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‘According to *Kastom* and According to Law’:¹ ‘Good Life’ and ‘Good Death’ in Gilbert Camp, Solomon Islands

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We can only discuss the death of a man according to the culture of that man. Culture of man, decision of man. (Nathan)

Those who see the world through the experience of precarity are unable to feel secure about the stability of present conditions or the predictability of the immediate future. Precarious is the equilibrium of balancing on a thin rope! Precarious is the truce between opposed parties! It is the life of those who live amid tensions between incompatible values, for they are constantly under the threat that one position will suddenly snap and the other prevail, destroying, or at least altering, whatever it is they are trying to build. If this is what precarity means for real people living in the contemporary world, then the people of Gilbert Camp can be described as journeying through precarious times.

1 In Solomon Islands pidgin—‘*lo sait lo kastom en lo sait lo lo*’.

Figure 4.1: Map of the Archipelago of Solomon Islands

Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

Gilbert Camp (see Figures 4.1 and 4.2) is not the original *hom* (home) of those who live there now. They started to migrate to Gilbert Camp from other parts of the Solomon Islands archipelago towards the end of World War II. At the time, Honiara was still a military base in need of builders to make it look more like the capital city. After the labour migrants, others soon followed, having heard about the ‘lights of the city’ from relatives and friends. Curious about the novelty it represented, they became convinced it offered the prospect of economic growth and the promise of an enriching experience.

However, in the years of Honiara’s rapid expansion, migrants struggled to find a place to settle, for the cost of renting in town was prohibitive for the vast majority. The system of subsidised housing put in place by the Solomon Islands Housing Authority benefited only ‘the wealthiest members of the urban population’ (Nage, 1987, p. 95), so the migrants started to build leaf houses in public places in the town and on its outskirts. This is the case of the land where the Gilbertese contingent camped during the Guadalcanal campaign, which is reflected in its contemporary toponym.

Figure 4.2: Map of Gilbert Camp and the Honiara Town Boundary

Source: CartoGIS, College of Asia and the Pacific, The Australian National University.

In Gilbert Camp today, people habitually declare: ‘Honiara is hard’ (*Honiara hemi had*)—meaning that living according to their traditional values results in a daily struggle. They face multiple challenges: they must ensure subsistence for their immediate families with the paucity of their financial resources; they must cope with the incompatibility of their market-based social lives and the realisation of the values of relatedness; and they must mediate between the different cultural repertoires of their ethnically diverse population, and even between the different conceptions of Christianity defended by the various denominations. It is indeed hard. Nevertheless, coping with these tensions constitutes the core of their effort to turn Gilbert Camp into the place where they can live according to their values, which is what they indicate as the ‘good life’ (*gud laif*).

There is no reason to expect that such a condition will be achieved soon. They know that, at any time, they can lose all that they have built, in both material and symbolic terms. It has happened already in the past. As a matter of fact, Gilbert Camp has already been destroyed a few times, and has always risen from its ashes again. Literally. On Tuesday 13 September 1977, a fire left nearly 50 people homeless and only two buildings untouched. Stoically, the settlers immediately began reconstruction. Men travelled to Visale, in West Guadalcanal, cut timber for a week or two, and built new houses.

In the following years, the living standards of the settlers benefited from many improvements. A bridge was built at the bottom of the hill and the road was improved and extended. However, these improvements took place amid problems and difficulties of various kinds, such as the lack of a proper water supply, poor access to electricity, road disruptions, random disposal of rubbish and increasing demographic pressure. In addition, floods occurred on a regular basis, destroying people’s food gardens and the newly built houses. Dave Hart (2008), a missionary who lived and worked in Gilbert Camp, wrote a detailed description of a violent rainstorm that hit the settlement on 2 November 1993 and the flood that inundated it as a result. In his diary, he recorded that ‘many people lost their gardens and especially the potato crops. They were either washed away completely or so covered with mud that they couldn’t be salvaged’ (p. 376). Yet, they did not give up; they started everything again.

Next, the indigenous population of Guadalcanal began to voice their concerns about the unregulated occupation of land. They did not receive much attention from the national government, though. As a consequence,

their frustration mounted and some migrant households were forced to leave under the threat of violence. Those were the beginnings of what has become known as the 'ethnic tensions'. This is the rather inaccurate tag that is commonly used to indicate the tumultuous events that took place in Solomon Islands between 1998 and 2003. Dissatisfied with the response of the government to the land issue, some Guadalcanese organised themselves as paramilitary groups and evicted about 20,000 settlers (Moore, 2004). While the continuous disputes over previous decades could be explained as resulting from unregulated access to land by different ethno-linguistic groups, the response of colonial institutions and, later, the national and provincial governments, also played an important role. The different descent system (patrilineal for most of the settlers, matrilineal in Guadalcanal) had not been codified in a legal framework sophisticated enough to account for the cultural complexity of this context, and Guadalcanese concerns regarding land boundaries, exploitation of land and overall land policy had not been taken seriously (Fraenkel, 2004). That is why it is inaccurate, at the very least, to label as 'ethnic' a conflict that was arguably caused by ineffective land policy and a superficial understanding of the indigenous point of view about land.

Following the Honiara Peace Accord (2003), the migrants were allowed to return to their settlements. Yet, today, after more than a decade, the land issue is still far from resolved (Maggio, 2017), for the 'real landowners' have not been identified, as the 'right' way of accessing land has not been identified. The people of Gilbert Camp know that, at any time, they may be evicted again and lose everything. That is why they have to use all their cultural competence to cope with the problems emerging from the legacy of the land issue. In this chapter, I illustrate how skilful and sophisticated their response can be.

I take the case of a compensation meeting organised to solve a controversy that originated in an accusation of malevolent magic. The meeting was presided over by independent local headmen and three police officers. They established that no attack had taken place and that the accusation had its origins in a sisterly dispute about residential land. Nevertheless, compensation had to be paid. To establish who was to pay it, how and how much, but especially why and to what effect, the collaboration between the police and the 'local chiefs' was fundamental.

