Full day	Lewetniok, Big Stone village
	Philip Gen Morrisson Matias Janeti Matias Melissa Matias	Stayed at home	Full day	Wortawtaw hamlet, Tasmat village

					household.
	Glenda Lois Moriane Matias Matias Rañ	Went to collect <i>ne-ñiēsmat</i> , and harvest manioc and <i>na-sarop</i>	Morning	Batalias and Letanlap gardens, Leqel village	The nuts were to be kept for the funerals, while other products were intended for daily consumption.
	Jeff Turris	Went to work in one of his maternal uncles' garden	Full day	Lesalap, Tasmat village	Jeff's maternal uncle had requested him to come and help.
	Wilson Roñ Jack Valuwa	Arrival	Late afternoon	Wortawtaw	Wilson arrived from port Vila where he lived and worked. Jack arrived from Santo where his father, Philip Gen's older brother lived.
29/01/2011	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ Moriane Matias Janeti Matias Morrisson Matias Jeff Turris Richard Swithun Masten Philip Wilson Roñ Jack Valuwa Philip Gen John Hubart Luisa Rosep	Went to Church	Early morning	Sere, Tasmat village	That was a Sunday. John Hubart and Luisa Rosep came the day before to sleep and spend the day with their family in Wortawtaw. They had a small kitchen of their own there that was always ready for them to come.
	All the previous people + family relatives from neighbouring hamlets	Family day	Late morning until late afternoon	Wortawtaw	The extended family gathered to discuss the forthcoming funerals and share a meal. People came from Lañmar, Lerat, Blakbutu, Lañramo, Bulurig, Litebē.
30/01/2011	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ Moriane Matias Janeti Matias Morrisson Matias Jeff Turris Richard Swithun	Walked around the whole island in order to visit their relatives	Early morning until late afternoon	Mere Lava	This trip was made in order to announce the date chosen for the funerals and invite people to come, as well as to request from certain relatives

	Masten Philip Wilson Roñ Jack Valuwa Philip Gen				contributions in yams, pigs and <i>ne-ñiē</i> .
31/01/2011	Matias Rañ Jeff Turris Richard Swithun Masten Philip Wilson Roñ Jack Valuwa Philip Gen	Went to cut firewood	Morning until early afternoon	Gafsara	This had been decided as a community work and young men from various hamlets of Tasmat village gathered together in order to complete the work.
	Glenda Lois Melissa Matias Moriane Matias Janeti Matias Morrisson Matias Eirin Basil Rina Basil Luisa Rosep	Cooked	Morning until middle afternoon	Wortawtaw	The meal prepared was intended to feed the workers as a direct compensation for their work.
01/02/2011	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ Rina Basil	Went to the garden to gather <i>na-sarop</i> , <i>na-vatras</i> and various crops	Morning until early afternoon	Tenerig garden, above Tasmat village	<i>Na-vatras</i> were collected in preparation of the funerals to come. <i>Na-sarop</i> was collected to show me how to prepare a <i>rumrubus no-lok</i> , the various crops were for daily consumption.
	Melissa Matias Janeti Matias Moriane Matias Morrisson Matias Luisa Rosep Philip Gen	Stayed at home	Full day	Wortawtaw	Luisa Rosep, Melissa and Moriane looked after the household and the younger children who played with children from other hamlets.
	Masten Philip Wilson Roñ	Went to work on the airfield construction site. Then went to repare a generator.	Full day	Lewetniok, Big Stone village, then Auta village	During their trip around the island they also visited relatives in order to prepare the funerals, especially requesting prices for pigs they wanted to purchase.
	Jeff Turris Richard Swithun Jack Valuwa	Spent the day at their maternal uncles'	Full day	Lañmar, Tasmat village	

