

The London School of Economics and Political Science

**Planting Roots, Making Place: An Ethnography of
Young Men in Port Vila, Vanuatu**

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of Economics for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy,

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Abstract

This thesis is about an organised group or ‘squad’ of young men in Port Vila, the capital of the Pacific Islands nation-state of Vanuatu, and their practices of place making in the rapidly developing context of ‘town’. The young men studied are second-generation migrants and thus first-generation born and raised ‘urbanites’. Based on twenty months of fieldwork, this thesis examines how these young men are transforming Freswota Community - the residential area in which they live - from a place with no shared and relevant social meaning into a place imbued with greater collective significance.

First, I demonstrate how these young men experience themselves as ‘unplaced’, a condition which entails two aspects. They are displaced from the social structure and kinship systems within which their parents previously ordered their lives and from which they have drawn their social identity. Additionally, the young men experience themselves as marginalised from the formal education and employment structures of town. Following this, I show that it is through practices of place making, which they refer to as ‘planting roots’, that these young men are emplacing themselves in the Freswota area. ‘Planting roots’ includes such processes as developing their own shared history, naming roads, building topogeny and developing their own community social structure and social order. I argue that these processes are leading to the emergence of a new phenomenon: primary town emplacement. By coming into relationship with Freswota land, these young men are not only transforming it from virtual no-place into some place, they are also transforming themselves from ‘unplaced’ persons into emplaced ‘Freswota men’. I conclude that this is generating a new locative identity: it is now the Freswota community rather than their parents’ home island places that is emerging as their primary location of belonging and the source both of their sense of self and their social identification.

A central aim of this thesis is to draw attention to the positive and creative ways in which unemployed young men, usually criticised and stigmatised as delinquents in newly and rapidly urbanising contexts, are actively engaged in developing their community and their relationships in order to live more viable and socially productive lives.

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List of Key Characters

(Kingston-4 boys and ages when I first met them)

Older Boys

Lewis	age 28
Ritchie	age 28
Arthur	age 27
Sargent	age 26
Benson	age 26
Jaksil	age 26
Samuel	age 26
Jones	age 26
Elwin	age 25
Toto	age 25
Manu	age 25
Hudson	age 24

Younger Boys

Owen	age 22
Benny	age 21
Alfred	age 21

Time Line

History of the Kingston-4 boys and the Development of Freswota-4

Pre-Colonial Period

The land that is now Freswota Community was owned by people from Ifira Island, one of the autochthonous groups of South Efate. The area that is now the Freswota Park was called *Mauto* (or *Matua*), which in Ifiran language means ‘small hill’. The area by the Presbyterian Church was called *Malasitabu*.

Colonial Period (1906-1980)

The land that is now Freswota was a plantation owned by a French man named M. Demeaux.

Pre- Independence Years

In the mid-1970s the land that is now Freswota-1 and Freswota-2 was purchased by Gas Central, a French Company and subdivided into plots and sold. The area that is now Freswota-3, 4, 5, 6 was purchased by the Vanuatu Housing Corporation and subdivided into plots and sold.

1977

A tractor cleared the land that is now Freswota-3 and Freswota-4. A few families built make shift houses and moved to the area. As most people who had purchased plots of land could not afford to build houses so soon after paying for their land, most of the land remained uninhabited and the bush grew wild once again.

1980 (July 30th)

Vanuatu achieved Independence

1983- 1984

Many of the ‘older boys’ of Kingston-4 were born in other Port Vila communities.

1986- 1987	Sons of families who had moved to Freswota-3 formed 'Vietnam-2', a violent and criminal gang. They dominated the area for approximately six years and as a result many people held off moving onto their land in Freswota-3 and Freswota-4. The gang was dismantled in approximately 1992.
1988 - 1989	Many of the 'younger boys' of Kingston-4 were born in other Port Vila communities.
1990-1991	The 'older boys' approximately 7 or 8 years old and the 'younger boys' approximately 2 or 3 years old moved with their families to Freswota-4.
1991- 1992	The police with help from residents already living in the community dismantled the Vietnam-2 gang. This operation also led to the first efforts to organise a Freswota 'Council of Chiefs'.
1995	The Port Vila Municipality widened the small footpath that had emerged between the start of Freswota-3 and the end of Freswota-4 and covered it with coral (the boys named it 'Chocolate Street') thus making it the first thoroughfare through Freswota accessible to trucks.
1999	The first Freswota football team- the <i>Freswota Raiders</i> - was formed by ex-Vietnam-2 gang members to develop cooperation between groups of boys in Freswota.
	The Port Vila Municipality connected Freswota-3 and Freswota-4 to the town's electricity and water supply. However, it has taken some years for individual

houses to activate their access to the services (many houses in Freswota-5 and 6 were not connected in 2010).

Approximately 2000-2003

The Port Vila Municipality built the Freswota Park at the boundary between Freswota-3 and Freswota-4.

The Port Vila Municipality built the Freswota Football Field and the Freswota Primary School.

The Freswota Presbyterian Church was built.

The Port Vila Municipality paved the main thoroughfare (the boys have since named this road 'The Kingston Highway') and built street lamps along it.

The 'Women's Council' formed and took on the responsibility of organising the first Freswota Independence Day celebration events in the Freswota field.

The boys who later formed the Kingston-4 boys started to 'walk about' together.

2006

The boys along with groups of boys from other communities formed a political association called 'Vanuatu Roots' whose intent was to show the Government the kinds of violence and problems in Port Vila's residential communities. The Vanuatu Government shut down the Association after only a few months citing that they were a group advocating the smoking of marijuana.

2007

A violent clash between people from Ambrym and people from Tanna began in Blacksands community. Violence between these two island groups erupted throughout Vila's communities, including Freswota-3.

In response to this violence the Freswota 'Council of Chiefs' re-established themselves and the Freswota youth council formed.

2008

A fight between Freswota and Ohlen communities occurred following the rape in Freswota-3 of two Freswota girls.

A reconciliation Ceremony between Freswota Community and Ohlen Community was held in the Freswota Park.

The boys of Freswota-4 started to 'organise' as an official 'squad' with the name 'Kingston-4' where Kingston signifies both that they are 'kings' of being 'stoned' and Kingston Jamaica - the birthplace of Bob Marley. 4 signifies that they are located in Freswota Community area number 4.

Following the visit of the Jamaican reggae artist Jah Mason to Freswota, the squad realised that Freswota-4 was a holy place.

2009

The Port Vila Municipality laid coral on the road behind the Freswota School (the boys call this road 'Rebel Street') making it the second main thoroughfare through Freswota.

A covered market house was built in the 'Freswota Park' to house the informal vegetable market.

2010

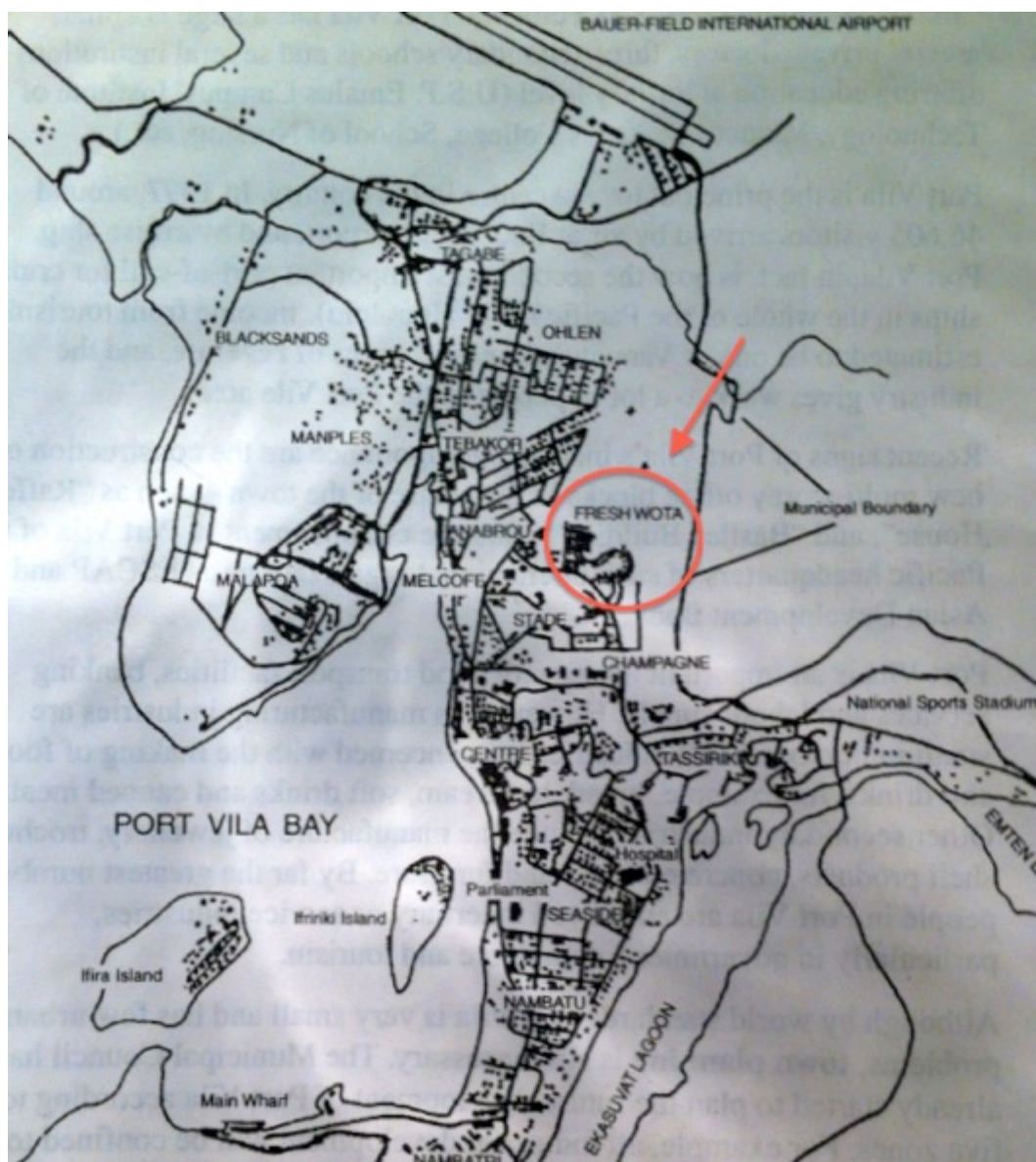
A young woman and her daughter were raped and murdered in an empty kava bar in Freswota-4. This sparked renewed talk and a meeting about the development of Freswota as a more 'cooperative' and 'organised' 'community'.

Map 1: Vanuatu



Map of Vanuatu - Property - AQUA | sanctum

Map 2: Port Vila Centre and Residential Areas



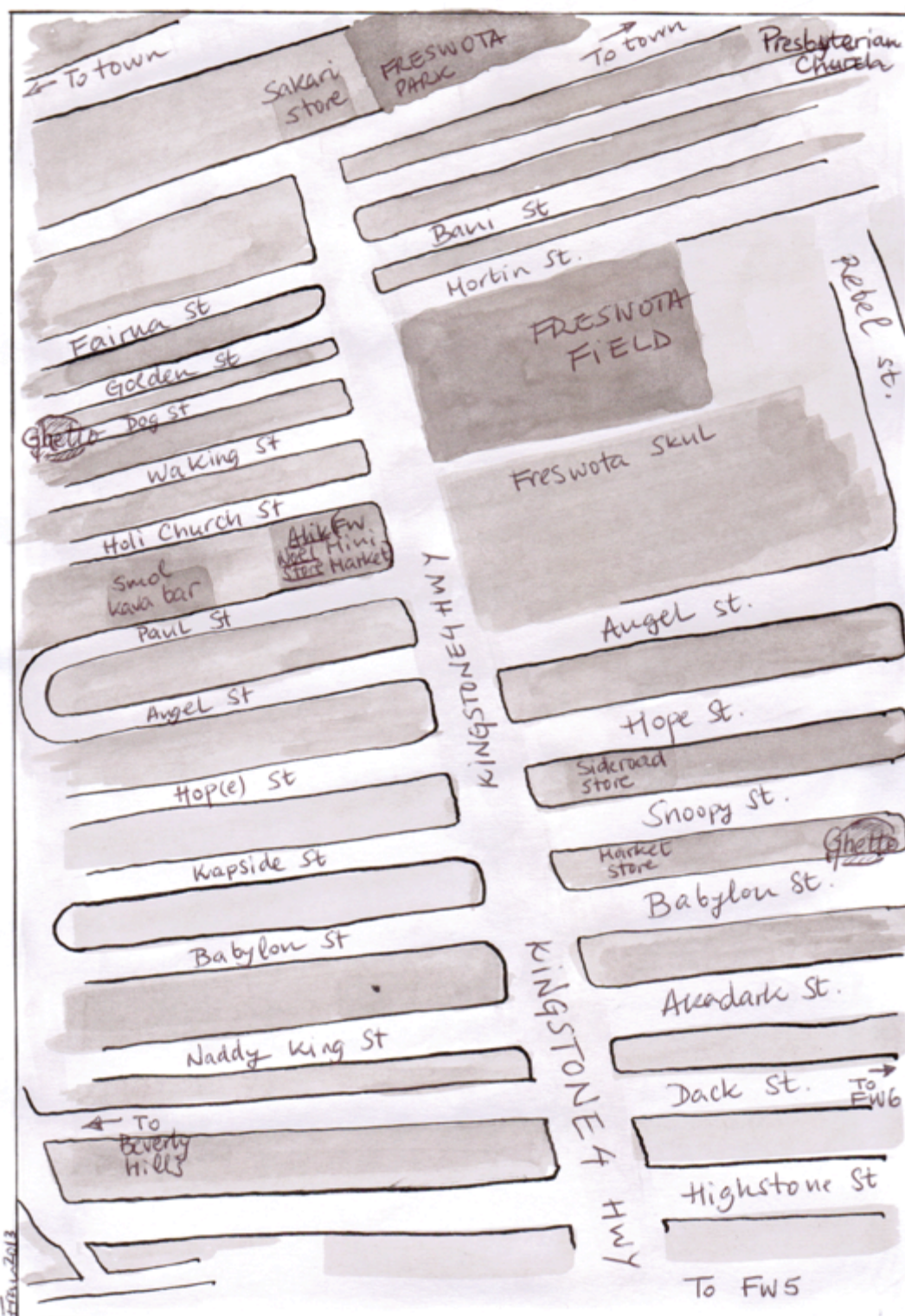
(Government of Vanuatu Department of Education 2000: 62)

Map 3: Freswota Community areas 1-6



(Imagery © 2014 DigitalGlobe, Map data © 2014 Google Earth)

Map 4: Freswota-4
(As related to me by the Kingston-4 boys)



(Map drawn by Francisco Navarro, London 2013)

Preface

Where did you grow up?

One afternoon, while I was sitting on a bench watching my landlord's daughter trying to gain momentum on a swing, a young man approached and sat down beside me. I guessed that he was in his mid twenties. He was wearing jean shorts, a bright orange t-shirt, and his hair was styled in neat dreadlocks fastened with a band in reggae colours (red, yellow, black and green). The young man introduced himself as Jojo and then began to ask a sequence of questions I had become familiar with as a white woman living in Freswota. Freswota, the principal site of my field research, is a residential community of approximately 5,000 people located on the northeast side of the centre of Port Vila, the capital of the Pacific Islands nation-state of Vanuatu (see Map 1).

‘Are you a Peace Corps. volunteer?’ he asked.

‘No.’

‘Are you from Australia?’

‘No.’

‘Are you a teacher?’

‘No.’

I had not been in the field long, but knew that a specific question from me would reciprocate his friendliness. So when the young man paused, signalling it was my turn, I asked in Bislama *Yu blo wea?* meaning ‘Where are you from?’ or ‘Where do you belong?’¹

In Port Vila, often just called ‘Vila’ or ‘town’ (*taon*), this is the question usually asked when two strangers meet, as each person tries to locate and identify the other. Most people, including those who are born in town, respond with the name of a ‘place’ (*ples*) - one of the 82 islands in the archipelago, or a village on one of the islands, to which they can trace ancestral roots or origins. For ni-Vanuatu, being from an original place is a signifier of identity.² Furthermore, it is out of the ground of the original place, and in relation with the people of that place, that a person's identity and being are formed (Rodman 1992: 647).

I was surprised therefore, when Jojo responded to my question with: ‘What do you want to know, where my father comes from, where my mother comes from, or where I have grown up?’ (*Yu wantem save wanem, dadi blo mi blo wea, mami blo mi blo wea, o mi gruap wea?*) Given the ubiquity of articulating coming from an original place, often

¹ Bislama is a creole language. It is one of the three official languages spoken throughout the archipelago (the other two being French and English).

² People from Vanuatu are referred to as ni-Vanuatu.

referred to in the anthropological literature as ‘home island’, this young man, by answering my question with a series of his own questions, was reflecting an identification with a home island place, and with his area of town, that was more complex than I had previously noted.