This case is indicative of the processes through which the people of Gilbert Camp are coping with the conflicts that originate from the absence of a sophisticated land policy, the large-scale introduction of foreign capital into Solomon Islands, the monetisation of land, the individualisation of landownership promoted by the state bureaucracy and the inequalities that these processes engender. Sorcery accusations are thrown to make inequality visible. Conversely, hybrid courts are organised to prevent accusations from escalating into potentially deadly conflicts.

The ability to make use of these mechanisms reveals a sharp awareness of the risks connected to the flows of foreign capital, ineffective bureaucracy and the negative incentives that these new possibilities create for the peri-urban population. The memories of the 'ethnic tensions' are a constant reminder of what perceived inequality can cause. It follows that the efforts of the people of Gilbert Camp to make and control accusations is an illustration of their commitment to construct a peri-urban space in which the project of the good life can still be cherished.

In a nutshell, the people of Gilbert Camp are fully aware that the introduction of large quantities of capital and the monetisation of land will encourage predatory behaviours in their fellow citizens who will compromise on their morality to make profits. However, most of the people of Gilbert Camp do not want to live in a community in which immoral behaviours take place with impunity, because that will eventually result in the kind of tensions that caused the eviction and the death of many of their relatives and friends in the past. They migrated because they wanted economic prosperity; however, they do not wish to compromise on the 'art of living together well'. The good life for them is made of both.

The case analysed in this chapter shows that, notwithstanding the general condition of precarity of the people of Gilbert Camp, they are all too aware of the difference they can make in building stability that will reach across the present and the future. In fact, they are making a strong contribution to the identity of Solomon Islands as a nation that ensures the freedom of movement of its people. Rather than 'squatters' trapped in a precarious present, they should be recognised as citizens struggling for a better future.

Such a claim has an important bearing on the ways in which the people of Gilbert Camp are perceived by outsiders. Popular caricatures of peri-urban settlers in Honiara often represent them as criminals (Anti-social

behaviour becomes police's concern, 2011), unscrupulous squatters (cf. Fraenkel, 2004) and violent raiders (cf. Sillitoe, 2000, p. 178) who can only be tamed by Christianity and who can only advance with the help of externally imposed development schemes. In contrast, this chapter indicates how they may be considered concerned citizens, inventive creators of practical solutions to potentially dangerous situations and successful mediators between state law and customary law.

This process of mediation is of extreme importance for the people of Gilbert Camp today. Since the end of World War II, they have been leaving their places of origin in large numbers and settling in Honiara, because, generally speaking, they value what is lacking in their former home locations and what can be found in Honiara. However, even in the urban context they would like to live under the aegis of their *kastom*.

The starkest illustration of their commitment to living according to customary values is in their daily efforts to deal with tensions over the meaning and use of these values. Sometimes tensions can escalate into actual disputes, with the explosion of potential violence and consequent blood feuds. To avoid this, some sort of arbitration becomes necessary. In Honiara, though, there is no state-based legal system covering issues related to customary law. That is partly due to the fact that the national legal system withdrew the delivery of local justice services as a consequence of the civil conflict and recent administrative centralisation. Even though the government provides some support for local courts, this is very limited and, in recent budget allocations, has increasingly been diverted to more formalised legal apparatuses (Winter & Schofield, 2007). Most local courts 'exist in name only' (Goddard, Paterson & Evans, 2010, p. 11); those that do have a place to sit, personnel and a budget allocation from government usually deal only with land disputes.

Given the absence of state-based systems of customary dispute resolution and enforcement of customary norms, the people of Gilbert Camp have set up their own ways of dealing with wrongdoing and implementation—that is, 'hybrid courts', like the one I describe in this chapter. The fact that they creatively re-elaborate the principles of *kastom* to concretise them in the non-traditional context of their peri-urban settlement is an illustration of their efforts to change their current conditions.

Before presenting the ethnographic description and analysis necessary to ground these claims, I must delimit the scope of the argument and define three terms fundamental to it. First, the argument presented in this chapter is especially relevant for the segment of the Gilbert Camp population that identifies with the island of Malaita and, most specifically, with the Kwara'ae ethno-linguistic group. Gilbert Camp is largely a Malaitan settlement, the majority of its population being born in Malaita province or having a Malaitan background (82 per cent). People from other provinces, especially Western Province, Central Province and Makira, make up the remaining 18 per cent, along with a few migrants from Papua New Guinea (PNG). Among the people sharing Malaitan origins, most identify with the Kwara'ae ethno-linguistic category (72 per cent), the largest in Solomon Islands.

Second, the three terms that need to be defined are 'hybrid court', 'law' and '*kastom*'. The term 'hybrid court' has been used to refer to forms of dispute resolution in small-scale communities, resting at once on varying degrees of customary practice and state intervention. In the dispute analysed in this chapter, state intervention takes the form of voluntary assistance provided by local police staff. As for the customary part, describing this case as one of customary law would be discursively convenient, but is complicated by the underlying problem of conceptualising both *kastom* and law. The 'concept of "custom", often associated with "tradition" remains notoriously problematic for anthropologists', as Goddard (2010, p. 31) has argued. Further, using the Western term 'law' when referring to the norms involved in processes of dispute resolution might distract from their actual aims and effects (Zorn, 1990). Yet, the importance of local norms cannot be denied, nor should any reflection about tentative terminologies prevent an attempt at understanding the implications of cases of dispute resolution (cf. Goddard, Paterson & Evans, 2010, p. 18).