places					
02/02/2011	Melissa Matias Janeti Matias Moriane Matias Morrison Matias Luisa Rosep John Hubart	Went back to Leverē hamlet	Full day	Leverē hamlet, Tasmat village	The children were sent back with their classificatory grand-parents in order to help them in the daily tasks.
	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ	Went to collect burao branches	Morning until middle afternoon	Gafsara	The inner bark of the branches would be used to fasten the various <i>no-lok</i> to be prepared at the funerals.
	Philip Gen	Went to visit relatives	Morning till early afternoon	Tasmat <i>aval</i> <i>metqanī</i> <i>sigēlēg</i>	He wanted to discuss several points regarding the forthcoming funerals.
	Masten Philip Wilson Roñ	Still repairing generators	Full day	Auta	They stayed at one of their maternal uncles' place.
	Jeff Turris Richard Swithun Jack Valuwa	Spent the day at their maternal uncles' places	Full day	Lañmar and Blakbutu, Tasmat village	
03/02/2011	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ Eirin Basil Rina Basil	Went to collect food	Morning till early afternoon	Tenerig garden	Food was simply intended for daily consumption
	Melissa Matias Moriane Matias Janeti Matias Morrison Matias	Stayed at home	Full day	Wortawtaw	The oldest children took care of the household; others went back and forth to the neighbouring hamlets.
	Masten Philip Wilson Roñ	Came back from Auta	Middle afternoon	From Auta to Wortawtaw	
	Philip Gen	Went to his place	Full day	Leteniok, Tasmat village	Philip spent the day cleaning his place, where he had been living with his wife before she died.
	Jeff Turris Richard Swithun Jack Valuwa	Spent the day at their maternal uncles' places	Full day	Lañmar and Blakbutu, Tasmat village	
04/02/2011	All the Wortawtaw residents + family relatives from the	Went to dig up wild yam tubers, <i>no-</i> <i>qor</i>	Full day	Legoer Van, To-Sawar, To-bē-weas	The tubers were intended for consumption at the funerals.

neighbouring hamlets					
05/02/2011	Masten Philip	Went to visit family relatives to request for yams	Full day	Auta village	The yams were intended for consumption at the forthcoming funerals
	Wilson Roñ Matias Rañ Jeff Turris Richard Turris	Went to search for a pig and bring it back to Tasmat	Full day	From Makondo, Big Stone village to Tasmat	The pig was given by one of Wilson's maternal uncle and would be sacrificed during the forthcoming funerals.
	Philip Gen	Went to pay for a pig	Afternoon	Lekurañ, Tasmat village	The pig would be sacrificed during the forthcoming funerals
	Glenda Lois Melissa Matias Janeti Matias Moriane Matias Morrisson Matias John Hubart Luisa Rosep	Stayed home and cooked	Full day	Wortawtaw	They cooked to feed the members of the household and family relatives who had come to visit
06/02/2011	All the Wortawtaw residents + relatives from Lerat, Lañmar and Blakbutu + Tasmat village <i>jifs</i>	Family meeting	Early morning	Wortawtaw	The discussions concerned the schedule of the funerals and how the moëtup verē would be conducted at the forthcoming funerals
	All the Wortawtaw residents + village community	Church rehearsals	Late morning till mid-afternoon	Sere, Tasmat village	The rehearsals concerned the diverse songs and the Church schedule for the forthcoming funerals.
	Glenda Lois Matias Rañ	Went to their garden	Late afternoon	Qorqas hamlet, Tasmat village	They quickly went to their garden, close to Wortawtaw in order to gather food for daily consumption.
07/02/2011	All the women of the hamlet + women of Bulurig hamlet	Went to gather <i>dovor</i> and <i>dokerē</i> leaves	Morning	Rosrañwör, Leql village	Basketfuls of leaves were carried back to the Sere public place in Tasmat village
	All the men from the hamlet	Went to gather firewood	Full day	Gafsara	The firewood was then carried back and stored in the

					men's <i>ne-gemel</i> on Sere
	All women of Tasmat village + visiting women relatives from around Mere Lava	Made the <i>do-titea</i> covers	Afternoon	Sere, Tasmat village	The <i>do-titea</i> would serve to bake no-lok and be used then to share the food at the forthcoming funeral feast.
08/02/2011	Men from the hamlet + relatives from Bulurig, Lerat, Lañmar and Blakbutu	Went to gather firewood	Morning	Levetrig and Gafsara	The firewood was then carried back and stored in the men's <i>ne-gemel</i> on Sere
	Melissa Matias Moriane Matias Janeti Matias + Women relatives from Bulurig, Lerat, Lañmar, Litensirip and Aunen	Went to gather <i>do-ptēl</i>	Morning	Gafsara	The banana leaves would be used to make the no-lok bundles. The piles of leaves were stocked in the women's meeting-house in Sere. They also came back with basketful of <i>ne-ñiē</i> nuts.
	Glenda Lois Luisa Rosep Roler Noel Rina Basil Eirin Basil Morrisson Matias	Stayed and cooked	Full day	Wortawtaw	They prepared a meal for the workers as a direct compensation for their help.
	Men from the hamlet + family relatives helpers	Went to gather <i>ne-ñiē</i>	Afternoon	Creek nearby Lañmar	Baskets of nuts were carried back and stored in the women's meeting-house on Sere.
	Men and women from Tasmat village	Went to gather coconuts	Late afternoon	Areas just above the Sere, Tasmat village	The nuts were carried back and stored in and immediately next to the stone oven in the women's meeting-house, on Sere.
09/02/2011	Glenda Lois Eirin Basil	Went to search for crops	Early morning	Nier Vaslap, Big Stone village	A family relative gave the food as a contribution for the funerals.
	Masten Philip Richard Swithun Jeff Turris Wilson Roñ	Went to dig up manioc	Early morning	Leverē hamlet, leqel village	The manioc tubers were then piled in the women's meeting-house on Sere.