It was during time spent in Port Vila in 2001, that I had observed young people respond to this same question by naming a home island.³ I had found such responses from young people intriguing, as many had been born in the residential areas of town, and had never visited their parents’ home islands. Owing to these circumstances, most had only limited knowledge and experience of the language, *kastom* and culture of the home islands – the forms through which being a ‘person of a place’ (*man ples*) are understood and demonstrated in Vanuatu.⁴ These forms are also the means through which a person maintains connection to a home island even when no longer living there (Bolton 2003). Cultural geographer, Joel Bonnemaïson (1985a; 1994), in his research on the southern Vanuatu island of Tanna, emphasises the importance of place to the identity of the people. He explains that it is in ‘the essential relationship between man and place that the feeling of identity is forged. The bond is such that a man cannot for long leave the territory where his ancestors first appeared; if he did, he would alienate his identity’ (1985a: 32). Bonnemaïson concludes that without place, people have no ‘power and belongingness’ (1985a: 40).

Interested in researching young people in Port Vila, the question ‘why youth in town express primary identification with a home island?’ was the starting point of this research. Yet, once I arrived in Vila, it became increasingly clear that for youth in some residential communities, such as Freswota (see Map 2), home islands are no longer the primary marker of identification, nor are they experienced as the source of their being.

Indeed, I observed that many youth in town ask each other upon first meeting not ‘where do you belong’ (*yu blo wea?*), but rather ‘where did you grow up’ (*yu gruap wea?*). This is reflected in Jojo’s response.⁵ I noted that for many young people, revealing that one

³ I spent three months in and around the Port Vila area engaged in research for an MA in anthropology.

⁴ *Kastom* is the Bislama word used by ni-Vanuatu to ‘characterize their own knowledge and practice in distinction to everything they identify as having come from outside their place’ (Bolton 2003: xiii). *Kastom* is also seen as a ni-Vanuatu way of life – ‘a reliance on subsistence production, an ‘adherence to ‘traditional’ practices of kinship and marriage, the performance of customary rituals at birth, circumcision, marriage and death, the sacrifice and exchange of pigs in the rites taken in the graded society’ (Jolly 1982: 340).

⁵ While people in Vanuatu use a hierarchy of names when identifying themselves to others – such as coming from an island, a region of an island, or their autochthonous hamlet (Bolton 1999: 52), the point of interest here is that youth are explicitly defining the home islands as the place of their parents, and the community as the place of their primary identification.

has grown up in Freswota, and in particular an area in Freswota such as Freswota-4 at the 'dark corner' (*dak kona*), conveys much more signification than revealing that one originates from the island of Santo for example.

Taking my cue from Jojo, this thesis examines the ways in which a group of young men, ages approximately 21- 28, who were all born in town to migrant parents, conceptualise and experience both their relationship to their home islands and to the area in town within which they have grown up and live. Generally, this is a study of how young men understand their physical surroundings, their relationship between physical place and sense of being, and the significance of being emplaced people.

Why and how, are Jojo and young men like him undergoing and creatively transforming where they locate their sense of being? While the process through which Jojo came to be sitting on the bench in Freswota Community that day spans a two hundred year history of Christianisation, migration, colonialism and the introduction of a capitalist economy which has led to significant socio-economic changes, I suggest that three specific developments are leading to the emergence of the new phenomenon of primary town emplacement. Although it is true that some youth express identification with both town and their home islands, as I discuss in Chapter 1, my focus in this thesis is on those young men who experience themselves as more or less displaced from their parents' home island places.

Firstly, Jojo's parents, like most parents of the young men who are the subjects of this study, migrated to Port Vila as young adults around 1980, when Vanuatu achieved independence from Britain and France. They are considered to be the first permanent or semi-permanent migrants to town since they remained in town, unlike their predecessors who were circular migrants who always returned to their island places (Lindstrom 2011: 261; cf. Haberkorn 1989).

Young men like Jojo, born and raised in town, are second-generation migrants. In the broader literature on migration, diaspora and transnationalism, second-generation migrants are defined as those born in the new setting after their parents' migration (Lee 2008: 7). As I argue in Chapter 1, for youth like Jojo, being second-generation migrants means that they are more detached from the cultural and customary practices of a home island. This has resulted in their becoming positioned outside the social structure and kinship networks traditionally maintained through participating in the cultural and customary practices of a place. Consequently, young men like Jojo, see themselves as no longer rooted in the ground and the social relationships of their original place, a condition

of being they refer to as ‘floating’ (*stap flot nomo*). Being second or third-generation in town is, however, not sufficient cause for this emergent transformation. Research in Vanuatu has shown that even second and third-generation migrants in town maintain close relationships with their home islands (see Tonkinson 1977; Mitchell 2002; Lind 2010; Lindstrom 2011).

Thus, secondly, it is the context of Freswota community itself that is also contributing to the emergence of primary town emplacement in Port Vila. Indeed, most migrants live in communities that developed as people congregated in areas where their extended kin already resided. In contrast, Freswota was established by the Vanuatu Housing Corporation to provide low-income housing to migrants. Plots of land were sold to people regardless of island origins, and Freswota developed as a ‘mixed island community’ (*miks aelan komuniti*) where people who originate from all islands in the archipelago live. This makes Freswota different from many other communities around Vila. Within its boundaries one finds cultural practices, lifestyles, *kastom*, and indigenous languages and beliefs that span the entire archipelago.⁶

A consequence of this heterogeneity, as I discuss in Chapter 2, is that most Freswota residents had no prior relationship with one another before moving to Freswota. The first residents of Freswota describe the area as having been ‘uninhabited bush’ (*bus nomo*), devoid of shared meaning between its residents. The subjects of this study, young people who were the first to grow up there, consequently grew up apart from extended kin and people with whom they would otherwise share origins and a corresponding sense of order and way of being. Faced with this particular social context, young men like Jojo have experienced Freswota as a context of social disorganisation and refer to it as the ‘confusion zone’ (*konfuzin zon*). The way people in newly urbanising contexts create shared meaning with people from different places is one of the broader questions to which this thesis attends.

The third factor in the emergence of the new phenomenon of primary town emplacement is the specific socio-economic circumstance of Vanuatu’s post-colonial context. As I will discuss at a later point, the history of Vanuatu was such that it has produced a generation of youth with insufficient formal schooling to qualify them for formal employment in town (see Appendix 1). High unemployment rates additionally make it difficult for many young people to find formal work (see Appendix 2). The general

⁶ Ohlen and Numburu Communities used to be more ethnically divided but are increasingly becoming characterised as ‘mixed’ communities (Dan McGarry pers. comm. 10/06/13).

public criticise these unemployed town youth for ‘hanging around’, and ‘wasting time’, on the roads of the residential areas day after day (cf. Mitchell 2002; 2004).

By looking at Freswota and its residents through the lens of context we see how Freswota as a place reflects, and how Freswota residents – in this case young men – embody the colonial impact in the region and the tensions of decolonisation as well. As Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson note: ‘cultural territorialisation must be understood as complex and contingent results of ongoing historical and political processes. It is these processes, rather than pre-given cultural-territorial entities, that require anthropological study’ (1997: 4). Indeed, a central claim of this thesis is that high rates of youth unemployment in the post-colonial context has led to the precarious living conditions for many young people in Port Vila today. How young people are responding to this condition, is one of the broader issues this thesis is trying to address.

This thesis focuses on a particular ‘squad’ or ‘group’ of young men who are living in this context. These young men, who gather each day for camaraderie, refer to themselves as the ‘boys of Freswota’ (*boe blo Freswota*) or the ‘boys of Kingston-4’ (*ol boe blo Kingston-4*). Throughout this thesis I refer to them as the ‘Kingston-4 boys’ or just ‘the boys’. In Bislama, the term *ol boe* is translated as ‘those boys’ or ‘the boys’, and is commonly used when referring to a group of boys. Likewise, the term *ol gel* is translated as ‘those girls’ or ‘the girls’, and is commonly used when referring to a group of girls. In Bislama, ‘*ol*’ stems from the Bislama word *olgeta* - the third person plural which translates as ‘they’ or ‘them’ (Crowley 2011). Thus, even though the subjects of this study are in their early to late twenties, I use the terms ‘boys’ and ‘girls’ as it is how the young men and the young women referred to themselves, and how other community members and the public spoke of them.

In Port Vila, young men such as the Kingston-4 boys are often derogatively labelled ‘boys of the road’ (*boe blo rod*). Being ‘of the road’ is negatively valued in Vanuatu as it means that a person is not of a home island place. Most people in Vanuatu generally believe that everyone has a home island to which they can return. It is not uncommon for the media in Port Vila to argue that unemployed town youth be sent back to their home islands, especially following incidents of youth violence or criminality. Young men like Jojo and the Kingston-4 boys respond to these conflicting assertions exclaiming: ‘Where will they send us? We were born in town. We grew up in town. We have been educated in the ways of town, not the ways of the island!’

As this thesis will show, not only do most of these boys not have places on a home island to which they can return, but they identify themselves not as people of an ‘island place’ (*man ples*) or multiple island places, as do their parents, but as ‘children in town’ (*pikinini lo taon*) and as ‘boys of Freswota’. For them growing up in town has constituted them in different ways from their rural counterparts.

Young People in Town

It struck me, not long after I started my research with ‘young people’ (*yang pipol*) in Freswota, that Western definitions of ‘youth’ and ‘young people’, seen for example in UN reports, did not fit the definition of youth that the youth I knew subscribed to themselves. While even the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VKS) defines ‘youth’ (*yut*) in Vanuatu to be persons between the age of 12 and 24 (2008: 17), many of the youth I knew in Freswota were older than this.⁷ Indeed, many were in their mid and late twenties, and all identified themselves as ‘youth’ and as part of a general Vanuatu category of ‘young people’.

When I realized that the VKS definition of youth excluded the self-identified youth I knew, I spoke to the director of the VKS Young People’s Project (YPP), who agreed that while the YPP focuses on the age category defined by the UN, ‘youth’ in Vanuatu is a much broader category. He explained that while in the past the category referred to unmarried adolescents who did not have children, today it does not depend on a person’s age or whether he or she is married or not, and has children or not. Rather, people are youth if they identify as a youth.

I observed that in Freswota, being a youth is additionally about ‘following the youth’ (*folem ol yut*) where *folem* is specifically translated as ‘hanging around with’ and *yut* is the Bislama term for ‘organised group of youth’.⁸ As one of the Kingston-4 boys explained: ‘you are a youth when you walk about with the youth, when you follow the youth’ (*yu wan yut taem yu wokbaot witem ol yut, taem yu folem ol yut*).

Being a youth is therefore about everyday practices as a youth. This includes not only everyday socialization with youth, but also an involvement in the running and functioning of organised youth groups. Indeed, as I demonstrate throughout this thesis, many young people in Freswota, and throughout the communities of Vila, spend time with their peers in groups called ‘squads’ (*skwad*). While some squads are informal, other

⁷ This is roughly based on the United Nations definition of youth or young person, which defines ‘youth’ as ‘those persons between the ages of 15 and 24 years’ (UN Youth Social Policy and Development Division).

⁸ The second definition of ‘youth’ in the Bislama dictionary is ‘youth group’ (Crowley: 2011)

squads, such as the Kingston-4 boys, are more cohesive and organised. I suggest that one reason organised squads have become so prominent in the town communities is because many youth who are active in organised squads do not participate in the formal institutions such as school, church or formal employment. As I argue in Chapter 2, the squads have developed as an informal mode of social organisation.

In Vila many young people do not have more than a primary school education because their families could not afford the cost of secondary school.⁹ Young people in Freswota often explained that ending school prematurely has left them at a ‘half-road’ (*stap lo haf rod nomo*), a saying symbolizing incompleteness and the blockage of forward movement.

Throughout Melanesia, the road is an important metaphor of life’s journey. In Freswota, young people idealise that in the time ‘before’ (*bifo*) life followed a ‘straight road’ (*stret rod*). This was a defined road where boys knew that they would be circumcised, would cultivate a garden, get married, have children, raise pigs, become an elder and die. Girls knew that they would marry, move away from their families, have children, work in their gardens and ‘live a long life’. Young people’s expression of being left at a ‘half-road’ reveals that in town the category of ‘youth’, which is not conceptualised as a phase of social reproduction, has become an extended experience with no known trajectory for when they will transition into ‘adulthood’.

In the same way they idealise the trajectory of island life, Freswota youth idealise the course of town life as well. They see the town ‘road’ as involving movement from education to employment, to owning a plot of ground, to marriage and children. Although most youth I knew had girlfriends and boyfriends and children of their own, many do not have access to the resources needed to marry and establish their own independent households. This has contributed to young people’s sense of themselves as living in an extended period of youth with its perceived condition of social unproductiveness. As many town youth are aware of being unable to travel the full trajectory of rural or urban ‘roads’, they express that they cannot predict their future, that their future is a ‘question mark’ (*kwestin mak*).

This is not an unusual condition of being for young people in rapidly growing urban contexts, as the anthropological literature on youth makes clear. Indeed, many anthropologists to date have focused on how young people are navigating social and

⁹ Noting the problem of the high cost of education the Vanuatu Government started implementing free primary school education throughout the archipelago in 2010.

economic uncertainties (Jeffrey 2010: 466; cf. Christiansen 2006; Cole and Durham 2009; Blom Hansen and Verkaaik 2009; Brison and Dewey 2012; Simone 2005).

Anthropologists have shown significant interest in understanding the lives of youth who:

Have been born into social environments in which their possibilities of living decent lives are negligible and in which many have found themselves stuck in positions of inadequate life chances and bleak prospects' and where youths are coming of age in 'often volatile and precarious circumstances and have had to shape their lives and strategies accordingly in their attempt to generate meaningful lives for themselves. (Christiansen 2006: 9)

Situated within this discourse, this thesis seeks to understand how young people in one community of town are negotiating the socio-economic context in which they live.

Previous work carried out by Mitchell (2002; 2004; 2011) along with a report and accompanying film made by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre Young People's Project (1999a; 1999b) has demonstrated the restlessness of youth living in Port Vila where terms such as 'killing time' (*kilim taem*) have been popularly used by youth to reflect their experienced alienation and disempowerment in the town context. My research demonstrates, somewhat in contrast to this previous research, that some youth such as the Kingston-4 boys, dissatisfied with the government's inability to create a better living environment for them, are engaging in more active practices. As one Kingston-4 boy explained:

We see the failure of the government and so this is why now young people are at a crossroads, questioning – why and what has gone wrong? We haven't seen the government do one thing to help benefit youth in the communities. So this is why we are looking to find our own way to rise up our lives, to do something to better the situation. So a lot of youth now are doing small work in the community. We help our neighbours and in return our neighbours help us. So we are starting to do this ourselves. Life in town is hard. But always there is a solution, a way to make a better life.

In the past decade there seems to be a marked shift in the wide scale attitude of youth to their position and role in the town context. This thesis highlights this shift, as it focuses on the productive and creative action of the youth I knew.

People in town, including the youth themselves, refer to youth who have been born and who have grown up in town as 'children in town' (*pikinini lo taon*). Being a 'child in town' refers to the practice of the attitudes, manners and 'lifestyle of town' (*fasin blo taon*). While youth sometimes use an urban/rural dichotomy to classify themselves or others, and while many youth do still classify themselves based on affiliation with their parents' home islands (and thus demonstrate multiple identifications), for many youth,

differentiating between different categories of ‘children in town’ is more relevant to their everyday. When asked, youth list different classifications of ‘children in town’ – the ‘choir group member’; ‘church-goer’; ‘youth who have schooled good’; ‘youth who are school-leavers’; ‘youth who stay quiet in the home’, and the youth who ‘don’t have work’ among many others.

Language is also an important aspect of what defines ‘children in town’. As Vanuatu is one of the most linguistically diverse countries in the world, indigenous languages have been central in identifying a person’s home island place. They have also been important to learning *kastom* knowledge and practices of the home island (Vanuatu Cultural Centre 2008: 30). Recent statistics have shown, however, that in town, young people’s knowledge and use of indigenous languages is increasingly diminished. Most young people who have lived in town since birth are growing up speaking Bislama as their first language.¹⁰ This is in contrast to people on the islands.