Concerning the meaning of Malaitan *kastom*, this has been extensively discussed in the past (Akin, 2005; Carrier, 1992; Demian, 2003; Jolly & Thomas, 1992; Keesing, 1982a, 1982b, 1982c, 1993; Turner, 1997). Summing up a great deal of literature, one could say that *kastom* refers both to shared traditions and to contemporary ideas and institutions that people perceive to be grounded in such traditions. Thus, people make use of *kastom* in a rather creative and flexible way, for political purposes as well as within the context of economic mechanisms, such as compensation claims and land dealings (Akin, 2013). However, I think that Kwara'ae people would phrase it more straightforwardly. As the anthropologist,

Benjamin Burt (1982), wrote, '*kastom* represents the values by which they would like to live' (p. 381). For these reasons, they tend to use the terms *kastom*, tradition and *falafala* interchangeably (Gegeo & Watson-Gegeo, 2001, p. 59).

Speaking about the values of Kwara'ae life, the Kwara'ae man, Michael Kwa'ioloa, called 'a community' a place where 'everyone knows each other'. He added:

We coordinate the chiefs and if there are any problems we deal with them. The chiefs² of each place come together and arrange it: 'The meeting will be at our place on Sunday'. That man must come, *as at home*, and the matter is finally settled with a hearing at a police station [emphasis added]. (Burt & Kwa'ioloa 2013, p. 168)

Kwa'ioloa's words aptly summarise the case reported and analysed below, which suggests that what I observed is not an isolated circumstance, but rather an instance of a contemporary tendency.

Background: Two Sisters, One Piece of Land and a Death

Rhoda is an unmarried woman in her 30s who settled in Gilbert Camp when she was a teenager. In January 2000, she gave money and food to Jacob in exchange for a piece of land. Jacob claims to be a landowner; he frequently receives payments from people who seek to regularise their settlement in Gilbert Camp, but he does not issue any written proof of sale. So it was for Rhoda, who was asked to pay SBD10,000. As she only had SBD6,000 at the time, she promised to pay the rest as soon as she had saved it. Jacob accorded her some time, and Rhoda built a house on 'his' land and lived there for six years (see Table 4.1 and Figure 4.3).

In 2006, a maternal relative of Rhoda's died, leaving behind a young daughter and a house in the adjacent settlement of Kobito. Consequently, Rhoda went to live in Kobito with the young girl, and Rhoda's sister, Jane, moved into Rhoda's house with her own husband and children. They built a store in front of the house and lived there for six more years.

2 By chief, Kwa'ioloa actually indicates a person who has experience in dealing with cases of dispute resolution and who is not necessarily recognised as a leader in the community. In this essay, I use the word chief with the same meaning.

Figure 4.3: Kinship and Spatial Relations Connecting the Opposed Parties

Key: Triangle = male; circle = female; horizontal link below = marriage; horizontal link above = siblings; vertical link = descent; slash = deceased.

Source: Fieldwork data.

One day, a tragic event took place. In the same area, Ethel was living in the house of her late husband Robert. In June 2011, Jack visited her. As one of Robert's cross-cousins, Jack felt he could take advantage of Ethel's hospitality, even though she had been a widow for more than five years by that time. He showed up and demanded to be fed and given a place to sleep. Ethel welcomed Jack and prepared what later became his last supper.

The following day, as the man was not up for breakfast, Ethel sent her niece to wake him. The young girl came back alone; she said that her uncle was not getting up and that he was very cold and looked lifeless. Ethel rushed into her cabin and immediately came out in tears, screaming and shouting that Jack was dead.

George, Jack's brother and second in their patriliny, soon came. From that day, he became the eldest male member of his family. As such, it was his duty to officiate at the funeral. The next day, on her way to the cemetery, Jane met her sister Rhoda and informed her of what had happened in their neighbourhood.

About a year later, Jane and her husband had saved enough money to buy the piece of land where they were living. Even knowing that Rhoda had already 'bought' the area, they knew that they could still 'buy her out' by simply offering Jacob a higher price. So they visited the man and handed him SBD10,000. Rhoda, who initially had given Jacob SBD6,000, never completed the payment. Hence, after more than 10 years, Jacob felt fully

entitled to take those SBD10,000 from the couple and forget about the first purchase. It was not his business, after all, if, in this way, Jane was playing a very bad trick on her sister. As a consequence of the double-dealing, Rhoda lost her SBD6,000, 'her' piece of land and her house.

That is why, as soon as she knew about the purchase, Rhoda decided to take revenge. She visited Ethel and told her that Jack had died of sorcery, and that Jane and Hugh were responsible for it. Immediately, Ethel went to George's cabin and informed him. Outraged, the brother of the victim went in search of Nathan, a man he used to call a 'local chief'. Cognisant of the events, Nathan realised the deadly potential of the controversy. He decided to mediate, and called for a meeting in the nearby Naha police station.

Table 4.1: Timeline of Events, 2000–12

2000
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhoda gives SBD6,000 and food to Jacob in exchange for land she believes is his. She does not know that her purchase is not protected by state law. • Jacob allows Rhoda to reside on 'his' land and she builds a house.
2006
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rhoda rents the house to her sister Jane. • Jane builds a small shop in front of the house.
2011
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jack stays at Ethel's house. Ethel hosts Jack and cooks for him. • Jack dies. Ethel rushes into the cabin when she hears that Jack has died. • George officiates at the funeral in honour of his brother.
2012
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Jane gives Jacob SBD10,000 in exchange for the right to reside on the same land that Rhoda 'purchased'. • Rhoda threatens Jane, requesting money in exchange for not denouncing her. • William threatens Rhoda to prevent her from denouncing Jane. • Rhoda gossips about Jane. • Ethel refers the gossip to George. • George requests compensation for Hugh. • George asks Nathan to set up a meeting. • Hugh asks Luke to hold the meeting in the police station. • Hugh pays compensation to George.

The following Sunday, in the room of the Chief Police Officer (CPO), there were 18 people: the CPO and two policemen sat behind a desk; Nathan and two 'chiefs' were behind a table; on one side of the room sat Jane, her husband and their relatives; on the opposite side sat Rhoda, George, his wife, Ethel, other relatives and me. After a collective prayer, Nathan

formally opened the proceedings; he explained that the meeting was held under the authority of the local chiefs, the depository of customary law, and the local police, who were responsible for the enforcement of the national constitution. Then George stood up, explained his reasons for taking offence, and the 'trial' began.