Matias Rañ + relatives from Bulurig, Lañramo, Lañmar and Litebē	Other women of Wortawtaw hamlet + child relatives from Bulurig	Went to gather various kinds of leaves	Morning until mid- afternoon	Leverē hamlet, Leqel village, then Tenerig garden	They collected mainly na-sarop but also do- <i>do-ptēl</i>
All residents of Wortawtaw hamlet + Tasmat village community		Rehearsal in Church for the ceremony to come	Mid- afternoon to early evening	Sere, Tasmat village	
Young men from the hamlet		Went fishing	Overnight	Nier Gafsara	The fish caught would feed the feasting participants the day after
10/02/2011	FUNERARY FEAST				SERE, TASMAT

Table 8. Traditional calendar of Mere Lava, Banks Islands

Lunation	Meaning Gregorian calendar	Associated	activities
<i>tivol / tesi</i>	? / ?	Eat manioc, mango, local nuts, breadfruit. Specific food for the cyclone times. Cyclone season	January
<i>wētgor / tugē</i>	? / ?	Eat manioc, local nuts, breadfruit. Specific food for the cyclone times Cyclone season	February
<i>tugē / vutgor</i>	? / ?	Eat manioc Harvest the first new yams	March
<i>tesi / tiñor</i>	? / ?	Eat yams Harvest the new yams Start the building of houses Make new pandanus baskets ready for the harvest	April
<i>lemlap</i>	'The big rain'	Eat yams Build houses Plait pandanus baskets Harvest yam gardens	May
<i>ñwavutrañ</i>	'Uproot' or 'dig up the roots'	Eat yams Build houses Plait pandanus baskets Harvest yam gardens	June
<i>rañrañ tavap</i>	'Dig up the <i>tavap</i> '	Eat yams, new local nuts, breadfruit Build houses Plait pandanus baskets Harvest the remaining yam gardens, the <i>tavap</i> are ready, burn new gardens	July
<i>un gon / sertöl</i>	'Bitter Palolo worms' / Name of the fourth pointed arrow?	Eat yams, local nuts, breadfruit Complete house building Burn new gardens and start planting new gardens.	August
<i>un melagis / malgam mermerir</i>	'Green Palolo worms' / ?	Eat manioc Plant new gardens	September
<i>un wir / malgam uttum</i>	'Palolo worms copulate' / ?	Eat manioc Weed the gardens	October
<i>malgam uttum / un rig</i>	? / 'Little Palolo worm' November	Eat manioc Weed the gardens	
<i>malgam mermerir / un melagis</i>	? / 'Green Palolo worm'	Eat manioc, mango. Cyclone season.	December

Table 9. Mere Lava yam's cultivars.