I suggest that as town is a mixed and multi-lingual environment, young-people’s command of Bislama, French and English, rather than the indigenous languages, reflects an emerging gap between rural and town contexts and between generations. This is also the case as town young people’s Bislama develops in its own way, as youth invent slang, idioms, and many short forms known as ‘short-cuts’ (*sotkat*). Changes in Bislama fno doubt are contributing to a widening gap between generations, both in town and on the islands.¹¹

Youth in Port Vila also express differences between themselves in terms of ‘style’ (*stael*). This is often symbolized in terms of clothing. For instance, the ‘local style’ (*lokol stael*) is the style of the rural islands and is not often found in town. It consists of t-shirts and hand-sewn skirts with elastic waistbands for girls, and t-shirts and simple basic trousers for boys. In Vila, one finds a greater diversity of clothing styles. ‘Normal style’ (*nomol stael*) girls wear brand named t-shirts and long ‘surfer shorts’ when in their communities, or nice fashion skirts when they go into town. ‘Normal style’ boys wear similar t-shirts accompanied by long jean shorts or fashionable army pants. ‘Expensive style’ (*ekspensiv stael*) girls wear tight jeans, earrings and revealing tops, and boys wear clean sneakers, slack trousers and often a hat or scarf. The ‘*niga* style’ (*niga stael*) is adopted mostly by boys, although some girls wear it too, and consists of loose trousers

¹⁰ According to a survey conducted by the YPP, 77% of Vila youth between the ages of 13 and 25 said they do not speak an indigenous language. 93% of Vila youth surveyed said they speak Bislama almost exclusively with their friends (2008: 28).

¹¹ Linguistic-Anthropologist Leslie Vandeputte-Tavo is currently researching Bislama in town.

with long t-shirts. These youth are often involved in hip-hop, rapping and breakdancing associations. Lastly, ‘ganja style’ (*ganja stael*) or ‘roots style’ (*roots stael*) girls and boys wear sought after locally made t-shirts with local organization logos, or t-shirts with images of Bob Marley, or marijuana leaves imprinted on them. While ‘ganja’ is a slang word for marijuana, not all youth who wear the ‘ganja style’ smoke marijuana, rather these clothes are easily available in town and are affordable.¹²

In addition, ‘normal style’ ‘local style’, and ‘expensive style’ girls mostly wear their hair in neat topknots, and boys wear their hair cropped short. ‘Niga style’ youth often wear their hair long, and ‘ganja style’ youth often wear their hair in thick or thin dreadlocks, or in braids in different patterns.

Dress is a choice many young people make to demonstrate their experience or their desired relationship with the town context. Young people’s dress styles assert their particular and different forms of engagement with modernity, making them different from both their rural counterparts and also from many of the older generations in town.¹³ During my time in the field I came to know youth from many categories and styles, however this thesis focuses on the Kingston-4 boys who have adopted the ‘ganja style’ or ‘roots style’. According to my observations, this category of youth makes up the largest demographic group of youth in Freswota.

Young people in town are adopting overseas products and influences, and are making them distinctly their own. This will be seen particularly in Chapter 4, which looks at youth practices involving the mobile phone. By giving these details, I mean to show the heterogeneity of youth in town. As the anthropology of youth has made clear, it is important to acknowledge that youth, like adults, are ‘not a monolithic group’ (Brison and Dewey 2012: 10).

In this thesis I argue that it is by means of their place making activities that the boys are transforming the Freswota land, the community, themselves and their lives in creative ways. Indeed, as Christine Jourdan has noted for youth in Honiara, Solomon Islands, young people might be pushed to the economic fringes but they are cultural agents in forming their own urban identity and social space (1995a: 203). For the Kingston-4 boys, place making is their creative response to the condition in which they live. As such, this research project contributes to an emerging focus in the anthropology of youth (see Cole and Durham 2009; Blom Hansen and Verkaaik 2009; Simone 2005). It explores

¹² See Macintyre (2008) for discussion of ‘style’ among youth in Papua New Guinea.

¹³ See Margaret Cummings (2002) for discussion of dress and ideas of beauty in Vanuatu.

young people's agency in creating greater shared social meaning and increased possibilities for their own social production and reproduction. Like Simone, who works with youth in Douala, Cameroon, this project explores youth who are 'trying to find more effective ways of living in their cities, of being able to finally put 'youth' behind them and consolidate the opportunities and resources to build families, careers and real lives of their own' (2005: 529).

Previous research in Vanuatu has not yet made clear what relationships might be emerging between youth born and raised in mixed town communities and their home island places. This thesis takes up this question. In doing so, it seeks to fill a gap in the anthropology of Vanuatu where limited research has been carried out on young people in general, and on experiences of young people in town in particular (cf. Mitchell 2002; 2004; 2011). This work also contributes to the anthropology of Melanesia, particularly in terms of how people continue to experience relationships with autochthonous place and developments of place making practices.

Introducing 'The Boys'

The Kingston-4 squad of boys consist of approximately 100 members. I spent time with roughly 40 of them, and came to know approximately 11 well. It is their words, practices and stories, which bring this thesis to life.

While the Kingston-4 squad is the largest and most dominant squad in Freswota-4, the part of Freswota within which the boys live (see Map 3), there were several other squads of boys in the area as well. They were separated from the Kingston-4 boys by age. This included, for example, the 'Ex-Gang' squad whose members were some of the younger boys in the community, approximately 15-20 years of age. The Kingston-4 boys are the squad of 'older boys' in the community, although they also divide themselves into 'younger' and 'older' squad members.

The Kingston-4 boys were between 21 and 28 years old during the time I was in the field. Nearly all were born in Port Vila between 1983 and 1989, lived their first years in other communities, and moved to Freswota in 1990 or 1991. They are the first young men to live and grow up in their part of the Freswota community. Most of the Kingston-4 boys have not travelled to their parents' home islands, nor speak their parent's indigenous languages. As such, they openly exclaim that they are a 'product' (*pradakt*) of living and being educated in town, and consider themselves first and foremost 'Freswota boys' and 'children in town'.

The boys often told me that they are living a ‘life of the ghetto’ (*laef lo ghetto*), a ‘last life’ (*las laef*) where as one boy said: ‘We do not have anything, no education, no job, no money, not even respect of the community’. The boys say they are a disadvantaged generation, the product of a gap between traditional and colonial and post-colonial systems. Furthermore, they stress that if the government does not improve the education and job prospects for Vanuatu youth, the future of the entire country will be at risk. They make this claim knowing that 66% of the total population of Vanuatu is under the age of 30 (See Appendix 3), and many, like the Kingston-4 boys, are struggling in the town context.

The boys seldom go to the centre of town, approximately 2.5 kilometres away, usually not more than once a week, and mostly for a purpose such as going to the market or picking up a package from the wharf. The boys told me that paying bus fare to and from town is expensive; moreover, unless one has a purpose and or money, there is not much for them to do in town. I believe this is a marked change from young people’s relationship with town of just a decade ago. While Mitchell (2002; 2004) and the Young People’s Project’s film (1999) ‘Killing Time’, mentioned above, depicts youth restlessly walking the city streets looking at items for sale in the shop windows, the youth I knew acted to the contrary, spending most of their time in their community. As this thesis will suggest, Freswota youth are clearly focused on developing their community and their relationships with the people in the area in which they live.

In Freswota, the Kingston-4 boys spend most of their time in a few, otherwise neglected shelters, ‘grass huts’, disused kava bars, or out of the way places, situated along the roads of the community. They refer to these as their ‘ghettos’ (*ghetto*).¹⁴ Although the popularity of one ghetto over another changed every few months, they spent much of their time in one place they called the ‘Alick Noel’.

I stumbled on this ghetto by chance one afternoon, only days after first meeting some of the Kingston-4 boys (how I met the boys will be described at a later point in this thesis). I was walking along the main road, the only tarred road through the community at that time, when I heard my name and saw one of the boys motion for me to come over. I crossed the road, approached the ‘Freswota Mini Market’ and walked behind it (see Map 4). There I found a small group of about six boys - some seated on a long wooden bench

¹⁴ Music and films influence the boys’ use of the term ‘ghetto’ where a ghetto implies a residential area in which neglected, marginalized, and disadvantaged people live. The boys use the term spelled in English, as seen for example in the name of the popular ni-Vanuatu reggae band ‘Black Ghetto’.

and some perched atop an abandoned old freezer. Sawdust, garbage, scraps of old kava roots, planks of wood, discarded metal rods and rusted parts of old cars were scattered everywhere. A cartoon drawing of a man with dreadlocks smoking an exaggerated joint looked down from one wall, and 'Kingston-4' was written in a number of places. I noted that two boys were reading the Vanuatu Daily Post, one boy was rolling a joint and one boy was smoking a cigarette, which he then passed on to another boy. The boys made space for me on the wooden bench and welcomed me to what they said was their main 'hang out' area –the 'Alick Noel' – named after the owner of the shop who had given them permission to spend their time there.¹⁵

During the months of fieldwork, I spent many hours with the boys in the 'Alick Noel' ghetto sitting on the wooden bench. It was here, behind this shop, that the boys, one by one, or sometimes as a 'full squad', shared with me their everyday world. This area was a place made by the boys, for the boys, and other residents of Freswota rarely ventured there. The boys told me that as they do not attend school, nor have formal employment, they have no specific place to be each day and so they have created their own places in the community.

I observed that the boys usually begin their day behind the Alick Noel store. Each boy, after waking up, walks to the store knowing that the other boys will be there. The store is located along the main thoroughfare and in the centre of the Freswota-4 community. As such, it is a place conducive to taking care of the squad's daily business. Seated there, together, the boys discuss activities they are engaged in, current events, politics, and their plans for projects in the future. Other boys, from other squads, come to the Alick Noel to pass along messages or talk about important community affairs.

It is usually only in the latter part of the morning that the boys, as a squad, then move to other areas in the community where they engage in the community projects they are involved in and the activities they had planned. Or, as was also often the case, they moved to another ghetto to relax, smoke marijuana, and do this privately and away from the eyes of community residents.

The Kingston-4 boys say that what distinguishes them from other squads of boys, and from other residents in Freswota, is that they smoke marijuana – known to them as 'smoke' (*smok*). Smoking marijuana is illegal in Vanuatu and most people additionally

¹⁵ Permission was granted in exchange for the squad's support when Alick Noel ran for election to the Municipal Council. The store has changed ownership but the new owner still permits the boys to gather there.

disapprove of it because they believe the effect causes young men to act in violent ways. The boys, on the other hand, smoke marijuana because they believe its effects make them 'wise'. The boys regularly contrasted their own expanded awareness to other Freswota squads who they say 'do not see the truth' (*oli no luk save tru*). The Kingston-4 boys say these other boys only drink alcohol – a product that pacifies them into accepting their marginalisation rather than trying to change it. The boys repeated this as a justification for smoking often. They said that one of the reasons they first formed their squad was to spread the message of 'local living' (*lokol laef*). The boys define 'local living' as living a Melanesian lifestyle in contrast to a European one. The boys speak about 'local living' as a lifestyle where people are equal, where everyone has sufficient food, where people work together for mutual benefit, and where freedoms are not hindered by the need and desire for money. The boys told me that they learned these ideas through the 'wisdom of smoke' and also through their greatest influence – the reggae singer Bob Marley.

Indeed, one of the reasons the squad have named themselves 'Kingston-4' is because the boys liken their life in Freswota-4 to Bob Marley's descriptions, in his lyrics, of the inequality and marginalization he experienced while growing up in Trench town, a poor slum of Kingston, Jamaica. The boys add the number '4' to Kingston-4, to note their area of Freswota.

Bob Marley's music, and reggae music in general, is the most popular form of music among young people in Vanuatu today. As Tom Dick and Marcel Meltherorong write:

The music of Bob Marley matches the physical, social, and cultural environment of Vanuatu. We have the 'roots' that Bob sings about. Bob's music fits here in Vanuatu because it is a music of consciousness. It is an everyday music for everyday people... reggae is a music born out of oppression and slavery and this is the main reason why we feel it matches with the cultural and social environments. (Dick and Meltherorong 2011: 9)

For the Kingston-4 boys, and boys like them, reggae music speaks to their experienced marginalisation in town (cf. Bolton n.d. (2010): 9).¹⁶ Messages learned through Bob Marley and other reggae songs have been incorporated into the boys' world-view. From its lyrics they find the terms that help them to express their own experiences of displacement, marginalisation and their fight against the 'Babylon System' – which they

¹⁶ In reference to this article Bolton writes that while the authors attribute the identification with Bob Marley to ni-Vanuatu experience of colonization and also slavery (in the nineteenth century ni-Vanuatu were taken to Queensland to work on sugar cane plantations), this identification may rest more on the disempowerment that young people are facing in the urban contexts (n.d. (2010): 9). I agree with Bolton as the Kingston-4 boys reflected more on their marginalization than on the past context of plantation labour.

see as a non-Indigenous political and economic system that enforces non-indigenous rules and values on local populations and thus impinges indigenous rights and freedoms.¹⁷

The boys say that there are two types of people in Vanuatu: people who are part of the ‘Babylon System’, usually referred to as the ‘system’ (*sistim*), and people who are ‘Roots People’ (*Roots Pipol*), people more in touch with Melanesian lifestyles. The boys see themselves as part of this latter group and often refer to themselves as ‘Roots Men’, a point I will return to in the Introduction.

The Kingston-4 boys ‘planting roots’ in Freswota is thus a story about people with a received idea about the importance of having roots to a place, the creation of roots in a new place, and about young men becoming rooted in a place.

Thesis Outline

I begin this thesis by highlighting the significance of autochthonous, or home island place, to the constitution of the ni-Vanuatu person. Drawing from the anthropological literature on Vanuatu, I examine the importance for ni-Vanuatu of having roots and being rooted to a home island place. I show that despite a history of mobility and relocation to new places, ni-Vanuatu have continued to see themselves as being primarily emplaced in a home island place. Following this, I begin to suggest that for some young people the sense of locating themselves in a home island place is changing. Here I lay out the argument of the thesis – that not having access to the land of a home island place involves an ontological shift. I suggest that the importance of belonging to a home island place to the very ‘meaning of what it is to be’ is becoming replaced by an increasingly valued sense of emplacement in town communities. I propose that it is through place making activities that the Kingston-4 boys are transforming Freswota, which in the beginning of its development was a ‘not-place’ – as it was a place not yet shaped by shared social meaning, into a place of more socialisation and shared social order. I suggest that this is not just a story about the transformation of Freswota as a place, but is also a story about the transformation of its residents. In coming into relationship with the Freswota land, the boys are also becoming shaped as persons of the Freswota place.

Chapter 1 explores the boys’ understandings of the ‘Confusion Zone’ – a term they use to describe the nexus between the social structures of a home island place and the wider formal social structures of town. The chapter begins by exploring the reasons the

¹⁷ Fighting against ‘Babylon’ or the ‘Babylon system’ is a recurring theme in roots reggae music. It is frequently used to refer to living in an oppressive system. Police are seen as agents of the Babylon system.

boys find themselves without access to land on their home islands, and how they conceptualise this as a loss which affects their very identity and being. Following this, the chapter then examines the boys' experienced marginalisation from the formal social structures of town – specifically formal education and formal employment. It demonstrates that they experience their being outside these systems as a condition without opportunity for cultural productivity. For the boys, the 'Confusion Zone' is a new condition – the nexus between two competing value systems and thus between two ways of being. The boys experience this condition as one of 'pre-ordered' 'chaos' and themselves as metaphorically not-yet-fully-grown ni-Vanuatu beings. This chapter provides the contextual detail for the rest of the thesis. It is out of this 'pre-ordered' 'chaos' that the boys' place making activities have emerged as they work to order their place and emplace themselves within it.

In Chapter 2, I begin to examine the boys' specific place making activities in Freswota. The chapter starts by exploring the boys' diminished relationships with extended kin in town. I argue that to manage a 'crisis of sociality' (Simone 2005), Freswota residents have developed their own modes of social organisation in the community. I suggest that the 'squad', as well as a system of 'community councils', are new modes of social organisation focused on building 'cooperation' and 'organisation' in the community. I propose that these are new examples of order making emerging in Freswota.

Chapter 3 explores the Kingston-4 boys' life as 'boys of the road'. In Vanuatu, being 'of the road' is a problematic condition of being as it implies that a person is not 'of' a place. In contrast to this perspective, I suggest that the boys experience and conceptualise the road as a place in and of itself. This is different to previous ni-Vanuatu understandings of the road as means to an end, as the travelled route towards a destination point, and as the metaphorical pathway that connects a person to his or her place. Specifically, this chapter examines the boys' practices of naming the roads, their creation of a recited history of the development of the community, and how through discursive practices of 'walking about' on the roads, and their 'making history' – which involves creating stories that are then shared – the boys socialise and order what they have imagined as a previous 'pre-ordered' 'no-place'. This chapter argues that it is through their particular practices on and along the Freswota roads that the boys are creating new social and spatial relationships. Moreover, it proposes that through shared time spent on the roads the boys' become constituted by the roads.

Chapter 4 broadens the focus from the Kingston-4 boys to young people in Freswota generally. In doing so, it provides the reader with some insight into the lives of

Freswota ‘girls’. This chapter looks at how young people employ the new mobile phone technology in creative ways. Particularly in how they use the technology to expand their relationship networks in the face of increasingly unreliable kinship networks in town. This chapter examines the different ways young people send and receive text messages, place and answer phone calls, and how they modulate their sharing of phone credit as they try to develop strong connections with non-kin to whom they can then make requests for money or other items. Ultimately this chapter shows that as trans-generational networks have become eroded in the wider town context, the relationship networks that young people are embedded in have altered. The use of the mobile phone technology is one new form through which young people are pushing previous social boundaries of everyday life. I argue that it is through the process of extending their relationship networks and developing phone conventions that a shared sociality and a shared experience of how life is lived in Freswota is emerging. This is an important part of their ‘planting roots’ and making place in the Freswota community.