It was a long debate. The chiefs asked many questions, listened to a multiplicity of contradictory claims and crosschecked different versions for more than two hours. At the end of the interrogation, Nathan declared that no evidence of a sorcery attack had been found. Having fruitlessly dissected the sorcery accusation in all its details, the authorities began to interrogate Jane and Rhoda on their dispute over land. After a few clarifications, they seemed to agree about what had happened. Eventually, they asked us to leave the office, as they had to formulate their judgement.

We left the room, sat on the grass and waited, smoking cigarettes and chewing betel nut in haste. I started to look around. Many people were gathering in front of the police station. They were friends and relatives or simply people who could not resist their own curiosity. I could see Helen, George's wife, and their children, plus many of the children who normally stayed with us in Gilbert Camp. Those on 'our side'—Ethel, Jim, Graham and Peter—were sitting with George and me. At the left-hand corner of the building, Jane and Hugh were sitting close to each other. Sometimes they would exchange a few words, but they remained silent for most of the time. On another corner, Annette, William and Maria, who, until then, had been sitting with Jane and Hugh, were talking rather animatedly, although in very low voices

As for Rhoda, she was by herself, walking back and forth on the verge between the grass and the road. At that time, I was not conscious of what was happening. The rearrangement of relationships had already started; Rhoda was not on 'our side' anymore, as she had been at the beginning of the meeting. She was not on her sister's side either. She was alone. It was as if the judgement had already been pronounced.

We re-entered the room when the CPO summoned us. A man who had not been at the meeting in the CPO's office took the stage, introduced himself and gave a brief speech in Kwara'ae, which the knowledgeable Luke translated.

Luke: 'I have never come across a case of two sisters attacking each other in this way. I am very surprised.'

Nathan also spoke:

Nathan: 'This case, as we have had the opportunity to ascertain, does not present any evidence concerning the death of our brother Jack. They have made use of his name for their personal problems with the land.'

Finally, Luke pronounced the verdict:

Luke: 'We chiefs sat down and decided what follows: Rhoda shall pay one *tafuli'ae*³ to George. Jane shall pay another one to George. Both Jane and Rhoda shall pay another one to Hugh. In case they do not have any *tafuli'ae* readily available, they will give SBD1000 instead.'

Except for a few screams of indignation from Rhoda, the decision was accepted and no appeal was called for. The case, though, left me perplexed. Why was making use of the name of a dead relative, and not the land double-dealing, seen as the main wrongdoing? How should the conflict between the value of land and the value of kinship be interpreted to reflect the point of view of the chiefs? How did they achieve their final decision? Most puzzling—why was Jane considered as responsible as Rhoda, as Jane was a victim of her sister's gossip, not an accomplice?

Analysis: Context, Conflict, Accusation and Outcome

My analysis of the material above is inspired by a conceptual categorisation of cases of witchcraft and sorcery accusations developed by anthropologists Stewart and Strathern (2004). They made an explicit attempt to connect witchcraft and sorcery accusations with gossip and rumours, developing a theoretical framework in which this case seems to fit. The framework consists of four analytical fields: context, conflict, accusation and outcome.

While there are some benefits in undertaking such an analysis, there are also some complications. In particular, the difference between the terminology used by my informants (see Table 4.2) and that used by Stewart and Strathern can be confusing. In the main, I use the term 'malevolent magic' (Goddard, 2010, p. 22) rather than 'sorcery'. If, at times, I switch to 'sorcery' as if these terms were merely interchangeable,

3 Type of shell money.

Context: The Value of a Dead Man's Name

Understanding the relationship between gossip and accusation requires us to consider the context in which these take place—a fundamental consideration. Stewart and Strathern (2004) wrote:

For words to be harmful, even lethal ... they have to be spoken in contexts of ideology that are congenial to them. It is therefore the ideological and historical context rather than the words themselves that ultimately produces the effects. (p. 30)

Since looking at Kwara'ae history and ideology is beyond the scope of this chapter, I will concentrate on two specific elements of Kwara'ae culture: death and names.

The people of Gilbert Camp at first experienced Jack's death as an inexplicable, perhaps natural, event. Then, when Rhoda's gossip spread, they began to suspect that the death had resulted from an attack of malevolent magic. The difference between these two conceptions of death (*mae*) is very marked in Kwara'ae culture. In general, the death of a relative is something that throws the community into a sense of loss and astonishment, regardless of whether the person died or was killed. However, it is relatively less shocking when an aged person or someone who is known to be sick dies. If it is recognised that the person died as a consequence of aggression, some form of reparation has to take place.

There are two main aspects in Kwara'ae reparation: *to'ato'a* and *fa'aābua*. *To'ato'a* is the compensation given or extorted for an offence. It might take the form of a voluntary payment or the deprivation of life through a retaliatory killing. *Fa'aābua* is the maintenance or restoration of a person's status as *abu*.⁴ An offence, such as the killing of a relative, or the desecration of a sacred place, devalues the status of the related person. Such devaluation is called *fa'alia*, a term that is translated as *spoilem* (defilement)⁵ in Solomon Islands pidgin. Hence, to put it in Kwara'ae words, following a *fa'alia*, a *to'ato'a* has to be given to *fa'aābua* the victim.

Both voluntary compensation and retaliatory violence are seen as ways to regain the status one has lost as a consequence of taking offence. Traditionally, if it is not possible to identify the perpetrator or to seek

4 Persons towards whom respectful behaviour ought to be shown are referred to as *abu*.

5 See Table 4.2.

reparation from them or their relatives, the victim pursues the restoration of their own status through killing someone randomly (cf. Burt, 1994, p. 47). Nowadays, this institution has been largely, if not completely, abandoned. However, its principle should be kept in mind if we are to understand that the point of reparation is not to punish the perpetrator but, rather, to *fū'aābua* the victim. That a perpetrator is identified is somehow incidental. In contrast, restoring the victim's status is fundamental.