Cultivar name in Mwerlap	Characteristics	Origin or other specific knowledge
<i>Ne-sinag mu wotok</i>	Big but not too long. White flesh. Flat.	Specific yams for men of the <i>no-wotok</i> rank.
<i>Ne-surbēn</i>	Very long but not too flat. Red flesh, red skin.	Associated with Qet, according to a <i>kastom stori</i> .
<i>No-vunmiak</i>	Red tubers. Flat and often showing fork.	
<i>No-qolmo</i>	Curved like a hook. Red skin. White flesh.	
<i>No qet rashwa</i>	Like <i>no-qolmo</i> but flattest. White flesh. Red skin. Usually short.	
<i>Ne-meavin</i>	White tubers. Do no grow deep in the ground.	This cultivar is no longer grown in the gardens. Perhaps still certain person in Auta have some.
<i>Na-rap</i>	Short tubers. White one like <i>ne-bis misis</i> and round shape. No hairs.	No longer very common.
<i>No-qet ea mwol</i>	Long tubers. White skin and flesh.	Called like that because the head of the tubers slightly protrude from the ground.
<i>No-qör e-mmē</i>	Very big tubers. White one.	
<i>No-qotlap</i>	Very big. White skin and flesh. Hard and strong head with a yellowish colour. Long hairs.	One of the two genuine cultivars of yams. Said to 'be grown with the island'. Called <i>ne-gen ta le-won</i> , 'food from the bush'.
<i>Ne-siweta</i>	Long tubers. White skin and flesh. Very soft when cooked.	Liked for its soft texture when cooked and because it produces plenty tubers (<i>pikinini</i> , 'children') for each tuber planted.
<i>Ne-mmē</i>	Big and long tubers. Have a smell when cooked and is soft as well. Half-red skin. White flesh.	People generally like the taste of this one.
<i>Ne-sinag ta Nier-gar</i>	Small head but long tubers that grow deep (<i>laek wan botel</i>). Red skin. White flesh. A good yam.	Found at a wild state in Nier Gar, so they called it that way.
<i>Ne-riprip</i>	Strong like wild yam and can be very big. Usually curved. White skin and flesh.	
<i>Ne-terevarvar</i>	Red head that becomes white at the opposite end of the tubers. Long tubers.	
<i>Ne-bis misis</i>	Short tubers. Very white skin and flesh. No hairs and very soft when cooked.	
<i>Ne-laotöl</i>	Big tubers. Half-red skin.	
<i>No-not</i>	White tubers. Round shape like <i>no-goto e-mmē</i> .	

<i>No-sok</i>	Some are red, some are white. Double and very strong skin.	Sugary taste. the children like it.
<i>Na-gasgas</i>	No given description	
<i>Ne-teagēl</i>	Looks like a snake. Soft and smooth when cooked. Red skin. White flesh.	Came from Maewo through a man from Letemser about thirty years ago. Newly introduced cultivar.
<i>Ne-meleak</i>	Strong tubers that grow wild or can be planted. Red skin. White flesh. Sometimes so long that the tubers have to be broken up before their end (<i>ne-meleak sow</i>).	The second of the genuine cultivars of yams. Also called <i>ne-gen ta le-won</i> . <i>Ne-meleak na-ñwarat</i> are the long and male ones, <i>ne-meleak na-vavean</i> are the short and female ones.
<i>No-rörö</i>	Very long and big tubers. Red skin. White flesh.	
<i>No-rörö mon</i>	Very big tubers. Half-red skin.	
<i>No-rörö wet</i>	Very very big tubers. Red skin. White flesh.	
<i>No-goto-e-mmē</i>	Round shape and flat. Red skin and flesh.	
<i>Ne-reakēr e-mmē</i>	Short tubers. Red skin and flesh. Soft when cooked. Long hairs.	Good to be grated at celebratory occasions because it makes a strong <i>no-lok</i> . Also produces a lot of tubers when planted.
<i>Ne-reakēr wēnwēn</i>	Same size but white skin and flesh. Soft when cooked and long hairs as well.	Good to be grated at celebratory occasions because it makes a strong <i>no-lok</i> . Also produces a lot of tubers when planted.

Table 10. Public *moëtup verē* related to individual life course on Mere Lava.