In Chapter 5 I return once again to focus on the Kingston-4 boys. This chapter explores Kingston-4 boys’ movements concerning their sharing and hiding of valued items cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana. I suggest that by examining these movements the boys’ relationships and intentions as persons are revealed. This chapter argues that the boys modulate with whom they share these items because it is from their shared consumption that they achieve an altered state of being – one in which they become transformed (albeit only temporarily) from a weaker condition of being into one of greater strength and masculine efficacy.

The thesis closes with an Epilogue. The epilogue emphasises some of the main ideas argued throughout. I highlight the transformation of Freswota land from ‘pre-ordered’ place into Freswota Community, as well, the transformation of the boys from ‘unplaced’ persons into Freswota men. In the last part of the Epilogue I suggest that ‘planting roots’ and identification as ‘Roots Men’ is a way of being ni-Vanuatu. I also argue that ‘planting roots’ is part of a wider social movement aimed to achieve better future lives for town residents.

Introduction

Planting Roots

This thesis is about an organised group or ‘squad’ of young men and the ways in which they are inscribing an area of land with social meaning. Using the analytical concept of place making, this thesis explores the different practices through which these young men are transforming the area in which they live from a place with no shared and relevant social meaning into a place imbued with greater collective significance. I argue that it is by coming into relationship with the Freswota land, through their place making activities, that they are transforming the land from virtual no-place into some place, and are also transforming themselves from unplaced persons into emplaced ‘Freswota men’. I suggest that it is through place making activities, which they refer to as ‘planting roots’ (*planem* roots), that the Freswota community, rather than their parents’ home island places, is emerging as the source of their primary location of belonging and their sense of social identification.¹⁸

This Introduction offers a framework for understanding the reasons why the Kingston-4 boys are planting roots in Freswota, and the means of their transformation. The first section examines the notion that place making activities lead to a transformation; that it is through practices, which imbue a place with greater shared meaning, that people become emplaced in an area. The second section turns to a discussion of the cultural models informing the boys’ focus on roots. It explores why having roots and being rooted is important to the ni-Vanuatu person. Following this, the third section examines what planting roots means for the Kingston-4 boys and why the boys refer to themselves as ‘Roots Men’. In much the same way as being rooted is significant, so is mobility. Thus the fourth and fifth sections examine the anthropological literature on ni-Vanuatu mobility, particularly the way in which ni-Vanuatu value some movements and journeys more than others. I also examine several new communities and the different ways relocated people and migrants have built and rebuilt communities in new places. While the anthropological literature on the region demonstrates that many second and third generation migrants continue to identify with a home island place, this thesis suggests that this is changing, that

¹⁸ For youth in Port Vila the term ‘roots’ is often spelled in English, as seen in the popular Port Vila band name ‘26 Roots’, and in the local t-shirt company ‘Roots.K’.

being ‘unplaced’ involves an ontological shift for some young people who have lived in town since birth. I discuss this ontological shift in the sixth section. The seventh and eighth sections turn to the context of this study. I examine the meaning of the term ‘urban’, the rapid urbanisation of Port Vila town, and the boys’ position in this urban context. The chapter concludes by introducing the field site and the methodological approach of this project.

Place Making a Process of Transformation

To conceptualise the transformation of Kingston-4 boys’ place based identity, I draw on Michael Scott’s (2007a; 2007b; 2005) analysis of Arosi place making on the island of Makira in Solomon Islands. Scott puts forward an analytic framework to understand Arosi representations of ‘coming into being’. He writes that Arosi believe pre-human Arosi progenitors gave rise to true humans by transforming their place from an area of imagined pre-order – Scott terms ‘utopic land’, into a condition of ongoing ordering and re-ordering he terms ‘topogenic primordality’. He suggests that Arosi view this pre-social ‘utopic land’ as one of ‘spatial vacuity’ as its first inhabitants were different types of beings such as animate rocks, or snakes. They were not ‘true people’ as they were pre-social and did not yet engage in productive relations with one another (2005: 205). Scott writes that Arosi consider this ‘utopic land’ to have been a ‘potential place’, a ‘not-place’, since it was not yet shaped by social meaning (2005: 198- 205; 2007b: 28). He suggests that Arosi see this pre-social, vacuous land as ‘chaos’ and argues that it is through practices of place making, such as fusing autochthonous matrilineages with unique territories, creating genealogical lineage narratives, founding new settlements, investing land with taboos and names, trees and gardens, that the Arosi see themselves and their land as becoming shaped (2005: 206).

I suggest that the context in which the Kingston-4 boys have grown up, that which they refer to as the ‘confusion zone’ resonates with Scott’s notion of Arosi primordial ‘utopic land’. I frame the discussion this way for, as I argue in Chapter 3, the first residents to move to Freswota, including the Kingston-4 boys, emptied the land of its prior social meaning as a prelude to emplacing themselves within it. Thus the story of Freswota’s ‘origins’, and the Kingston-4 boys, some of its first residents, is a story that can be likened to that of the Arosi progenitors. It is a story about people who through practices in the land transform a ‘not-place’ – a place not yet shaped by shared social meaning into a socialised one, with a shared order and organisation.

However, this is not just a story about the transformation of Freswota as a place, but it is a story about the transformation of its residents too. As Scott also argues for the Arosi, the transformation of place involves an analogous transformation of ‘coming into being’ where the ‘not-quite-human’ Arosi progenitors, residents of the utopic land, become transformed, through their relationship with the land, into ‘fully-human’ Arosi beings.¹⁹

Joel Bonnemaïson (1985a) shows a similar understanding of transformation among people on the Southern Vanuatu Island of Tanna, thus supporting why I have chosen this analysis as well. Bonnemaïson writes that Tannese Islanders believe that the formation of places was coincident with the appearance of the first true humans. He writes: ‘the appearance of places, of social space, and of an ideology of attachment to place... occurs along with the appearance of men’ (1985a: 36).

This thesis will demonstrate that an analogous transformation is occurring through the Kingston-4 boys’ process of planting roots in Freswota. Like their predecessors, it is by means of rooting themselves in a place that they come into being as persons. It is important to note that I do not mean to suggest that they are transforming Freswota into a more socialised place without drawing on meaningful precedents. Throughout this thesis I will show that the Kingston-4 boys’ place making activities are informed by the ways their ancestors formed their land on their home islands. As such a continuation in the form of practices of place making can be found in the town context.

Roots and Rootedness

For the Kingston-4 boys, planting roots involves activities that create social relationships with a specific area. In order to understand Kingston-4 boys’ planting roots in Freswota, we first need to explore the cultural models, especially notions about ‘roots’ and ‘rootedness’, in which the boys are more or less explicitly in dialogue. An examination of ni-Vanuatu ideas and idioms of roots and rootedness, and also the importance of tree metaphors that have been documented for many islands throughout the archipelago, will help us to understand why roots and being rooted is important.

John Taylor (2008a), working with the Sia Raga of north Pentecost, demonstrates that being rooted in an original place and being able to trace roots back to an original place is central to the structuring of ni-Vanuatu society. He writes that the Sia Raga distinguish

¹⁹ Scott writes that Arosi transformation occurred by means of human activities and reproductive relations with other beings and with the land (2007a: 34).

between areas of land some which they identify as ‘foundation places’ (2008: 80). Foundation places are the specific origin places of individual descent groups; they are the ‘memorial proof’ of acts by which ‘ancestors have merged with the earth of that place’ (2008: 80). Through a chronological recollection of the ancestors, often identified through ancestral gravesites and other markers in the place, a person or people, are able to trace their descent to a particular place. This is important as it locates a person and a group of people in specific social and spatial relationships, and is the way in which rights to the use of land are allocated.

Taylor explains that Sia Raga trace their ancestry and historical emergence from foundational places through metaphors based on arboreal imagery (2008a: 101). They use diagrams called land-trees (they have trunks and branches upon which names of foundation places are written) to help trace the historical relationship between themselves and a land that is embodied by their ancestors. Taylor writes that the ‘primary function of the land tree is to provide a map of relationships’; it is an instrument for directing the land and for directing all the people connected to the land (2008a: 80). This is particularly important as islanders move and relocate. As Taylor notes: the land-tree is the main figure through which people understand the spatiality of their social relationships (2008a: 21).

Also writing about Vanuatu, Knut Rio (2002) asks why people are obsessed with origins? He suggests that tracing origins is a central principle of Ambrym philosophy. He writes that ‘everything can be reduced to their origin – there you find the truth and the true shape of the thing’ (2002: 48). He suggests that like a vine, the crucial part of a person, or a people, is the place where they have come out of the ground, the ‘root place’ that provides an ‘anchorage’ and an ‘energy’ (2002: 48). Like Taylor, Rio points out that ni-Vanuatu identify with their original location because it is through this identification that social life is framed.

Rio describes how people use stories to trace their movements back to their origins, back to ‘where the social entity started’. He suggests that people belong to a genealogy, and ‘come out of’ a migratory history which usually began elsewhere. The place where a person grows up is of secondary importance since a person is always a ‘man of the place’ where their genealogy started (2002: 54).

While Taylor and Rio both explain the importance of having roots, and tracing roots back to an original place. What being rooted to a particular place means for the constitution of the ni-Vanuatu person, is most notably taken up by Joel Bonnemaïson (1985a; 1994). Bonnemaïson describes how Tannese liken a man to a ‘tree whose roots

thrust deep into the sacred earth' (1985a: 37). He writes that Tannese believe their identity is forged from the relationship between man and his place (1985a: 39).

Bonnemaison explains that in central and southern Vanuatu, the notion that ground confers identity and power is associated with the idea of 'the doctrine of first appearance', expressed in Bislama as *stamba* – a derivative from the English word stump (1985a: 41). He describes that it is out of the place where ancestors first appeared or emerged, that identity, as well as things magical, social, territorial and political have developed. All lineage groups also trace where their ancestors first emerged.

The *stamba* is the 'root-place' of a people, and its people are 'root men'. They keep the power contained in the *stamba* and guard and hold mastery of that part of the territory (1985a: 41). Bonnemaison quotes the first Minister of Lands of Vanuatu to further substantiate this point: 'land is to the ni-Vanuatu what a mother is to her child. It is in relation to the land that he 'situates' himself, and thanks to land that he retains his spiritual strength' (1985: 60).

The notion of *stamba* reflects ni-Vanuatu ideas about independence, about a people possessing the power and authority over their own territory and themselves. The notion of the 'doctrine of first appearance', and the stories and land-trees which trace a person back to this origin, substantiate the belief that emplacement in the original territory of the ancestors confers a cumulative power and strength, and legitimises the ordering of social life. As Bonnemaison writes:

Everyone is a master in his own place, as long as he is what is called in Bislama a 'man ples'; that is, a man who derives down the whole chain of his ancestors from the place where he lives. In Tanna this affirmation goes even further. The 'man ples' is also a true man ('really man' in Bislama): he who has retained his full identity. Any others – wandering fugitives from traditional wars, exiles, or groups relocated to the coast – are men without roots, deprived of any customary power and, in principle, of any land or political rights. (1985a: 40)

The importance of 'root place' is that it is the source of identity, strength and autonomous power. Furthermore, people stay connected to it through their roots.

Although Bonnemaison describes *stamba* as a 'root place', in the anthropological literature, *stamba* is often translated as 'tree stump' or 'base of tree'. This is the first listed translation of the term in the Bislama Dictionary (Crowley 2011). Yet, I believe Terry Crowley's second translation of *stamba* as 'trunk of tree', does more to conjure the botanical idiom that the term implies, and better reflects ni-Vanuatu conceptualizations of

ground as alive and generative. It also does more to invoke the understanding, important to the discussion here, that a person has far reaching roots that can be traced back to an original place.

Scott's (2007a) analysis of the use of 'trunk' and 'branch' idioms in Southeast Solomon Islands is helpful in interpreting this meaning of *stamba*. He points out that arboreal metaphors reflect important cultural processes relating not just to belonging and rootedness, but also understandings that lineage forebears, like the trunk of a tree, are the 'most important part, where life comes from, the original part, the centre part' (2007a: 218). Thus a focus on the 'trunk' as opposed to the 'stump' reflects ideas about a plant's growing core, the 'centre' from which roots (which ni-Vanuatu believe generate belonging and identity), as well as new shoots (which ni-Vanuatu believe signify generation and continuity of life), all grow.

That said, rather than translating *stamba* as 'tree stump' I believe it might be more helpful to translate it as the 'trunk of a plant'. As I discuss in Chapter 1, the nuanced relationships that migrant ni-Vanuatu have to original ground can be better likened to a plant such as a 'creeper' or 'vine', which reaches new places yet is always attached to the same root, and less to the tree whose trunk is firmly rooted in a place.

In the above paragraphs I have described the importance of *stamba*, as well as the cultural models of roots and rootedness, with which the boys are in dialogue. Equally important to our consideration of the Kingston-4 boys' planting roots in Freswota is knowing the cultural models of not having roots which also informs the boys' practices.

According to the anthropological literature, not being able to trace roots back to a *stamba* or 'root place' results in a condition of 'rootlessness', or what I refer to in this thesis as 'floating' (Chapter 1). In Vanuatu, this is considered a problematic condition of being, because without roots a person loses 'energy', power and identity, as already described above. Concomitant with this, is the loss of access to land and political rights attached to the land.

In Vanuatu, being rootless has a negative connotation. Margaret Jolly (1982) demonstrates this point through the idiom of the 'bird' and the 'banyan tree', as the Sa of south Pentecost use it. She writes that the Sa view the banyan tree as a metaphor for ni-Vanuatu people and their *kastom*. The banyan tree, with its far and deep reaching roots, conveys the notion of rootedness and an 'indissoluble attachment to the land that they occupy' (1982: 340). This is in contrast to 'birds' with their 'roaming, fitful quality' (1982: 340). Jolly writes that the Sa first used this idiom to contrast themselves to European

colonisers with whom they were in political opposition. They saw themselves as the stronger rooted banyan trees, while the European colonisers were the weak roaming birds. Jolly notes that this metaphor derives from the Sa's first experiences of Europeans moving about in ships and then aeroplanes.

Jolly writes that the significant point about the metaphor is that it conveys more than just an idea of physical rootedness in contrast to mobility, but implies a moral judgement as well. She suggests that the Sa positively view themselves as 'strong, resistant and tough-skinned because they live on their own land, cultivate their own food, and maintain a relation to their natural world which is sacred and ancestrally ordained' (1982: 340). Europeans, on the other hand, are seen to be 'weak, vulnerable and flabby, because they have no such intimate or enduring relation to the earth but [are] compelled to move about in search of money' (1982: 340).

Jolly explains that this metaphor is the Sa's conscious negative evaluation of European way of life. But it can also be seen to reflect a more general critique of the condition of being 'rootless', where not having a 'root place' is devalued, even morally denigrated. This cultural precedent helps inform our understanding of why the Kingston-4 boys are concerned with their roots and with planting roots in Freswota. To be a 'rootless' ni-Vanuatu is to be debased as a person. The following words from one Kingston-4 boy, Toto, reflect this informed understanding of what it means to be rootless. As Toto exclaims:

We are in a big trap, we feel like we have fallen into a big hole. But everyone believes he has roots and he has life. And everyone deserves respect and everyone deserves life. If we can get back a more rooted life then we will have a better life for tomorrow.

As the rest of this Introduction will demonstrate, the boys speak about their varying conditions of rootlessness and rootedness in a home island place in different and often contradictory ways. This is seen in the ambiguity in Toto's remark here where it is unclear where Toto predicts this more rooted life will be located. While some boys express hope that they might reclaim roots to an island place, other boys exclaim that their roots to an island place have permanently been lost. Still other boys fluctuate between these two positions.

This reflects the boys' experience of an uncertainty of their roots. They are in a time of transition where they are trying to understand where they are rooted, if they are rooted, if they not rooted, and what that means. This is a tension recurring throughout the quotes of the boys in the chapters of this thesis. Despite the tensions in what they say about

their varying connections to their home island places, many which are nostalgic longings and hopeful imaginings, it is clear that the boys' focus on place making activities, or planting roots in Freswota, is part of a greater sense that by rooting themselves in an area, an emplaced life - which in Vanuatu is a more valued life - will ensue.

Although being rooted to an original place has always been valued, it is important to mention that expressing identification with a wider 'home island' as one's 'place', as people do in town today, is a more recent construction. In pre-colonial times, inhabitants of the archipelago lived in small hamlets organised around 'root places', and around closely related male kin (Bolton 1999: 45). At that time there was no conception of belonging to a greater island or to a greater archipelago, even though, through extensive trade networks, islanders did have relationships with people in other hamlets on other islands (Bolton 1999: 45; MacClancy 1983: 105).