That is valid in both life and the afterlife. Regardless of whether the person died or was killed, he or she will not cease to be a member of the community. He or she will continue to take part in the everyday life of the descent group as an invisible, though sentient, entity. It follows that the relationship between the ghosts and the people is not very different from the relationship that people have with each other. One should make a person *abu* (*fū'aābua ngwae*) as much as one does a ghost (*fū'aābua akalo*). The degree of respect depends on status, not on biological conditions.

There are several ways in which a ghost is made *abu*. One is the prohibition against pronouncing a ghost's name. It follows that *spoelem nem* (defiling a name) is considered a wrongdoing. That is because, as George told me, 'a dead relative must rest in peace'. At this point one must ask: how could Jack rest in peace while somebody was making disrespectful use of his name? It is as if somebody was using the name of a living relative. It follows that the reason why making use of the name of a dead relative was seen as a wrongdoing deserving of compensation was that there could be no 'good life' for the Kwar'ae people as long as there was no 'good death' for their ancestors.

Conflict: The Value of Land and Kinship

Let us now turn to the conflict between Rhoda and Jane and see how it can be interpreted. 'It is always some misfortune that triggers accusations', Stewart and Strathern (2004, p. 27) argued. However, although 'the same human envies and jealousies feed into gossip generally and witchcraft accusations in particular' (p. 28), the causes of envy differ depending on the context. The context of this case study was characterised, among other things, by the problematic issue of land.

Victor Turner (1996) published a study of Ndembu village life in which he interpreted sorcery and witchcraft accusations as forms of 'social drama' that made other underlying conflicts explicit, including conflicts over

land. In other words, he explained accusations as the surface indicators of pre-existing tensions. As the local chiefs and the police officers saw it, the accusation that came before them can be seen to fit within the grids of such an interpretation.

Turner (1996) famously identified four sets of events in which the 'processional form' of social drama can be formulated: breach, crisis, redressive action and reintegration or recognition of schism. Although I find that Stewart and Strathern's (2004) analytical model aptly suits the purpose of interpreting the different stages of this case, Turner's processional form better serves the specific purpose of looking at the origin of the conflict. Indeed, while Stewart and Strathern conflate breach and crisis into the single category of 'conflict', Turner distinguishes between these two aspects. This analytical separation allows a more precise examination of the ultimate cause of the conflict.

The origin of the conflict can be conceptualised, in the first phase, as that identified by Turner (1996) (i.e. breach), because a person breached a set of norms that regulated social relations between the members of a community. In this case, the norms regulating the relationship between sisters, as well as between in-laws, were disregarded in favour of personal land interests. In the words of Maria, Rhoda and Jane's elder sister, 'two sisters ought not to fight each other, they are the same blood'. So, although the origin of the conflict was land double-dealing, the chiefs conceptualised this wrongdoing through the idiom of kinship. To look more closely into these two layers of wrongdoing, I must briefly illustrate the controversial issue of land in Gilbert Camp, before looking at the value of sisterhood.

The people in Gilbert Camp see the issue of 'their' land as covered by several layers of confusion. One of the reasons for this is the impossibility of knowing who the 'real landowner' is. The area of land disputed between Rhoda and Jane lies outside the town boundary (see Figure 4.2) under the jurisdiction of the Guadalcanal Provincial Government. That means that it is not easy to verify the claim of landownership by anyone who can prove genealogical connections to the indigenous tribes of the Giana region. People in Gilbert Camp do not know who the 'real landowner' is. So, if someone like Jacob claims ownership over a piece of land to sell or rent it, they could believe him and pay him. A self-appointed 'landowner' can, as happened in this case, accept money in exchange for a piece of land and then, after an unspecified period, decide to sell that same area

to someone else. This case of land double-dealing is particularly telling of the many possibilities of twisting the terms of a contract in the absence of written records and a clear-cut land policy.

These and other aspects coexist and come together to create the precondition for land double-dealings to happen and be denounced by means of sorcery accusations. It is happening in other parts of Melanesia too, such as PNG, where witchcraft and sorcery accusations have been interpreted as a reflection of tensions emerging from changing relations between landowners and incomers (Stewart & Strathern, 2004, p. xiii). Since Solomon Islands underwent recent major rapid changes in land tenure (Larmour, 1979, 1984), it is not surprising that land conflicts are found to be at the origin of malevolent magic accusations.

However, even though land double-dealing cannot be prosecuted, it can be proscribed. Here comes the second aspect of this section: kinship values. In Kwara'ae culture, the general principle that relatives ought to help each other is unanimously accepted and generally concretised in acts of mutual care. This principle applies particularly to siblings, who, as Maria effectively reminds us, are 'born in the same basket'. Sisters are especially expected to be kind to each other and to cooperate effectively. They should be mutually helpful, rather than harmful.

It follows that when Kwara'ae sisters have a disagreement, they ought to solve it with each other, or at least try to. Should the matter be so serious that mediation becomes necessary, they should seek the help of their mother or another woman elder in their network. When a conflict between sisters is dealt with in that way, its negative potential can be contained and a resolution found.

Certainly, buying your sister's land is, to use Turner's (1996) terminology, a 'breach of regular norm-governed social relations ... between persons or groups within the same system of social relations' (p. 91). An elder woman or a mother could settle the conflict by reminding the two sisters of their reciprocal obligation of care and help. However, if that did not work, the breach could 'extend until it becomes co-extensive with some dominant cleavage in the widest set of relevant social relations to which the conflicting parties belong' (p. 91.). This corresponds to the shift from the first to the second phase in Turner's processual form—namely, 'crisis'.