Type of <i>moëtup verē</i> <i>(Mwerlap)</i>	Subtypes <i>(Mwerlap)</i>	Made by	Made to	Moment of performance
<i>ne-wismat</i>	-	Commissioner	People commissioned for a specific work	Prior to the task to be achieved
<i>ne-sermasgeat</i>	-	Commissioner	People commissioned for a specific work	After the commissioned work has been completed
<i>no-wol-eañ</i>	-	Parents of a female child / also Commissioner of a house	The child maternal uncles / also the building team of a house	During the baby's first months (female child) / also when a house is finished.
<i>no-wol-gemel</i>	-	Parents of a male child	The child's maternal uncles	During the baby's first months (male child).
<i>no-wolgor</i>	-	The groom's maternal uncle	The bride's father and mother	Before one boy and one girl could live together
<i>no-wolwol</i>	-	The groom's maternal uncle	The bride's father and mother	Some time after the boy and girl had lived together for a while and when the groom and his kinsmen have gather enough wealth.
<i>nu-tula</i>	<i>nu-tula- matē</i>	The deceased's children	The deceased's siblings	Usually made 10 days after the death, to secure the deceased's land and possessions as well as to strengthen and reaffirm kin bonds
	<i>nu-tultula</i>	The deceased children /also one's siblings	One of the deceased's brother /also one's sibling	Usually made at the same time as <i>nu-tula matē</i> , to publicly identify him as a new father for them / also to strengthen and reaffirm the relationships between siblings
	<i>nu-tula loqöt</i>	The deceased children	The deceased's brothers	Usually made at the same time as <i>nu-tula-matē</i> , to compensate the deceased siblings for covering the corpse
	<i>n- avutvetgēl</i>	The child	His father	Usually made at the time of <i>nu-tula matē</i> , to secure the possession of one or several particular trees
	<i>nu-tula sus</i>	A child	His father	Usually made at the time of a house <i>wol-eañ</i> , to

				thank and recognise his father's care
<i>ne-veoret</i>	-	Any kin	Any kin	Usually made at the time of other <i>moëtup verē</i> , generally to thank the receivers for some special support and care they had provided at a particular moment
<i>no-domdomwēn</i>	-	Any kin	Any kin or <i>jifs</i>	Usually made at the time of other <i>moëtup verē</i> , to compensate a misbehaviour (<i>faen</i> in Bislama).

Table 11. Restrictions related to pregnant women.

Restricted actions	Consequences for pregnant women
Passing through or living on places associated with powerful ancestors	These would retain the baby inside of the mother's belly and prevent a safe and quick delivery
Plaiting baskets	The baby will be fastened to his/her mother's belly in the same way she had plaited the pandanus straps together, that will cause a difficult delivery
Eating black fish and turtle	The baby will not grow properly, he will stay small
Eating seafood	The baby will be attached to his/her mother's belly in the same way as the seashells are sticking to the rocks of the shoreline, that will cause a difficult delivery

Table 12. Ranks hierarchy on Mere Lava.

Male rank	Female rank	Obtained with/by	Associated artefacts/ornaments	Role
According to Jif Luk Wokot:				
<i>Vesveskēl</i>	-	Eating the food produced inside the <i>ne-gemel</i> + shell-money <i>no-som</i>	Pandanus strap on the leg which maintain <i>ne-suñlañ</i> kind of <i>na-sasa</i> leaves	No specific role but showing respect to higher ranked men and obey their commands. It is the sign that one will later be killing pig and get ranked.
<i>Wokrun</i>	-	Eating specific food + killing one young pig + shell-money <i>no-som</i>	<i>Ne-bēr</i> , costume plaited from burao or pandanus roots liber + <i>na-sasa</i> leaves called <i>sas-be-now</i> worn on the head	To pass the door and enter the <i>ne-gemel</i> . Lower ranked messengers and servants of higher ranked men.
<i>Wometelo</i>	-	Eating specific food + killing one grown-up pig + shell-money <i>no-som</i>	Walking stick <i>ne-kēr</i>	Messengers of higher ranked men
<i>Wilgen</i>	-	Eating specific food + killing one pig with tusk that came out of the jaw and started to bend + a certain amount of other pigs + shell-money <i>no-som</i>	Did not know	Messengers and executives of <i>no-wotok</i>
<i>Wilgen temet</i>	-	Eating specific food + killing one pig with tusks that came back inside the jaw again + a certain amount of other pigs + shell-money <i>no-som</i>	Did not know	Messengers and executives of <i>no-wotok</i>
<i>Wotok</i>	<i>ñweter</i>	Eating specific food + one pig with full-circled tusks and about 100 other pigs + shell-money <i>no-som</i> / One pig with full-circled	Did not know / Tattoos <i>nu-bul</i> and ornamented waistband <i>ne-bēr</i>	Did not move anymore to send messages but send his lower ranked followers to execute his orders. His words are highly respected