It was in the 1970s, as Vanuatu moved towards independence, that politicians seeking to construct a ni-Vanuatu national identity, promoted a notion of island-based identification (some form of this had emerged previously during the labour trade).²⁰ Lissant Bolton (1999; 2003) suggests that island based identities were constructed around a nationalist notion of unity through diversity. Focus was directed towards encouraging and celebrating the *kastom* of each island in the archipelago (as opposed to each 'root place'). *Kastom*, which had previously been considered to be a 'way of life' (Jolly 1994: 53), became regarded as something of value.²¹ Politicians defined *kastom* as the knowledge and practice of a particular place, and as the basis of a person's identity. Furthermore, the practice of *kastom* became the means through which people identified belonging to particular island places (Bolton 1999; 2003; Jolly 1994; 1982). It was through this nation-building project that the practice of defining oneself according to an island became customary.

Mary Patterson argues that during this political momentum to build Vanuatu as a nation, ideas about the importance of 'rootedness', 'placement', 'autochthony' and 'primordial attachment' to specific island places intensified (2002: 215). Patterson writes that the idea that ni-Vanuatu are a rooted people began to supersede previous ni-Vanuatu notions about the importance of mobility, a point I will return to shortly. No doubt, the

²⁰ See Corris 1973 for discussion about the labour trade and emergence of island identification.

²¹ Jolly writes that previously *kastom* was not something a person 'had', but was seen as a 'whole way of life and not just selected aspects of that life' (1994: 53- 54).

Kingston-4 boys' preoccupation with their roots is an illustration of how entrenched the notion of being rooted in an island place has become.

Jolly, Patterson and Bolton have all critiqued how notions of rootedness and emplacement have come to supersede other ways of relating to place in Vanuatu. With this in mind, the specific focus of this thesis on roots and rootedness, and the boy's place making activities as 'planting roots', comes out of the boys' own articulations of an uncertainty of their roots and how this is experienced as a problematic condition of their being (Chapter 1). In an attempt not to reify the boys' endeavours to achieve a more rooted life, this thesis not only looks at the boys planting roots, but also examines their local forms of movement and mobility. As I will discuss shortly, a complementary relationship between movement and rootedness in Vanuatu has been well documented in the literature. Significantly, the boys' focus on roots reflects not just that they are concerned with whether or not they have roots, but that the notion of being rooted in a place is a central part of ni-Vanuatu discourse today. I suggest that by examining the positive and creative ways in which the boys respond to their uncertain condition of rootedness, that anthropological notions about rootlessness and what this condition engenders can be pushed in more progressive ways.

Planting Roots

In the above section I outlined some of the cultural precedents that are informing the boys' understandings of roots and what it means to be or not be rooted. Given that roots are viewed as connecting a person to a 'root place', a life force, it is not surprising that when the Kingston-4 boys speak about 'land' (*graon*) they, like their predecessors, also liken it to their 'mother' (*mama blong mi*). They speak about land as 'life giving' (*graon hemi givim laef lo mi*) and use words like *stamba* 'trunk of plant', and 'roots' (*rus*), to suggest that the land grows their 'identity' or being. As Manu, one Kingston-4 boy explained, during a conversation about people leasing their land to others: 'Ground is the *stamba* of the life of a human being, and the more you give it away, the more you give away life.' Like their predecessors and their contemporaries throughout the archipelago, the boys view land and the root places in the land as central to the constitution of their very being. Having examined earlier ni-Vanuatu models of roots and rootedness, I now turn to the Kingston-4 boys' own conception of roots, 'Roots Men', and their project of planting roots.

When the boys speak about land ‘being like their mother’ it is a general land and not any specific territory. In Chapter 1, I will substantiate the claim that most of the boys experience themselves as ‘floating’; unable to trace roots back to a place. Needless perhaps to say here, not knowing their roots and whether they have roots that can be reclaimed, is the impetus for their planting roots in Freswota.²² Thus what is unusual about the Kingston-4 boys’ planting roots in Freswota is that their roots are new roots in a new area.²³ The roots they are planting in Freswota are not transplanted roots, nor shoots of vines that can be traced back to a base. As Samuel, one Kingston-4 boy, explained:

Your roots trace where you come from, where you belong. When you don’t know your roots you don’t have place. Many of us, we don’t know our places, and we live here. Here many things are different, we have new sayings, new ‘ways of being’ (*fasin*), and some people own land here too, so we are now starting to plant new roots here, in this place. Do I have roots? Well, I haven’t found my roots yet. If I can find my roots back to my island, to my ground, then my children will have two sets of roots, my island and Freswota. But if I don’t get back my roots, then their roots will be in Freswota that’s all. They will belong to Freswota that’s all. But this is just the beginning. We are only now in the early stages of planting roots.

Samuel’s words reflect the newness of the roots they are planting, as well that planting roots in Freswota is a recent and ongoing endeavour. Samuel points out, as other Kingston-4 boys do, that as they are just planting the roots now, it is their children and their children’s generation who will start growing them. This affirms the point made earlier that the boys’ have a fluctuating notion of the nature of their roots.

Even so, the Kingston-4 boys’ planting roots in Freswota is part of their intent to reclaim power, identity and dignity. As the discussion in the previous section demonstrated, to be ‘rootless’ is negatively valued. The ideology of rootedness in a territory conveys important cultural ideas about power, energy, strength and life force. It also encompasses notions about masculine identity as the boys’ view of place making is informed by previous notions that viewed men, rather than women, as being rooted to place, a point I will return to shortly.

²² Previous researchers have also referenced people’s loss of roots in the urban context. Jolly notes an ‘urban detachment’ occurring. She writes that people in Vila are experiencing both a freedom and a ‘loss of roots’ and this is occurring among both ‘those living in settlements with people from their own place, and those who live in more mixed suburbs or squatter settlements’ (1999: 293).

²³ Bonnemaïson (1985a: 56) notes that the missionaries tried to ‘erect a religious society with fresh roots in its new parishes’. This was their attempt to rebuild a new social system.

As the chapters in this thesis will show, the boys' planting roots, or place making activities, involve building a territorial identity through which place and society become structured. They are developing new modes of social organisation to order their social, political and economic lives. They have named the Freswota roads, a process which has inscribed them into the landscape of the area. They have developed a history of the place, and have also created stories of the place. All these practices serve to emplace them in Freswota. Through their planting roots, the Kingston-4 boys are reclaiming a sense of ni-Vanuatu efficacy and identity as a people merged with their place.

Thus for the Kingston-4 boys, planting roots is not an attempt to construct or maintain ideas of collective origins in an original place. Instead, what is emerging is a genericised understanding of island place. This is a nostalgic, idealised and romanticised sense of 'home island'. It is generalised both in time and space as it is seen to be a place of a time 'before' (*bifo*) when people lived 'simply' (*mo simpol*) in rural villages, and where everyone is seen to live a life that in comparison to life in town is 'easier' (*mo isi*), 'better' (*mo gud*), and is a place where everyone 'eats free' (*kaekae fri nomo*).

Secondly, planting roots in Freswota is a process of assimilation into a new area. Although I argue in Chapter 3 that Freswota residents emptied the place of its previous social meaning as a prelude to forming it, and thereby conceptualise themselves as the first people of the place, their place making is additionally a process of assimilation into the diverse cultural life around them. What is emerging is a Freswota youth identity that is 'creolised' (Jourdan 1996).

An important point about the boys' emplacement in Freswota is that they identify as the first people in the place, and this is how they legitimise their belonging to it. This is one reason why they emptied the land of meaning as a prelude to forming it in their own meaningful ways. I liken the Kingston-4 boys' notion that they are the first residents of Freswota, to Bonnemaïson's conception of the Tannese 'doctrine of first appearance' discussed above (1985a: 41). Jolly also notes that the Sa view those who emerged first as retaining a power and precedence (1999: 291). I suggest that the boys' hold an analogous sense of importance in conceptualising themselves as the first residents of Freswota. This is seen, for example, in the distinctions they draw between themselves and other newer residents of the community whom they often note 'have only just come' (*oli jes kam nomo*). In their distinctions, the boys' always evaluated their own practices as the right ones, as theirs are the ones that have set many precedencies of behaviour in Freswota.

While Bonnemaïson does not write about ‘Roots Men’, he does write about ‘root men’ – the men who can trace their ties to their ‘root places’. These are the men who are the keepers of powers contained in their *stamba* and who guard the theoretical mastery of the territory associated with their root place (1985a: 41). As I will discuss in Chapter 3, the boys see Freswota-4, and particularly the ‘Alick Noel ghetto’, as a holy place. I suggest that the Alick Noel ghetto can be viewed as their ‘root place’, and they its ‘root men’.

Through their practices, the boys are becoming ‘merged with the earth of that place’ (Taylor 2008a: 80). Moreover, the boys are starting their own genealogy. They are the roots, metaphorically planting themselves into the ground. I suggest that when they refer to themselves as Roots Men they are implicitly likening themselves to their first ancestors who came out of the ground and their ways of being. As one of the Kingston-4 boys said: ‘Roots Men eat the roots of the ground and also come out of the roots of the ground. Roots Men are Earth Men they have come out of the earth. As Roots Men, the boys can be viewed as the first ‘ancestors’ to the future children of the Freswota area. As well, their project of planting roots can be likened to that of the first ancestors who transformed a pre-social ‘non-place’ into a socialised place. Indeed, *Man Freswota* – ‘people from or of Freswota’ – is a recognised social identity in town. People, especially youth, contrast themselves as *man Freswota*, with other people in other residential areas of town.

It is important to note that a second meaning of Roots Men also informs the boys’ characterisation of themselves. This notion draws from, as mentioned in the Prologue, the boys’ interest in reggae music. This meaning of Roots Men is informed by ‘roots reggae’ a style of reggae music whose lyrics emerge from, and speak to, lives lived in ghettos (Chevannes 1995).²⁴ The boys often told me that Bob Marley was the ultimate Roots Man because he made roots reggae music. Some of the Kingston-4 boys symbolize their affiliation with roots reggae by wearing their hair in dreadlocks like many Reggae musicians.

The boys listen to reggae music more than any other genre (some even play in reggae bands) and its lyrics and messages influence their worldview. Reggae music speaks to and about people as exiles in Babylon, where people fight against systems of social, cultural and economic oppression which have exiled them, and within which they continue

²⁴ It needs to be pointed out that although the boys speak about living the ‘life of the ghetto’, Freswota community is less crowded than many other Port Vila communities and many of the boys live in formal houses.

to live (Chevannes 1995: 1). Resistance against the Babylon system and fighting for emancipation are two recurrent themes in roots reggae music.

I suggest that when the boys use the term Roots Men they are creatively combining roots reggae idioms with ni-Vanuatu concepts of being rooted. The boys believe they are inherently Roots Men, men who should be rooted, but the possibility to live rooted in their land has been obstructed by missionary impact, colonialism and post-colonial formal systems. For the boys, planting roots and becoming rooted is thus a project of releasing themselves from the marginalisation they experience. They liken their dreadlocks to roots, saying that their dreadlocks are their roots, are what connects them to the ground. Like their ancestors, the boys believe that rootedness confers strength, while wandering or displacement engenders 'weakness' (Jolly 1999: 292).

To elucidate the process of transformation in terms of roots is useful for the discussion that follows, as the Kingston-4 boys, like the roots they embody, are in a state of growth and change. We see that the roots the boys are planting are not roots that come from one original source, nor are they unchanging in their makeup. As Dick Hebdige, writing about cultural identity and the roots of Jamaican people appropriately notes: 'roots don't stay in one place. They change shape. They change colour. And they grow' (1987: xi). I suggest that this is the nature of the roots of the Kingston-4 boys. The boys are pushing boundaries of what defines their place, and the places to which they see themselves rooted.

Ni-Vanuatu Mobility

A discussion of roots in Vanuatu must be accompanied by some mention of mobility, as in Vanuatu the complementary relationship between movement and rootedness has been well documented in the literature. I reflect on those that are most relevant to understanding the boys' movements within Freswota.

Returning once again to the Tannese, Bonnemaïson (1985a) discusses different forms of mobility in the pre-colonial and colonial contexts. Bonnemaïson describes how Tannese believe that even though ni-Vanuatu are part of a locality, they are also a member of a 'territorially defined canoe', which is a mobile structure destined to follow routes (1985a: 42). Bonnemaïson explains that the canoe metaphor reflects a notion of wider social space. Within their territorial rootedness there exists a notion of mobility along defined routes within the territory and within the territories of one's alliances.

Bonnemaison reduces the mobility of pre-colonial times to three main types of journeys. The first is the initiation journey where young chiefs trace the voyage of their ancestors in order to know the boundaries of their territory and reaffirm relationships with allies and social partners (1985a: 49). The second journey type is the ritual voyage. These journeys lead to reciprocal exchange relationships with alliances and with people in other territorial boundaries (1985a: 50). The last type is the refugee, who journeys to places to seek asylum during misfortune (1985a: 50). Bonnemaison suggests that the canoe concept provides a framework for ni-Vanuatu experience of mobility while continuing to preserve their rootedness (1985a: 61). According to Bonnemaison, ni-Vanuatu are rooted people participating in cultural journeying and voyaging.

The reason for this account of ni-Vanuatu journeying is to help understand the movements of the boys in Freswota, as their movements are informed by some of these cultural precedents as well. Indeed, Bonnemaison noted that during colonialism, people adapted their mobility in ways that he suggests are ‘translations’ of these three dominant ways of being mobile (1985a: 54).

As the ethnography in this thesis will reveal, the boys’ movements within Freswota 1-6, their interactions with Freswota residents, and with other squads in Freswota, can be likened to Tannese notions of journeying, albeit on a much smaller scale, and among routes and roads that are not yet formally secured. While Freswota 1-6 areas are more familiar travelled routes, with exchange activities with squads there, other communities around town are considered areas inhabited by potentially threatening strangers.

Furthermore, both journeys of the past, and the boys’ journeys of the present, involve many of the same social practices. As the chapters in this thesis will demonstrate, planting roots in Freswota involves expanding their exchange networks beyond their own squad, establishing order, safety and security in their territory, knowing and establishing boundaries of their place, and coming into relationship with people from outside their own ‘root place’. Parts of Freswota are also places of refuge, as exemplified in a story in Chapter 5 of a Kingston-4 boy, who after leaving Seminary College, had nowhere else to go, and found refuge in Freswota. We see therefore that in much the same way that the Kingston-4 boys’ planting roots is a project of reclaiming rootedness to a territory and a rooted identity, it is also about reclaiming the ‘strategic or motivated mobility’ which, is a highly valued part of being a ni-Vanuatu male (Jolly 1999: 284).

The gendered nature of people’s movements is one important theme in the literature on mobility in Vanuatu. The literature has described ni-Vanuatu likening men to

trees powerfully rooted in place, while women are compared to birds who (through exogamous marriage) are destined to settle elsewhere (Bonnemaizon 1985a: 37, Jolly 1999: 284). Bonnemaizon writes that while the 'earth is a resonant masculine domain, rich in sacred powers and the hearth of rootedness, the air and sky are light feminine domains linked with movements' (1985a: 37). Jolly (1999) critiques the gendered movements in Vanuatu noting that the greater issue is not just that they are gendered, but that the movements are differently valued. She writes that while ni-Vanuatu privilege mobility over immobility, different types of mobility are valued differently. Wandering, floating and enforced marriage, mostly the domain of women, are deplored and devalued, while strategic and motivated movements, mostly the domain of men, are highly valued (1999: 284).

This is an important point for considering the condition of the Kingston-4 boys in Freswota. As this study focuses on young men, it raises particular gender issues, especially with regards to these previous understandings of gendered movements and mobility. As will be seen throughout this thesis, movements in Freswota continue to be gendered. While Jolly argues that the colonial period reversed the gendered nature of ni-Vanuatu movements, as men who sought work in plantations became mobile, while women remaining in the villages became rooted (1999: 292), I suggest that this configuration is reversing once again. I base this claim on observing that more young women in Freswota seem to be formally employed than young men and this financial success is engendering their greater mobility and freedom. I met many young women who said they are choosing who they marry, where they live, and with whom they spend their time. I even came across several examples of employed young women who had established their own households exclusively with other employed female friends. These young women said that because they were financially independent they could live with friends and thus remove themselves from the dominance of their fathers and brothers. In contrast, many young men in Freswota, such as most of the Kingston-4 boys, find that their mobility in town is curtailed due to their lack of formal education and formal employment. One of the assertions I make throughout this thesis is that planting roots in Freswota is one form through which the Kingston-4 boys try to reclaim a masculine strength conveyed through motivated mobilities.

Lastly, one of the more general points about the literature on mobility is that ni-Vanuatu mobility in the 19th and 20th centuries was circular in nature (Bedford 1977). Journeys were strictly controlled and intended always to return back to the voyager's

place. It was in the latter half of the 19th century that islanders' journeying patterns started to change as they left their home islands for longer periods of time (Bedford 1977). For instance, a significant number of Pacific Islanders worked on sugar cane and copra plantations in Queensland, Fiji (Corris 1973; Moore 1993) and on other islands in the archipelago. Bonnemaïson writes that many islanders experienced 'going away for wage labour as if it were another cultural journey' (1985a: 54).