Since Rhoda and Jane were unable to solve the initial breach, the tension mounted until it reached crisis point. During this phase, the underlying conflict (land) came to the fore, creating a set of actual and potential fissures within the concerned group or groups (kinship). As Turner himself observed, the recognition of the crisis as originating in the infringement of fundamental norms reveals the importance of these very norms for the people involved.

That is true also for the case under analysis. Based on what the chiefs took as evidence, they identified the land issue as the root cause of the accusation. However, the crucial infringement did not concern the 'correct' way of dealing with land. What the chiefs considered scandalous was the infringement of the norm of 'good' sisterhood. Yet, this was not *what* justified the compensation. Rather, this aspect played a role in the decision regarding *who* had to pay.

Accusation: The Values of a Gossiper and Those of a Messenger

How did the chiefs achieve their final decision? It was necessary to identify a specific form of hostility in the accusation. As Stewart and Strathern (2004) wrote:

We should note ... that ... accusations centred on people following a death. They were post-hoc attempts to explain the death and pinpoint blame for it. Rumor and gossip particularly came into play on the occasions of death and sickness, bringing out veiled suspicions and animosities ... [G]ossip may be seen as picking on someone to *treat* as an outsider, thereby redrawing the boundaries of the community, but the immediate motive may have to do with local politics in circumstances where group cohesion is fragile. (p. 12)

The authorities eventually realised that such were the circumstances of this case; they switched from the idea of hostility as distance⁶ to the idea of hostility as local animosity. The alleged sorcerer ceased to be seen as the perpetrator who did not belong to the place; rather, it was Rhoda, the initial accuser, who began to 'be seen as playing the aggressive role' (Stewart & Strathern, 2004, p. xii).

⁶ The idea of hostility as distance stems from the late fifteenth century: from Middle French *hostile*, 'of or belonging to an enemy', or directly from the Latin *hostilis*, 'of an enemy' (*hostis*, 'enemy', *hospes*, 'host'); from the Greek *hosti-potis*, 'host, guest', originally 'lord of strangers'; and from the Greek *xenos*, 'guest, host, stranger'.

That was possible because the chiefs were able to distinguish the different functions of gossip and rumour. According to Stewart and Strathern (2004), the difference between gossip and rumour is essentially one of extension. Both gossip and rumour refer to information about someone who is excluded from the conversation; however, while gossip consists of information reported or shared among people who are part of a relatively restricted network, rumour consists of the same kind of information when it begins to circulate into wider networks. Such a distinction provides us with a clear terminology to distinguish between the gossip phase—when Rhoda contacted Ethel—and the rumour phase—when Ethel reported to George.

Stewart and Strathern's (2004) distinction between gossip and rumour serves well the purpose of analysing these two phases. One way to elaborate further on this distinction is to connect the two phases with two different theories. Below I interpret the gossip phase according to Gluckman's (1963) theory, before proceeding to interpret the rumour phase according to Paine's (1967) theory.

Gluckman (1963) wrote that 'there is no easier way of putting a stranger in his place than by beginning to gossip: this shows him conclusively that he does not belong' (p. 313). Perhaps this is what Rhoda was trying to do with her sister. According to the interpretation of the chiefs, she was trying to transform her into a stranger, to make her look like someone who deserved to be ostracised by the community so that Rhoda could take her land back. Ethel implicitly initiated ostracism, too, when she reported the gossip to George. However, in doing so, Ethel was not pursuing her own interests. Rather, she was concretising the values of the community. The rumour worked to increase group cohesion, for as soon as the relatives of the victim knew about the attack, they began to 'coagulate' around the area where they were told their blood was spilled.

As Ethel was telling of her reaction to the bad news, she said that she immediately thought, '*brata blo mi mas save*', literally, 'my brother must know'. *Mas*, in Solomon Islands pidgin, can be equally translated as 'ought to'. In this case, it seems that the sentence was intended to express some form of moral obligation. 'Brother' was used to refer to George, who was both related through marriage links and someone with whom the speaker felt a strong bond. In this sense, the two were part of a group. *Mi* indicates the speaker, excluding anyone else. When Ethel used the term *mi*, she intended to stress that it was *her own* duty to report the matter.

An early critic of functional interpretations, Paine (1967) criticised Gluckman because, in focusing on the consequences of gossip for the community rather than on the motivations of the individual, the anthropologist tended to 'attribute to gossipers the "unity" of their community as their paramount value' (p. 280). In contrast, Paine proposed that gossipers defame others to advance, calculatedly, their own status.

Nevertheless, gossipers might present themselves as the denouncers of a wrongdoing—that is, as promoters of the values that are seen as positive by the community from which they seek to extract benefits. This, coincidentally, is the way in which Rhoda, according to the chiefs, tried to mystify her intentions when she denounced Jane and Hugh. Paine (1967) insisted that the analyst should not be misled by the face values under which gossipers seek to conceal their real aims. Indeed, he contended, this kind of reasoning does no better than reaffirm the tautological reasoning that sees every sociocultural trait as an organic contribution to collective equilibrium and unity. In contrast, 'a discussion of the values of gossipers is best related to what we can find out about their self-interests' (p. 280).

Two opposed theories of gossip reflect two opposed interpretive possibilities; one sees the gossip as motivated by self-interest, the other emphasises the positive repercussions of gossip for the community. Similarly, in his theory of value as the importance of social action, Graeber (2001) considered Nancy Munn's argument that witchcraft and sorcery accusations can be interpreted in two opposing ways. From an egalitarian point of view, witchcraft and sorcery accusations in Gawa are intended to suppress the 'destructive hyperindividualism' of some; from an individualistic point of view, Gawans assert that equality shall be maintained to 'create a situation where everyone is free to enter into exchange relations, engage in *kula*, and thus, spread their own individual names in all directions' (p. 84). The two interpretive pathways are feasible because Gawans are, according to Munn, both egalitarian and individualistic.