		tusks and a certain amount of other pigs + shell-money <i>no-som</i> + throwing yams from the top of her house.		and immediately obeyed / Said to be the money of <i>no-wotok</i> , women's <i>jif</i> , highly respected and her orders immediately obeyed by both men and women
<i>Tōwurmelag</i>	-	Eating specific food + one pig with full-circled tusks and about 1000 other pigs + shell-money <i>no-som</i>	Did not know	Do not need to move or even speak anymore, cannot be touched, is the ultimate guardian of peace, <i>na-tangwat</i> , and balance, <i>nu-ttareas</i> .
According to Jif William Sal:				
<i>n-evlap</i>	-	-		
<i>no-qotwas</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Lesser ranked messengers
<i>ne-tētu</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Lesser ranked messengers
<i>na-lañ</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Lesser ranked messengers
<i>no-wokrun</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Messenger and executive of <i>no-wotok</i>
<i>ne-wometelo</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Executive of <i>no-wotok</i>
<i>ne-wilgen</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Executive of <i>no-wotok</i>
<i>no-wotok</i>	<i>ñweter</i>	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food	Specific walking stick <i>ne-kēr</i> , and <i>ne-gemel</i> / Tattoos and ornamented house	Highly respected man whose words and orders are executed without being discussed. Is also the guarantee of peace and appropriately solve problems / 'way of money', <i>na-sal te bē som</i> for her husband <i>no-wotok</i> , <i>jif</i> of other women, highly respected
<i>ne-wiskut</i>	-	Pig, shell-money - <i>no-som</i> , food		Full of <i>na-man</i> , highly respected, but do not even give orders anymore
<i>no-qos</i>	-	Pig, shell-money -		Full of <i>na-man</i> ,

<i>gortok</i>		<i>no-som</i> , food	highly respected, but do not even give orders anymore
According to Marsden Harris:			
<i>lanī</i>	-	He eats the food - from inside the <i>ne-gemel</i> , he will kill pig later	Just started his study, 10 days
<i>tutu</i>	-	He came up the - stone platform in front of the <i>ne-</i> <i>gemel</i> and eats, he will kill pig later	Second period of study
<i>wol</i>	-	He kills pig -	The acquiring of third step
<i>wokron</i>	-	- -	Look after the <i>ne-</i> <i>temet</i>
<i>wokron</i> <i>qorqorlav</i>	-	- -	Is a man who look after planting
<i>wil</i> <i>qorqorlav</i>	-	- -	Look after the <i>ne-</i> <i>temet</i>
<i>wometelo</i>	-	- -	Is ready to take the title of <i>wilgen</i>
<i>wilgen</i>	-	- -	Teach all the lower ranks following the <i>wotowk</i> teaching
<i>wotowk</i>	<i>ñwotar</i>	- -	Is teaching the <i>wilgen</i> , became a high <i>jif</i> and is like a knife. He has right to order life or death of men and he is like a big banyan tree / Leader of women.
<i>wotowk</i> <i>vanvan</i>		- -	Is the title given to a <i>wotowk</i> who also has a position as a Church leader
<i>woskut</i>	-	- -	He knows everything and teach the <i>wotowk</i> . Became a high <i>jif</i> and is like a knife. He has right to order life or death of men

Table 13. Gendered division of work in cooking (ceremonial events).

Men's tasks	Mixed tasks	Women's tasks
Gathering firewood banana <i>vor.</i>	Gathering crops (yam, manioc, sweet potato)	Gathering hibiscus leaves <i>do vâ</i> , leaves <i>do ptêl</i> , or burao leaves <i>do</i>
Gathering the appropriate <i>sàrop</i> number of salt water drums <i>ngwesngwes</i>	Gathering fruits (breadfruit, mango, other fruits)	Gathering <i>na-</i> leaves Make the <i>do titêâ</i> and <i>do</i> leaves covers
Cleaning the ashes from the (yams, inner shallow hole of the stone oven and line it again with stones	Gathering fresh nuts (<i>nangae</i> , coconut)	Peel the crops manioc, sweet potato)
Lighting the fires	Break the nut and extract it from it's shell	Grate the crops
Remove the hot stones from the oven	Grate the nut	Pile the leaves <i>na-</i> <i>sàrop</i> .
Kill pigs and cut them into pieces leaves baked into ones <i>laplap</i>		Make the food bundles to be (<i>laplap</i> and pig's meat)
stones		Put the bundles the stone ovens (usually different for meat and
cover		Cover with hot and <i>do titea</i> / <i>do ngwesngwes</i> leaf cover
<i>laplap</i>		Remove the leaf and hot stones
distribute		Carry out the from the oven
		Cut the <i>laplap</i>
		Share and food