Literature on ni-Vanuatu mobility written in the 1970s and 1980s argue that despite growing settlements in the town areas, islanders' movements continued to be circular in nature. As Bonnemaïson noted in 1985: 'Melanesian mobility is still largely circular, congruent with a mental attitude that indissolubly links identity with faithfulness to the territory of origin' (1985b: 57; 1976).

In the 1980s, Gerald Haberkorn (1989, 1992) began examining the extent to which migrant settlement in town was transforming into a more permanent condition. He found that many migrants were having children in town, that people were visiting their home islands less frequently, and that the majority of people surveyed who were married, were living in Port Vila with their wives and children. As such, Haberkorn argued that permanent residency in town existed. Haberkorn noted, however, that permanent residency did include continued demonstrated commitment to the home islands. Residents in town sent their children to the home island for holidays and education, sent remittances back, and still regarded their islands as 'home'. Reviewing Haberkorn's work, Lamont Lindstrom noted that the level of sustainability of this commitment into the future was not made clear (1994: 162).

In accordance with Haberkorn, my research demonstrates that a growing population of Port Vila residents are no longer engaged in circular migration. Many Port Vila residents are firmly committed to the development of life in town, both in the present and for the future. Formal schooling, the emergence of 'town ways of living' (*fasin blo taon*), and for some, the purchase of ground in town have led to permanent residency in town. For example, a father of several youth in Freswota moved to Vila as a young man in the early 1970s. He told me that he is happy in town because he has his life there. Another father explained that it is unlikely he will return to his home island as he holds a 20-year mortgage for his ground and house, in addition to several other loans he has taken to educate his children.

Far from suggesting that they will return or retire to their home islands, these examples demonstrate a commitment to home ownership in town, to the education of

children beyond primary school, and to the future sustainability of a life in town. My research also demonstrates, in response to Lindstrom's query, that financial and social commitment to home islands has diminished for many town residents. Many first-generation migrants spend their financial resources on their families in town and most young people can neither afford to send remittances to the islands, nor have strong relationships with extended kin living there (see Chapter 3).

Many of the youth who have lived in town since birth, are second-generation migrants and thus first-generation 'urbanites'.²⁵ Although the 2009 national census indicates that rural to urban migration continues to be the main cause of population growth in Port Vila, and therefore most residents are still characterised as 'migrants', reports assert that there are 'many young people born in town and who have grown up in town and the migrants are just one aspect of the urban scene' (Vanuatu Cultural Centre 2008: 15).

Even though it has not yet been the topic of extensive anthropological research, it is becoming evident that there is an emerging population, like the Kingston-4 boys, who have lived in town since birth and who will not return to their parents' home islands. The results of an informal survey I conducted in Freswota in 2010 support this claim.²⁶ Out of a total of 50 youth surveyed between the ages of 15 and 29 who live in Freswota, 91% said they were born in town, 58% said they were born to parents of two island places, and 72% said they had never visited either of their parents' home islands.

Jolly noted in 1999 that 'rootedness in a village and in a particular landscape is constructed now in opposition to the detachment of town and the mobility of modernity' (1999: 292). I suggest that the boys' planting roots in Freswota, and their development of roads and routes in town that are commensurate with the movements of their predecessors, reveals a contrasting picture. The notion of opposition, that people in town are 'detached' and with unmotivated mobility, no longer holds true for many town residents.

Building Communities in New Places

'It is not unusual in the Pacific', writes Martin Silverman, 'to encounter people who trace their origins to other places either in recent, remote or mythological time' (1977: 5).

Indeed, in Vanuatu, changing residence and location has never been an uncommon

²⁵ Haberkorn writes that the children born in Vila in the 1980s and 1990s to migrant men and women are the first ni-Vanuatu to be classified by the Vanuatu census as 'non-migrants' (1989:14).

²⁶ This survey was carried out in the Freswota Football field over three days during Independence Day celebrations in 2009.

practice. Margaret Rodman (1985) suggests, for instance, that hamlets were never experienced as static but were mobile. Additionally, Robert Tonkinson notes that people traditionally abandoned their hamlets from time to time and rebuilt new hamlets on new sites (1977: 280; see also Taylor 2008a: 135). Jolly also writes that natural disasters, warfare and other migrations led to people relocating to other areas on the islands and to other islands (1994: 98). Exogamous marriages have led to emigration as well. Movements of people before foreign settlers arrived in the archipelago were mostly of this nature (Bedford 1977).

In building a framework to help understand the boys' planting roots in Freswota, and why their project is an emerging new phenomenon, we also need to identify how previous relocated and migrant Melanesians have developed their communities and villages in new areas. As it will become clear, the main difference between the boys' planting roots in Freswota and the practices of other communities is that the boys are neither transplanting a community from an island, nor recreating an island community in town.

Anthropologists have long been interested in how Pacific Islanders' experience community relocations and migrations to new places.²⁷ Howard and Howard (1977) for instance, write about the Rotumans in Fiji who after emigrating to another area in Fiji are drawing on their shared common history to transform themselves into an ethnic group within the larger social system. Knudson has shown that Gilbert Islanders relocated to the Solomon Islands have created 'relatively self-sufficient communities' by transplanting the social system from their old place into the new place (1977: 196). A last example is Larson's writing about Tikopia Solomon Islanders and their establishment of a community near the capital. Larson notes that 'frustration' and 'insecurity' permeates community life as they try to recreate a social system in a new environment that they insist is an extension of their Tikopia homeland (1977: 242).

In Vanuatu, Tonkinson (1977; 1985) has written about southeast Ambrymese Islanders who relocated and developed a new community known as Maat Efate near Port Vila following a volcanic eruption.²⁸ Tonkinson argues that relocation to Maat did not produce marked socio-cultural changes, as Maat Efate was developed as a southeast

²⁷ Anthropologists have also written about transnational migration of Pacific Islanders (see Lee 2008).

²⁸ Tonkinson refers to the village as Maat or Maat Efate, however during my fieldwork the village was known as Mele Maat.

Ambrymese village. He writes that architecturally and culturally, it more closely resembled their home island village than it did any of its peri-urban neighbours (1977: 281).

While Tonkinson examines a relocated island community outside Port Vila, Lindstrom (2011) shows that migrants to residential areas of Port Vila also establish communities in the manner of the villages on their home islands. Lindstrom writes that town communities ‘reproduce the village. These divide up into multiple, smaller clusters of houses typically inhabited by extended family members, other people from the same original village or region’ (2011: 259). He notes that migrants from Tanna Island, for example, have named their neighbourhood after one of Tanna’s volcanic vents. He writes that when they can afford it, people return home for Christmas, send their children home to be cared for by extended family, and send remittances, in order to maintain their family’s exchange responsibilities (2011: 260).

Research conducted by Craig Lind (2010) in a Paamese community of town also demonstrates that islanders recreate their home islands in town. Lind writes that not only do first-generation migrants recreate island life in town, but so do second and even third-generations who have lived their whole life in town since birth. He writes that Paamese, view place as not reducible to a specific location. Rather, place is ‘manifest’ in Paamese people (2010: 22). He argues that even young people who have never been to Paama say not only that they are from Paama, but also that they living in Paama (2010: 33). Lind writes that: ‘Paamese sense of being Paamese is in no means bound to geography, language or ethnicity because it accommodates persons who were not born on or visited the island itself and/or those persons who speak no Paamese at all’ (2010: 93).

Jean Mitchell’s (2002) research in Blacksands, a predominantly Ambrymese community on the outskirts of town, though residents from other islands also live there, additionally demonstrates that town communities recreate island life. Mitchell suggests, however, that migrants not only recreate island life but engage in making new spatial and temporal meanings as well. In her work, Mitchell argues that town settlements provide ‘imaginative possibilities’ and innovation that does not erode but ‘may embellish *kastom* practices’ (2002: 464). In keeping with Mitchell, this thesis shows that the boys’ relationships with the Freswota area, and community, differ in significant ways from the relationships with town place in the other cases cited above. The main point of difference is that the boys do not identify themselves as migrants— neither circular migrants nor relocated migrants, nor as part of the ‘urban drift’, as was the case among the youth with whom Mitchell worked (2002: 187). Furthermore, the Kingston-4 boys do not see

themselves as living in a territorial extension of their home island. Rather, as I will discuss shortly, the boys identify themselves as ‘children in town’. This is a marked change in the experience of living in town, and an important part of what is engendering the transformation in where they are primarily locating their sense of identity and being.

Secondly, because the Kingston-4 boys are not living in a community of people from their same island place they do not live with a transplanted social system from any one-island place. Thus the boys’ place making in Freswota cannot be categorised as one of ‘resettlement’ either. Michael Lieber defines resettlement as a process by which a ‘number of culturally homogenous people from one locale come to live together in a different locale’ (1977: 343). While many communities in town can be classified in these terms, Freswota community, as I argue in Chapter 2, is a culturally diverse community in which their own-shared system of social order and techniques of social organisation are developing.

As this thesis focuses on migrant experiences, on relationship with home island; on transforming experiences of place; and on place making activities in town, it draws on the literature of Tonkinson, Mitchell, Lindstrom, and Lind, who have all specifically written about these issues. It is important to note, that although the Kingston-4 boys do not define themselves as migrants their focus on being the first residents in Freswota, as well as their experience of making place, is in keeping with this literature on migration and resettlement.

By examining Freswota residents’ experiences of the Freswota community we see an emergent transformation. We see diminished relationship with home island place, the development of a style of community that differs from other styles in town, as well as the creation of a new social order instead of adapting a transplanted one. Freswota can thus be conceptualised as a new kind of place emerging in Vanuatu. As it will become evident, however, the boys’ place making activities are informed by the practices of previous generations. This emergent transformation therefore cannot be viewed as a process of change without acknowledging the continuity in the practices through which this transformation is also occurring.

As the Kingston-4 boys often told me, they have only just started planting roots in Freswota. Kingston-4 boy Alfred said: ‘Some of us aren’t planting roots yet but are just planning the planting of the roots’. Another boy, Arthur explained:

Roots is about having a tribe, it is about having a place where you come from. We are in the early stages of just planting these roots in Freswota now. But the

tree is not bearing fruit yet. We are still planting the roots of the tree that will bear the fruit in the future. Now we are just building Freswota so that it will become a good place... we don't have a central plan yet. We are still getting ideas and putting them together to make Freswota a better place.

As these words reveal, their transforming of Freswota into a place imbued with greater shared significance, shared social order and a strong locative identity, is a process still very much in the 'planting' phase of its growth and development.

Ontological Shift

Despite movements and relocations to new places, the anthropological literature has demonstrated that ni-Vanuatu continue to perceive themselves as primarily emplaced in their home islands or autochthonous places (Bonnemaison 1985a, 1985b, 1994; Tonkinson 1985; Rawlings 1999; Mitchell 2002; Bolton 2003; Eriksen 2008; Lind 2010).

Bonnemaison, writing in 1984, suggested for example, that even though 'space is now endless and uniform with alliance networks spreading much farther than before... changes in the scale and intensity of movement have not destroyed the traditional relationship between people and their territory' (1985b: 78). Similarly, Tonkinson, writing in 1986, said that for the southeast Ambrymese who relocated to Maat Efate growing up in Maat Efate did not change the home village from continuing to be the source of their identity and belonging (1985: 152). Tonkinson wrote that the inhabitants of Maat Efate 'consider themselves to be ethnically southeast Ambrymese and are unequivocal about this continuing identification with the homeland' (1977: 281).

Rawlings (1999) and Mitchell (2002) have also demonstrated that migrants in town, as well as those who were born and raised in town 'continue to identify primarily with their island or village of origin' (Rawlings 1999: 75). As Rawlings wrote in 1999, most people in Port Vila consider themselves to be migrants and 'it is rare that the term *man Vila* (person from Port Vila) is used by either rural or urban migrants in town or by peri-urban villagers, except perhaps by way of insult, as it is similar to saying 'you have no place' (1999: 76).

The question that begs asking, is why a transformation in the location of their emplaced identity is emerging among the Kingston-4 boys in Freswota? Why is a home island place no longer the primary register for some young people who were born and have grown up in town? In answering this question I suggest that it is the boys' specific

condition of not having access to land and thus their experience of being ‘unplaced’ which involves an ontological shift where the very meaning of what it is to ‘be’ is becoming redefined (Austin-Broos 2009).

Indeed, from a discussion of the literature we see that a continued relationship to the land of one’s place is a significant part of the maintenance of connection to a place. Returning to Tonkinson, he notes that the ‘apparent permanence’ of Maat Efate is problematic for both the Maat villagers and the islanders on southeast Ambrym as the land that belongs to the relocated Maat people remains, yet ‘is unavailable for occupation by the other villagers’ (1977: 21). Tonkinson writes that there is subtle pressure on the Maat people to either return to Ambrym, or make a decision about the future use of their land. Through Tonkinson’s ethnography we see a strong reason for why long term residents in town have continued to articulate their intent to return to their home islands. Tonkinson makes clear that people do not want to relinquish rights to their land, as it is their ‘most important resource’ (1977: 21).

I suggest that for the boys, not having access to land on their home islands is a change that involves an ontological shift where not having access to land is forcing a shift in where they see themselves rooted. Austin-Broos (2009) uses the term ‘ontological shift’ to explain a change in being that has occurred among the Arrernte Aborigines of Central Australia. Austin-Broos argues that the Western Arrernte’s condition of living and being today is framed by a past in which losing their land, which forced a transition from a hunter gatherer society to a local economy centred on a mission station, in conjunction with a state-sponsored project of ‘return to tradition’, has led to a radical marginalisation involving an ontological shift.

This does not mean, she explains, simply changed conditions, but drawing from Heidegger she writes that:

When [people’s relational] orders are disrupted... things and strategies start to lose sense. At the same time, other phenomena become apparent or ‘present,’ waiting to be invested with value as social practice changes course... Furthermore, this form of change concerns both social environments and the human subject, so that embodied identity, the very meaning of what it is to ‘be’, can be redefined. (2009: 5-6)

I believe that two changes among the Kingston-4 boys involve an ontological shift. The first, as already mentioned, is that the boys’ experience themselves as displaced from their home islands, a point I will substantiate through ethnography in Chapter 1. A key part of appreciating the experience of the Kingston-4 boys lies in understanding that without

access to land, they are forced into participating in the market economy of the country. For many ni-Vanuatu, becoming and being 'urban' now entails changed notions of value. Austin-Broos writes that while previously the value that informed the life-world of the Western Arrernte was drawn from their place, and their property was the 'practical and ritual knowledge, as well as the relatedness that gave them access to or authority over places'. In the new town context, this has been replaced. There has been a transformation into a social order where value is now invested in capital, property, cash, manufactured goods and commodities (2009: 6). I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys are experiencing a similar transformation and the tension between value systems is causing social suffering. Such a shift in value systems has led to a crisis among youth whose opportunity to be socially reproductive has become limited (2009: 9).

The second point is that the Kingston-4 boys' experience of marginalisation is also partly due to a particular national discourse. As already mentioned, it was during the Vanuatu Independence movement that the Vanuatu government tried to build a unified national identity by impressing upon people the notion of the home island identity (Patterson 1992; Jolly 1994; Bolton 1999, 2003). For youth who experience themselves as 'unplaced', living in a national climate where everyone is believed to have a place, evokes a sense of deficiency of their very being. As Ritchie, a Kingston-4 boy put it: 'you're a half-man that's all.' I return to this topic in Chapter 1.

The reproduction of the notion that everyone has a home island is evidenced in the ubiquity of the question 'Where are you from?' – prompting for a home island answer. That town is not perceived as a place to which a ni-Vanuatu can be from is revealed in instances when small children in Freswota exclaim: 'I am from Freswota' (*mi blo Freswota*), and that this always leads to a quick correction from parents.

As this thesis will show, many Kingston-4 boys reject both the idea that they are migrants who should frame their social world in terms of a home island place, and the implication that without such a home island place identification they are deficient unplaced beings. As Jolly has noted: the 'value of being 'of the place' is... seen as superior to that of being an immigrant' (1999: 292). The Kingston-4 boys are rejecting being evaluated by these past standards. Seeing themselves as primarily emplaced in an island place, and or migrants in the town place, no longer suits the context of their present.

From 'Vila bay' to 'Vila town'

As I have explained the framework for the boys' planting roots, I now turn to a brief discussion of the development of Port Vila town, as it is the broader context within which the boys live.

Port Vila is located along the shores of Vila Bay, where yachts and small boats are now often anchored. It is a busy town with traffic jams, honking buses, and crowded pedestrian sidewalks. On the southern end of town one finds Vila's main market house, where women sell fruits and vegetables and cooked food. The market house is connected to another market selling t-shirts, necklaces, baskets and woodcarvings, by a cement boardwalk along the water. Ni-Vanuatu, tourists, expatriates, volunteers and researchers in town often stroll the board walk or sit eating food at a café there, or in the park that also sits along the waters' edge.