In this section, I have been trying to say something similar about Kwara'ae conceptions of gossip and rumour. Indeed, the opposition between two interpretive possibilities of gossip and rumour mirrors that between Gluckman's (1963) and Paine's (1967) theories. While the gossip phase (when Rhoda told Ethel) fits with Paine's theory of gossip as motivated by self-interest, the rumour phase (when Ethel told George) fits with Gluckman's theory of gossip as the assertion of group values. It follows

that one single model cannot account for the accusation. Indeed, the case illustrates that gossip can change function depending on the intentions of the gossipers.

These intentions became evident towards the end of the meeting. In the first part of the chapter, I presented the disposition of people in the office where the hearing took place. I contrasted this with their distribution during the break, when we were all waiting in front of the police station. I hinted at the fact that, at that point, the 'rearrangement of relationships had already started'. In particular, I was referring to the position of Rhoda, who moved from being perceived as part of the accuser's group, to being perceived as against it. In formulating their judgement, the chiefs moved from the perspective of Gluckman's theory to the perspective of Paine's theory.

This shift was at the very crux of the compensation meeting. When the meeting began, we were all persuaded that George would receive compensation for the death of his brother. After hours of questioning, it became clear that this was not going to happen, and that compensation was being claimed against the misuse of the victim's name. As the reason for the compensation claim changed, Rhoda's position changed. As a messenger, Rhoda was sitting in the same area as the accuser's group. However, when the chiefs and the police established that the accusation was unfounded, and suspected that Rhoda had used it to attack her sister, she stopped being part of that group. Not being part of the other group either, she found herself isolated. That was the point at which compensation started to be realised in its essential meaning and function—that of a rearrangement of relationships.

Outcome: Rearranged Relationships and the Value of Community

In all societies there are everyday ways of evaluating evidence, and not all stories are accepted as simply true. A great deal depends on who is telling the stories and what their perceived motive for spreading gossip actually is, that is, their own self-advancement, revenge, hatred, jealousy, and so on. (Stewart & Strathern, 2004, p. 30)

The motives the chiefs identified behind Rhoda's gossip were akin to those identified by Stewart and Strathern (2004): 'self-advancement, revenge, hatred, jealousy and so on' (p. 30). So, why did the chiefs request that her sister compensate too?

Let us begin with the concrete form of the compensation that was requested in this particular case: one *tafuli'ae*. One *tafuli'ae* is considered by Kwara'ae people to be the appropriate compensation for a moderately severe wrongdoing. This is for reasons that do not relate strictly to its economic value.⁷ Rather, what matters is its symbolic value. A *tafuli'ae* symbolises the value of unity in diversity. A brief analysis of its materials and the way they are arranged clearly illustrates this point.

A *tafuli'ae* is made up of four types of shell (*kakadu*,⁸ *kurila*,⁹ *ke*¹⁰ and *romu*¹¹) reworked into round chips, and two types of seed (*fulu*¹² and *kekete*¹³) all tied together with strings obtained from the bark of either of two types of trees, *fa'alo* or *lili*. The mid-section of a *tafuli'ae* is made of chips of *romu*, the most rare and valuable type of shell. This mid-section terminates at both ends with a spacer made of wood or turtle shell, which divides it from a series of other segments of shell chips. The shell pattern of these segments varies depending on the type of *tafuli'ae*. It might be an alternation of discs of *kurila* and *kakadu* or a segment made of *ke* only. In any case, it is symbolically relevant that these segments are always in even numbers, whereas the central part is always unique.

Another symbolically relevant feature is that each end of a *tafuli'ae* culminates in a set of red cloth stripes. These, according to my Kwara'ae informants, represent the blood of two people who, for whatever reason, look at each other as separate. Like the cloth stripes, *romu* chips are red, thus, representing blood in their own turn. The reproduction of the metaphor of blood at both ends and the centre symbolises the unification of two groups in one. Kwara'ae people understand this aesthetic arrangement to be indicative of the particular function of *tafuli'ae*, namely, to turn duality and difference into unity and sameness. Therefore, when Kwara'ae people give a *tafuli'ae*, they are making a statement about their relationship.

7 As for the economic value of *tafuli'ae*, Kwara'ae people do not especially emphasise it, as opposed to Langalanga people, who produce them and have a more standardised categorisation (Burt, Akin & Kwa'ioloa, 2009, p. 59).

8 Kwara'ae name: *gwarigwari*; scientific name: *arca granosa*.

9 Kwara'ae name: *kurila*; scientific name: *pinna*.

10 Kwara'ae name: *tutu*.

11 Kwara'ae name: *romu*; scientific name: *chama pacifica*.

12 Kwara'ae name: *fulu*; scientific name: *gesneriaceae*.

13 Kwara'ae name: *mumu*; scientific name: *ciperaceae*.

A passage by Strathern (1999) elucidates how compensatory transactions have this effect:

Collectivities differentiate, identify, and, in short, describe themselves by their role in compensation, a kind of functional heterogeneity. Compensation is part of the wider field of transactions by which social units are defined through exchange. (p. 191)

This appositely describes one of the outcomes of the case, namely, the negotiation of Jane's position. To get back to her normal life, Jane had to pay her compensation to George immediately and in front of everyone; she had to make a statement about herself and her family as people of Gilbert Camp, rather than as outsiders seeking to extract a benefit from the community. With an act of giving, she was required to counter Rhoda's attempt to make a 'stranger' of her through gossip. This process of self-description, identification with members of the community and differentiation from hostile strangers (cf. Strathern, 1999, p. 191) is what makes the reorganisation of social relations possible and is what the chiefs were after when they formulated their judgement.