Several small roads lead away from the park and waterfront, and merge onto one of the two main thoroughfares through the town. This first thoroughfare is called the Lini Highway and it is named after Father Walter Lini the founding prime minister of the country. It is a two-lane road, unmarked, and without traffic lights. The road is lined with small shops. Some shops sell trinkets, post cards, and sunglasses, while others specialise in electronics, fashion, or sell alcohol, cigarettes, and expensive perfumes that can be bought 'duty free'. This street also has a few of Vila's restaurants including a French patisserie, an American restaurant offering hamburgers and hotdogs, as well as several bars and nightclubs popular with expatriates in town. Digicel's flagship mobile phone shop and the Vanuatu post office are also found there. Two large hotels punctuate the road, one which is the tallest building in town (approximately 6 stories), complete with a top floor restaurant and a casino.

The second main thoroughfare, slightly more inland and running parallel to the first, is the Rue de Paris. This road is also busy, yet visited less frequently by tourists, expatriates and ni-Vanuatu middle classes. This is 'China-Town' and its shops are mostly Chinese owned businesses selling inexpensive clothing, electronics, yards of fabric, and household supplies. It is also the location of the police station and the home of 'Club Vanuatu' frequented by ni-Vanuatu youth. China-Town is where many ni-Vanuatu go to shop and also to wait for their buses home. From this road, smaller roads branch out, many which lead inland and towards the residential communities that surround the town centre.



Figure 1: Aerial Photo of Port Vila



Figure 2: Port Vila: Lini Highway



Figure 3: Port Vila: Rue de Paris



Figure 4: Port Vila Market House

One of the most notable features of Port Vila, as well as other Pacific Nation towns, is their current rapid growth, both by rural-urban migration and natural increase (Connell and Curtain 1982: 121). In 2009, the population of Vanuatu was approximately 234,000 and of that 25% were living in Port Vila, or its other town Luganville (often called Santo Town) on the island of Santo. As Bonnemaïson noted in 1985, only five years after Vanuatu achieved independence: ‘the town is seen as a place of freedom and a symbol of modernity; the cultural charge it carries is enough to ensure its magnetism’ (1985a: 57). In the past 50 years, the population of Port Vila has grown rapidly. It has grown from 8,000 in 1970, to 16,000 in 1980, to 38,438 in 1999, to 44,039 in 2009 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009b).

As the statistics reveal, the development of Vila as an urban place has been rapid and recent. Port Vila is situated on land that originally belonged to Ifiran people of south Efate. In the 1880s European traders and missionaries began building houses there. In 1873 a Presbyterian Mission was established on Iriki, the islet in Vila Bay, and ‘Vila Bay’ became the first recorded non-Indigenous settlement in the area (MacClancy 1980; Bennett 1957, in Haberkorn 1989: 7). In 1906, France and Britain began a joint rule of the islands

under the Anglo-French Condominium Government of the New Hebrides. The establishment of the Condominium attracted more, mostly European settlers, and the population of Vila Bay grew, as did the physical infrastructure to support them. Like in other countries in the Pacific, the urbanisation of the area was the direct result of colonial projects; there had been no prior indigenous cities or towns (Connell and Lea 1994: 383).

The growth of Vila gained further momentum during the Second World War when American troops constructed a military base on the north of the island. According to Haberkorn (1989), the Americans ‘practically built a town overnight’ as approximately 10,000 ni-Vanuatu worked for the American forces in Port Vila (and Santo Town). Haberkorn writes that it is in this context that most ni-Vanuatu came into contact with urban life for the first time.

Vila’s growth in the years following the war continued, the result of increased rural-urban mobility (rather than natural population growth) as new plantations around the Vila area provided employment opportunities, and local education, medical and agricultural services also improved. Haberkorn suggests that it was during these years that the first more permanent urban relocations of rural ni-Vanuatu took place.

The 1960s and 1970s were a period of extensive growth due to increased government spending, economic expansion, and the introduction of a tax haven (Rawlings 1999: 84). Vila became a ‘boom town’:

Thirteen overseas banks opened their doors, the expatriate population tripled, subdivisions sprouted in what had been previously virgin bush and, as a side effect, tourism took off. Two large new hotels were built to international standards, air services increased rapidly and cruise ships tied up at regular intervals alongside a newly built wharf capable of berthing vessels up to 40,000 tons. Suddenly Port Vila was on the map. (Forster 1980: 371, in Haberkorn 1989: 11)

The 1970s also saw the movement for independence. This culminated on July 30th 1980, when British and French Government officials withdrew and the islands became the Republic of Vanuatu.

In the years after independence, migration to town accelerated, particularly the migration of females as economic development in town expanded bureaucratic and service jobs that created employment for women. This increased presence of females in town resulted in a natural population growth and it is the children born in Vila in the 1980s and 1990s who are the first ni-Vanuatu classified by the Vanuatu census as ‘non-migrants’ (Haberkorn 1989: 14).

One reason for Port Vila's rapid growth in the 1980s was because prior to independence ni-Vanuatu were prohibited from settling in Vila by colonial policies that operated through explicit ideas of race. Pacific towns had been developed as 'white' spaces (Rodman 1987: 1). Right from the start, employment was a precondition for islanders to be in town, an idea that Mitchell observes has continued to inform perceptions about life in town today, illustrated by regular suggestions that unemployed youth return to their home islands (2004: 361) – a discourse still heard today.

In 2010, Port Vila included the area that was officially designated in 1980 as the 'Port Vila Municipality', essentially government-owned land, and the autochthonous villages of South Efate that are classified as peri-urban communities due to their close proximity to town (Rawlings 1999: 73; Chung and Hill 2002: 7).

The speed of Vila's growth has led to a lack of affordable and available dwellings in town. Many ni-Vanuatu live in 'informal housing' or 'informal settlements' – living areas not in accordance to legal housing regulations (Chung and Hill 2002). However, as most residents have permission to live on the land, the terms 'squatter settlement' and 'shanty-town', sometimes used to describe these areas, are not accurate (Chung and Hill 2002). I also suggest that the term 'settlement', which as Goddard notes for Port Moresby, was first introduced by Europeans, and still connotes dispossession, unemployment and criminality, is not an accurate description of where people live (2005: 45, 2001: 4). Throughout this thesis I use 'community' (*komuniti*) and 'area' (*eria*), rather than 'settlement', as these are the terms I observed ni-Vanuatu using themselves, and as people living in Port Vila's residential areas reject being labelled unemployed and criminal.

The Freswota youth I came to know, who were born just after independence, told me that the years after independence were a time of hopefulness, where people dreamed of prosperity and opportunity in town. However, the new government, finding itself 'understaffed and lacking in experience' began struggling with their administration (MacClancy 1980: 153). Increasing disagreement and corruption among politicians led to a splitting of the main political parties, and the governing of the archipelago went into decline. Bolton writes that during this time the government, as well as the many international aid agencies who had come to assist the development of the new nation, were focused on providing services to rural populations and thus the population of Vila developed almost 'invisibly and unattended' (Bolton (n.d.) 2010: 4-5). Mitchell (2002) describes the youth of this time walking around restlessly, disempowered by their lack of opportunity for formal education and formal employment.

Unemployment continues to characterise the life of many people in town (see Appendix 2). The rising cost of food, transportation, electricity, and living expenses has resulted in a precarious socio-economic context that researchers have observed in other rapidly growing Pacific cities such as Honiara, Solomon Islands and Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea (see Connell and Lea 1994, 2002). When people speak about life in town they frequently say that ‘life in town is not good’ (*laef lo taon i no gud*). Cited reasons for characterising town as ‘not good’ are overcrowded conditions in many of the communities, inattentive landlords, poor conditions of the houses, and a lack of sufficient infrastructure. In addition, people fear the crime and violence in town, and with just reason, as incidents of theft and burglary, rape, assault, domestic violence and even murder are not uncommon. As well, many residents complain that town is full of temptation; that easy access to ideas of the ‘white-man’ and ‘over-seas’ products such as DVDs, cigarettes, alcohol, and late nights at nightclubs have contributed to a loss of tradition and respectful living.

When recounting the difficulties of town, many residents nearly always offer a contrast to town – the rural islands. Even children who have never travelled out of Vila expressed that ‘life on the islands is easier’ (*laef lo aelan i mo isi*) as on the islands the food one grows in ones gardens is abundant and free. Most youth I knew, including the Kingston-4 boys, held a nostalgic and idealistic view of island life. The only category of youth I encountered who did not hold this attitude were youth who have both had little exposure to island life, and who have been fortunate enough to continue into secondary education (and beyond) and thus are or will be employable in town.

Urban Vanuatu

People in Vanuatu often talk in terms of an ‘urban’/‘rural’ dichotomy. The anthropological literature also often distinguishes Port Vila (as well as Santo Town) from other areas in Vanuatu by referring to Port Vila as ‘urban’ and its residents as ‘urbanites’ and ‘urbane’. I try throughout this thesis to use the term ‘town’ instead as it is the term ni-Vanuatu use themselves when making the distinction. Mitchell argues that the urban/rural binary in Vanuatu needs to be undermined by ‘showing how village and town are interwoven’ (2002: 3).

Indeed, here I also suggest that ‘urban’ or ‘town’ as a category of analysis for conceptualising the transformations occurring among youth is limiting. Definitions of

urban connote ideas about particular boundaries (Wirth 1938), yet in Vanuatu, as is the case in many parts of the world, practices of ‘urban life’ are found even in rural areas.

Louis Wirth (1938) argues for moving beyond conceptualisations of ‘urban’ as a bounded space, to frame urban instead as a ‘way of life’. Wirth writes that:

As long as we identify urbanism with the physical entity of the city, viewing it merely as rigidly delimited in space, and proceed as if urban attributes abruptly ceased to be manifested beyond an arbitrary boundary line, we are not likely to arrive at any adequate conception of urbanism as a mode of life. (1938: 4)

Wirth suggests that urbanisation be viewed as a process by which ‘persons are attracted to a place called the city and incorporated into its system of life’ (1938: 5). Thomas Blom Hansen and Oskar Verkaaik have argued that despite decades of urban anthropology, little ‘attention has been paid to the urban as a kind of sociality, a mental condition but also a way of being in the world’ (2009: 12). They promote for future research to follow this approach.

The conceptualisation of urban in this thesis follows along these lines. I consider urban to be a ‘way of life’ that can be practiced anywhere despite location. I also suggest that in Vanuatu it is the analytic category of ‘town’, different to that of ‘urban’, which provides for greater distinction between experiences of people in ‘rural’ and ‘urban’ Vanuatu. I adopt this approach for while urban is a ‘way of life’, ‘town’ is the place which encompasses the commodities, experiences and opportunities that are only found in town. For instance, when people describe town, they speak about nightclubs, electricity, ice cream, butter and cold drinks, traffic jams, and other aspects of town life that are not found on the islands.

This thesis is neither about ‘urbanisation’ specifically, nor about ‘urban Vanuatu’, but focuses on forms of life lived within one area of town, Freswota-4. Furthermore, as I have suggested, the Kingston-4 boys’ condition of being in town is not reducible to their being ‘urban’, but is due to a specific colonial and postcolonial history of Vanuatu as well as the rapid development of Port Vila as a town.

Freswota Community and Situating the Field-Site

Having described the wider context within which this research project takes place, I will now give an outline of the Freswota community in order to situate the specific field site of this project.

Not long after I arrived in Port Vila, an anthropologist suggested that I might explore Freswota as a possible site for my research. I asked my new acquaintances, ni-Vanuatu researchers working at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, for their opinions. To my disappointment, despite knowing that I wanted to research the lives of youth in town, they unanimously agreed that my living in Freswota would be a bad idea.

They told me that drunk people slept on Freswota roads, houses were overcrowded, families did not take care of their children and most importantly, unlike the communities in which they lived, Freswota residents, because it is a 'mixed-island' community, do not 'cooperate' together. They explained that the lack of cooperation between residents made Freswota a difficult place in which to do research; that their own attempts to host youth workshops in Freswota had failed every time. When I asked whether another of the ni-Vanuatu residential communities around town (see Map 2) might be better suited, my new acquaintances said no. Pressing the issue of my safety they encouraged me instead to live in Mele village, one of the villages outside town.

Despite their discouragement, I insisted that a trip to Freswota was needed. One researcher kindly agreed to accompany me. She had heard that a volunteer had recently left the Freswota Primary School and his room had become free. The bus ride from the centre of town to Freswota-4 did not take long. From the window I watched as the dense shopping area slowly turned into vacant lots with shops under construction, then into areas of overgrown shrubbery with a few houses here and there. When the bus made the turn onto the paved road into Freswota I saw houses side by side, each one surrounded by a fence or hedge. The bus turned a corner and then stopped by a dirt road, beside an overgrown football field, opposite the primary school that I observed was still very much under construction. We went into the school and made our inquiries. To my great relief the room had already been let. I wrote in my notes that evening:

It is especially hot in Freswota, there is no breeze and the banana trees are scorched. When I stepped out of the bus I knew instantly that I would not be happy here. The community is spread over a large area with lots of unmarked small dirt roads connected to a long tarred main road. There are no people on the roads, and fences and gates separate the houses. It is not at all like the villages where residents are outside washing and cooking and the children are in between the houses playing. I can picture myself walking up and down these hot roads looking, without success, for people to talk to. I should have visited Freswota before trying so hard to live there.

Subsequently I followed my colleagues' suggestion and moved to the 'more cooperative' and 'safer' Mele village.

Six weeks later, however, I found myself in Freswota once again - this time as a guest at a ni-Vanuatu friend's *kastom* marriage ceremony. Unlike my first visit, which was at noon in November, this visit was during the early evening and therefore was cooler than before, and so when our truck turned into Freswota, the sights, sounds and smells that jumped out at me showed a completely different landscape.

The previously deserted roads were full of buses and people walking home from work exchanging 'good-night' greetings to passers-by. The football field where we had alighted from the bus on my first visit had been mown and was full of children chasing balls. Beneath the mango tree, in front of the school, women were selling bushels of island cabbage and baskets of yams to residents for their dinner. I also saw, for the first time, scattered along the road, the red, green and blue lights of the kava bars, and men sitting on wooden benches inside enjoying their first bowls or 'shells' (*sels*) of kava.²⁹ When I arrived at the house where the ceremony was being held, I heard the sounds in the neighbouring yards of women washing clothing, and children being pushed under taps for their evening 'shower' (*swim*).³⁰ Unlike my first observations of Freswota, where I had experienced Freswota as desolate, this second visit showed me a Freswota rich with people, their movements and social interactions.

I left Mele village soon afterwards and subsequently lived in Freswota for the rest of my fieldwork. During my time there I came to know well the small roads and the people who walked along them. I became friends with the women under the mango tree and with the children playing games in the football field. My first experience of Freswota, and the Freswota that I left many months later, were in remarkable contrast.

As previously mentioned, Freswota was established as a project to provide affordable housing to the many migrants in town. I describe the history of Freswota in Chapter 3, suffice it to say here, at the time of independence, the land that is now called Freswota, was purchased from a French plantation owner and subdivided into sections numbered Freswota-1 through to Freswota-6 (see map 3).³¹

²⁹ Kava is a popular drink made from the roots of the piper methysticum 'pepper' plant. It is not fermented, but is ground and mixed with water. It has sedative and anesthetic properties. Most of the Kingston-4 boys drink kava most evenings.

³⁰ Ni-Vanuatu use this English term to mean bathe.

³¹ The division of Freswota into numbered areas 1 – 6 is for organization and municipal administration purposes. Likely, it follows a pattern of numbering observed during the American military presence in Vila where Vila was sectioned into numbered areas still used today such as the areas called 'number two' (*numbatu*) and number three (*numbatri*).

Residents estimated that the population of Freswota 1-6 was approximately 5,000.³² In 2010 people in Vila spoke about Freswota being Port Vila's fastest growing community, and that even the plots in Freswota-6 had 'sold out'. Freswota covers an area of approximately 1 square kilometre, flanked by Port Vila's cemetery at Freswota-1, and by a river at Freswota-6. Due to the length of the area, and because Freswota-1 and Freswota-2 are accessed by different roads, many residents of Freswota 3, 4, 5 and 6 feel that Freswota-1 and 2 operate quite separately. Indeed, most youth I knew only passed through Freswota-1 and 2 when taking a specific route to and from the town centre. Otherwise, most of their time was spent in Freswota-4, with occasional time spent in the park located in Freswota-3, or at a favourite kava bar in Freswota-5.



Figure 5: Freswota-4 Viewed from Above



Figure 6: Freswota-4



Figure 7: Freswota-4: Angel Road

The parents of many of the Kingston-4 boys, like other Freswota residents, are employed in small businesses, work as receptionists, are managers of construction companies, work in offices, or are teachers in town. Many residents also supplement their income by building small houses for rent, buying taxis and buses that friends drive on their

³² The only published figure of the community stated that its population in 2007 was 2,715 (Foundation of the Peoples of the South Pacific 2007: 15).

behalf, running kava bars, and building small convenience shops at the side of their homes.