Still, the question remains: why Jane? As mentioned above, the chiefs considered Rhoda and Jane to be equally responsible. They said it explicitly and concretised this opinion in a demand for equal compensations. Were the women equally responsible? Before attempting to answer this question, I would like to highlight a further point. Jane paid her compensation in cash, at the end of the meeting, straightaway. As instructed by the chiefs, she gave SBD1,000 to Hugh who handed the money to George. The reason I find this interesting is that Solomon Islanders do not usually walk around with SBD1,000 in their pockets. The fact that Jane had such a sum on her proves that she expected to be asked to compensate; the fact that she was expecting what eventually happened reveals that she found the outcome, for some reason, reasonable to expect. Why?

Rhoda and Jane were not asked to pay compensation because they had acted as 'bad sisters', for there was nobody to compensate for that but themselves. Instead, they were asked to pay compensation for the disrespectful use of Jack's name, and for putting Hugh and George's lives in danger as a consequence. The authorities established that it was Rhoda, and not Jane, who initially spread the dangerous words. Hence, Rhoda's 'guilt' and Jane's 'innocence' were converted into their joint responsibility: first, for *spoelem nem* and, second, for causing the conflict between George and Hugh's families.

It follows that the outcome of the case cannot simply be explained in terms of wrongdoing and compensation. It is more complex; it is such complexity that I have tried to clarify in this chapter. True, Rhoda was guilty of misusing the name of the victim and of illegitimately gossiping against Hugh and Jane. However, Rhoda's actions were interpreted as resulting from a pre-existing tension that the two sisters should have solved before it affected other people. Therefore, it was their responsibility to give something to re-establish peace.

If we did not assume that the whole point of a compensation meeting was to identify the culprit, then it would not seem so strange that someone who did not directly commit a wrongdoing would be 'condemned'. This brings us closer to understanding the chiefs' request to Jane. Rather than finding a particular person guilty of a particular wrongdoing, the meeting was intended to identify the person(s) who had the responsibility for restitution. The difference between someone who is looked at as guilty and someone who is looked at as responsible is crucial. The object of guilt and that of responsibility are not the same; guilt refers to wrongdoing, whereas responsibility refers to the maintenance or restoration of *abu*. The former looks back at the past and the latter looks forward towards the future.

If we briefly look back at the section on 'context', we might recall that in Kwara'ae *kastom*, a man who suffers an offence only seeks compensation from the perpetrators if they can be identified. In a situation in which that is not possible, he regains his status by killing someone else, randomly. This old-fashioned institution suggests that the priority of compensation in Kwara'ae *kastom* is not to identify and punish the perpetrator but, rather, to re-establish the value of the victim—that is, the victim's condition as *abu*.

To make this possible, it is necessary to identify the party who is 'responsible for giving' rather than 'guilty of taking'. To clarify this point, another quotation from the work of Strathern (1999) is useful:

First, compensation enrolls a rhetoric of body expenditure, covering both physical and mental exertion, based on an image of body process as the giving out and taking in of resources. What is embedded as substance in artefacts and bodies is the energy with which persons have acted. (p. 189)

The 'energy with which people have acted' is entrenched in the object of compensatory transactions, because this is the substance of what has been subtracted in the first place: the values of the community as a whole. The imbalance created by such subtraction has to be reconverted into balance through the reinsertion of an appropriate and proportionate amount of substance. The main problem for this compensation meeting, then, was to determine who had to put his or her hand on his or her resources to re-create the pre-wrongdoing equilibrium. Once such equilibrium is re-established, the basic conditions for prosperity are back in place. The fact that the Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp, in collaboration with the police officers, were able to put this compensation mechanism into effect is an illustration of their efforts to establish these conditions, and to create a 'good life' in the urban context, according to their values.

Conclusion

The social anthropologist Marwick (1965), in his study of 'the link between sorcery ... and the social process', argued that sorcery accusations tend to emerge in response to socially stressful situations in which people 'belonging to a close-knit group ... are unable to settle their disputes by the judicial procedures available' (p. 3). In their later study, Stewart and Strathern (2004) showed how such circumstances might create the preconditions for gossip and rumour to become powerful weapons in the hands of disputants. In this chapter, I took up Marwick's position, and the subsequent move by Stewart and Strathern, to explore how a group of Kwara'ae people living in Gilbert Camp managed to turn accusations of malevolent magic into means for enforcing customary law to protect their values in the absence, or given the inadequacy, of a state-based legal response to local disputes arising from the legacy of a land issue. Land, kinship, death and names are values that the series of events analysed above brought to the fore; they were concretised in actions such as Jacob's double-dealing, Jane's purchase, Rhoda's gossip, Ethel's rumour, George's demand for compensation and the chiefs' final decision.

The chiefs concluded the compensation meeting as they did because they believed that such an outcome was beneficial for the community. However, some issues were left unresolved. In particular, the two sisters were still divided by their conflict over a piece of land. Arguably, the land conflict was not resolved because that was not the intention of the chiefs

in the first place. The way they directed their judgement was a statement: the value of a dead relative has priority over the value of land. The issue of land 'has to wait', as Nathan said towards the end of the meeting.

For the chiefs, establishing Rhoda and Jane's responsibility for compensation was an accomplishment, because that was the primary aim of the meeting—neutralising the ill-effects of the unresolved issue of land that had created the structural conditions for such wrongdoing to happen. As wrongdoers, Rhoda and Jane concretised values that Kwara'ae people recognise as foreign and wrong, and the compensation meeting was the instrument to counter such acts through concretising another set of values. These are the values by which the Kwara'ae people want to live. By concretising them into actions, such as compensatory transactions, they were trying to make Gilbert Camp a better place, a place where they can live the good life, whatever that means for them.

This chapter provides a clear counterargument to the widespread tendency 'to scapegoat and even demonise the residents of urban settlements' (Barber, 2003, p. 288; cf. Goddard, 2001) as blameable for the decay of Melanesian capitals. Rather than seeing these 'squatters' as responsible for a stagnant present, this story demonstrates that the people of Gilbert Camp are doing their best to minimise the negative consequences of historical processes largely beyond their control. They do this without the slightest certainty about their future.

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