During my time in the field most plots of land in Freswota-3 and Freswota-4 had houses already on them. Many of the houses in Freswota are permanent structures with walls built out of concrete blocks often with iron roofs. Inside, the walls are often painted bright blue or yellow, and one or two brightly coloured woven mats are positioned on the floor in between sofas of all shapes and colours.

Many other houses in Freswota, as is the case in some of Freswota-4 and much of Freswota-5, and 6, are less permanent dwellings. Many are lodgings rented out by off site landlords. They often consist of one room and are built from sheets of corrugated iron and planks of wood. Inhabitants usually share bathroom facilities with their neighbours.

In Vanuatu, houses can be warm places, especially houses with corrugated iron roofs. In Freswota, people spend much of their time outside. Women spend time in their yards or in front of their houses, washing clothes in big metal dishes, cooking on ad hoc stoves made from empty gasoline cans filled with charcoal, or relaxing on woven mats with visiting neighbours and friends. Men are often seen repairing broken cars or radios, or seated on chairs, reading the newspaper or talking with other men.

Freswota is one of many residential areas in Port Vila. Since it is the only residential area in which I lived, I cannot draw strong comparisons with other communities. Generally the reputation of Freswota, from non-Freswota residents, is that Freswota is one of the 'good' communities as Freswota is 'organised' and 'cooperative', a topic I turn to in Chapter 2. However, as mentioned, my colleagues at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre spoke about Freswota in less favourable ways. Moreover, as I witnessed, Freswota is far from being a place without violence, theft, sorcery and dispute.

As this thesis will show, Freswota is still developing as a community and the meanings being constituted in its spaces are multiple and 'multilocal' (Rodman 1992). While I do also take into account the discursive way in which Freswota-4 is being developed as a place, this thesis focuses predominantly on the experiences of just one group – the Kingston-4 boys.

Methodological Considerations and Ethics

I spent 20 months, from 2008 to 2010 conducting participant observation fieldwork. As mentioned, the first two months were spent in the context of Mele Village and 18 months were spent in Freswota.

In retrospect, the unexpected time in Mele was valuable as it gave me a base from which I have been able to make urban/ rural comparisons. Moreover, as I lived with a family, I was immediately immersed in ni-Vanuatu everyday life. This included immersion in Bislama. As the Bislama spoken in Mele village is different from the Bislama spoken by the boys in Freswota, it was when I moved to Freswota that I learned the short cuts, and the slang words young people use in town.

For the majority of my research I lived on Bani Street (see map 4) in Freswota-4. After a problematic start to my fieldwork (intending to do fieldwork in town but living in a village) finding my landlord's 'rent-house' (*rent haos*) was better luck. The rent house consisted of three one-bedroom units that were situated beside his own house. All the units, and my landlord's house, were enclosed by a fence which he locked at night and which created a yard that we all shared. Most of the time there were, including myself, approximately 15 people living within this fence and sharing this yard. I spent significant time with my landlord and his family, particularly with my landlord's daughter who was born in town and who was 16-years-old when I first met her. I also spent significant time with another family a few houses down the road.

My experience in Freswota-4 was not what my ni-Vanuatu colleagues at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre had suggested it might be. I did not find it difficult to meet people, speak to them and gain their support with this work. I became an active participant in the social life of my adoptive families, the Kingston-4 boys, Freswota girls, and other members of the community. I participated in the general life of residents which included helping with the cooking and serving of meals in homes, visiting people, watching DVDs with children on mats on the floor, attending births, funerals and marriages, assisting with local fundraising projects, and attending local meetings.

Most of my time, however, was spent with the Kingston-4 boys. I spent time with roughly 40 of the boys and came to know approximately 11 quite well. Time with the boys was spent on the road, in their ghettos, sitting behind the Alick Noel store, sitting in the grasses of the football field, at the kava bars, at the nightclubs, and participating in the community projects which the boys were involved in.



Figure 8: Freswota Football Field



Figure 9: Some of the Older Kingston-4 Boys



Figure 10: Some of the Younger Kingston-4 Boys

I did not find it difficult to research young men, quite the opposite, as they are eager to have their story told. As such, this thesis is full of their words, their slogans, their idioms, and reflects their own creative expression, as well as their eagerness for me to understand their everyday lives and record them in detail. Indeed, I fondly remember many evenings at the kava bars, where they would prompt me to take out my red notebook and record what was being said.

I explained to the chiefs and residents of Freswota that I was writing a book about young people in the community, and they received this endeavour positively. As well, my affiliation with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, well respected throughout Vanuatu for their research, documentation, and advocacy work, helped explain my presence in the community.

Since leaving the field, I have learned, that many of the ‘mothers’ (*mamas*) in Freswota-4, observing me walking around day after day and night after night with a group of boys, which women do not do (as I will mention later groups of girls and boys socialize separately), expressed concern, apparently asking each other ‘where are her parents? Who is letting her walk around here at night?’ Thus it has occurred to me, in retrospect, that people perceived me in different ways. While the young men and young women with whom I spent my time referred to me and accepted me into their lives as their ‘sister’ (*sista*), other members of the community may have questioned my morality, because

‘good’ women do not drink and smoke and ‘walk about’ (*wokbaot*) at night.³³ It is possible that they saw me as a ‘rubbish woman’ (*rabis woman*), translated as a woman who is involved in activities immoral activities.

Such a status could have impinged my research in that it could have deterred some people, perhaps some young women or people who regularly attend church, from spending time with me. However, I do not think my research was affected in any significant way. I still met and spent time with female neighbours, as well I came to know some of the community chiefs, their wives, lots of children, and quite a few of these concerned ‘mamas’. The two families who adopted me have teenage daughters who I came to know well, and one of the families is active in their church. People in town seemed to generally understand what research entails, and thus grasped my purpose. As well, in town, different standards of morality are often applied to white and ni-Vanuatu.

Besides participant-observation in Freswota, I also carried out semi-formal interviews with youth, their parents, some grandparents, and community chiefs. These were usually in reference to specific questions about topics I wanted answered. While I began fieldwork with a schedule of the topics I wanted to focus on – land, *kastom*, family etc. I soon realised that there is a fluidity to fieldwork where no matter how hard you try to learn about a specific topic, topics flow in their own order. I learned to follow the flow of fieldwork.

Besides interviews, I also conducted a few surveys including a household questionnaire and a survey collecting information on residential demography. I also carried out a few formal interviews in town with employees and volunteers at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, the Young People’s Project, Youth Challenge International, the Department of Women’s Affairs, the Women’s Centre and *Wan Smol Bag* Youth Centre. From these interviews I gained a wider contextual understanding of issues pertaining to youth in town.

Fieldwork and living in a densely populated community like Freswota was not easy. Like other community members I became ill with dengue fever during the first rainy season and malaria during the second. I was not a subject to serious violence myself, however many of my ni-Vanuatu friends were, and I tried my best while I was there to support them. While I was in Freswota there were also several surprising deaths. Two were

³³ ‘Walk about’ at night often encompasses the notion that one will be engaging in an immoral activity. This is reflected in the popular expressions, often said by older people in the community to younger people: ‘walk about on the straight road’ (*wokbaot lo stret rod*) or ‘walk about good’ (*wokbaot gud*).

explained by witchcraft, and one was a murder made to look like a suicide. The victim, whom I knew quite well, was a member of the squad of Freswota-3 boys. There was also a horrific gang rape and murder of a young woman and her child approximately 500 meters from my house. These deaths, as well as the other violence I observed, had an impact on me. I found fieldwork to be an emotional undertaking as people I knew were being killed, and a stressful endeavour as I became increasingly aware of the risk to personal safety, especially for young men and young women who choose to walk about at night.

I was also not immune to arguments and altercations. As I mention in Chapter 5, approximately 16 months into my research, some boys (mostly from Freswota-5), instigated by one boy I had upset, organized a meeting where they expressed anxiety that I knew too much about them, information they said a woman should not know. The leader of the Kingston-4 boys was asked to moderate the meeting in which they asked for my notebooks so that they could be burned. Very upset, yet bound by ethical considerations, I offered to go through the notebooks and tear out the pages that related to them. Fortunately, at the point of agreement, the leader turned to the boy who had instigated the meeting and said that what they were doing was wrong, that the Kingston-4 boys had given me permission to collect this knowledge. Head bowed low with distress, he apologized and left the meeting. The cause of the issue, I learned later, was that the boy who had instigated the meeting had been upset with me for having followed along when other boys declined to include him in an evening that involved drinking.

Thus another one of the everyday challenges I faced living in Freswota was negotiating the many financial requests from the youth with whom I was spending time. I had to learn to navigate the consequences of my saying no (as just described), and ensure that what I had to share was distributed evenly. However, as I discuss in Chapter 5, sharing and not sharing is an important signifier of social relationships in Vanuatu, and thus being part of the network of sharing and not sharing of money, food, and particularly, items of value – alcohol, cigarettes and marijuana, was a sign of my inclusion in their group. Indeed when the first Kingston-4 boy handed me a third of his cigarette to smoke, I knew I had ‘arrived’.

In Vanuatu, before starting fieldwork, researchers sign a contract with the Vanuatu Cultural Centre stipulating that researchers must participate in a project that serves the nation, and do something to benefit the local community in which they work. To fulfil this requirement I asked the boys, a few months before my departure, what I could do to both thank them for their assistance and to serve their community and the nation. They offered

two ideas. The first was to make a documentary about living in town, which they wanted to present to the government to inform them about the life of youth in town. They also wanted to distribute it to youth in the rural islands to dissuade them from migrating to town. I assisted the boys in their planning, scripting and filming of this documentary, which they called 'Now I Can See'. This was my contribution to the nation.

The boys' second request was for a pool table as the nearest one was in a nightclub in town. I raised money and the boys selected a coin-operated pool table found at a sports store in town. The boys rented a small-unused kava bar in Freswota-4 and started preparing and selling kava, cigarettes and 'games of pool'. It was a significant moment for them, as this business had the potential to give them an income and was a project they all became involved in.

In order to protect individual privacy I have changed the names and personal details of the boys and the participants involved. In accordance with the stipulations of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre research agreement, I will give a completed copy of this thesis to both the Freswota-4 community, and to the Vanuatu Cultural Centre.

Two methodological questions regarding gender can be queried in this research. The first pertains to the reputation of these young men as violent. Indeed, a question from an anthropologist I met in the field, concerned me throughout my fieldwork. She asked how I could justify researching the category of young men who are so well known for the violence they inflict on women, and for the theft and other criminal acts they commit in the community. I do not deny that many of the young men I came to know, and with whom I spent time were sometimes violent with their girlfriends and with each other, and that many had spent time in prison as a result of some of these actions. However, my interest lies in knowing these young men beyond the stereotypes of violence. Some of this violence is symptomatic of structural issues of life in town and dissatisfaction with lack of opportunities. As Martha Macintyre (2008) has also duly noted, many forms of violence seen in Pacific towns today have historical precedents as well. She suggests that violence is not necessarily a product of modern or urban processes as it is often claimed to be (2008: 180-181).

While I am neither ignoring nor justifying the boys' part in violence, a central aim of this thesis is to engage in a discussion about these types of young men that goes beyond reducing them to their violence (cf. Taylor 2008b). Being young and male and living in a Pacific town does not necessitate a discussion of violence. As this thesis will demonstrate, other aspects about them and their lives also demand our attention.

The second methodological consideration about gender emerging from this research, and that is the question ‘where are the women?’ While at first I considered writing about ‘young people’ generally, I soon realised that there were too many differences between the different categories of youth, as mentioned in the Preface, and so I narrowed my focus. It was the same when it came to writing about both young men and young women. While I do have information on many young women, who like young men also struggle without enough opportunity for formal education, or formal employment, I found that as youth spend most of their time in single sex groups, drawing generalizations about the practices of both genders together was difficult.

While the boys spend the majority of their time outside their houses, the girls spend most of their time in their houses and yards, or in the houses and yards of friends. Or if they do venture onto the roads, it is usually under the cover of night. As boys and girls engage in place making in the community differently, and as their mobility in the different spaces of the community are controlled differently, boys’ and girls’ experiences of Freswota as a place are different. I note here that it was usually in their intimate relationships at night, in their time spent at the nightclubs, and as I demonstrate in Chapter 4, through their use of the mobile phone, that boys and girls come together. Thus, as it was ethnographically too messy to focus on both genders in most chapters of this thesis, and as I spent more time with the boys, I chose to limit the scope of the thesis to the boys. Nevertheless, when it is relevant to the discussion, I include the voices and experiences of the girls, as I do with the voices of other members of the Freswota community.

As this thesis focuses on the boys, I end this Introduction with a conversation I had on the phone with Jaksil, one of the Kingston-4 boys, not long before completing the thesis. Jaksil phoned to tell me that he thought my next project in Freswota should focus on ‘diversity’. After making this suggestion, he asked me to explain diversity to him. Not knowing exactly how to word it in Bislama, I described one of the notions advocated in Freswota – that of ‘no islandism’ –which is about accepting the cultural differences of people from different islands (a topic I turn to in Chapter 2). When I finished explaining, he laughed as he said: ‘Everything you have just told me is what we taught you a few years ago’.

It is through this lens that I wish this thesis to be read. It is not a general story about all young people or young men in Freswota, Port Vila or Vanuatu. Rather, it is a contextualised account of one group of young men. It examines their place making activities in Freswota and how through this process they are not only transforming

Freswota into a meaningful place, but are also transforming themselves. As such, it seeks to bring further understanding of young peoples' creative responses in precarious living contexts, and tries to develop a greater awareness about the complexity of the lives of these otherwise stigmatised youth.

Chapter 1

Confusion Zone

Introduction

‘We don’t have ground! We are losing our identity!’ (*Yumi no gat graon! Yumi stap losim identiti blo yumi*) said Benson, one of the Kingston-4 boys. ‘Everything that God put with the ground is with the ground, all *kastom* and all things like that are with the ground. So when we don’t have ground we lose it. We lose our *kastom* stories. We lose our identity. We lose everything. When you talk about ground, you talk about human beings now.’

Benson’s words reiterated conversations I often heard with the Kingston-4 boys. During afternoons relaxing in the ghettos, and evenings seated in Freswota-4 kava bars, talk would regularly turn to their experiences as ‘landless people in town’. They would compare themselves to Islanders, who, still living on their land, they believed were living more secure lives. Frequently, during evening conversations, other kava drinkers, young and old, would move closer, attuning their ears to the boys’ hushed talk, wanting to hear more. For many ni-Vanuatu, even long-time residents in town, the notion that a ni-Vanuatu ‘does not have ground’ is implausible. As most people told me: ‘Everybody has ground, there is not a ni-Vanuatu person who does not have ground’. Accordingly, Margaret Rodman has argued that ni-Vanuatu believe rights to ground are inalienable, it is just a person’s ‘access’ to ground that can be ‘won’ or ‘lost’ (1987: 33).

In Vanuatu, the word ‘ground’ (*graon*) refers to ‘original-land’ – the land in which a person’s first ancestors and lineage forebears lived, and the ‘place’ (*ples*) from which a ni-Vanuatu person draws his or her cultural identification and articulates his or her geographical and ethnic ‘belonging’. As writer Selwyn Arutangai explains:

All ni-Vanuatu feel that ‘land is everything’, it is basic to their identity... Traditionally land is not only the source of subsistence but the mainstay of a world-view by which ni-Vanuatu cultures operate, the foundation of all custom. It represents life itself, both material and spiritual. An individual is ‘tied’ to his territory by affinity and consanguinity through blood and marriage. In Melanesian culture, he must have some land to call his (and to a lesser extent ‘her’) own, otherwise he is considered to have no roots, status or power. Survival entails understanding and working the land and following the social and political rules connected with it. (1987: 262; cf. Bolton 1999: 46)

For ni-Vanuatu, the significance of having ground is that it locates a person in kinship

networks and in their economic, social and political worlds. Benson was right when he said, ground is ‘everything’.

This chapter examines the Kingston-4 boys’ relationship with ‘original ground’, or as it is often referred to – ‘home island’ place, from their position as youth born and grown up in a town context. I demonstrate that their access to ground on their home islands has diminished and this is transforming the boys’ concept of being. As these changes cannot be fully appreciated without also understanding the boys’ experience living in town, this chapter focuses on the nexus between home island place and town place. Specifically I suggest that two conditions of being have located the boys in a metaphorical space they refer to as the ‘confusion zone’ (*confuzin zon*). These are – *mi stap flot nomo*, translated as ‘I’m just floating that’s all’, referring to life outside traditional ni-Vanuatu social structures, and *mi stap nomo* – translated as ‘I’m doing nothing at all’, referring to life outside wider formal social systems of town. In the ‘confusion zone’, the ‘ingredients’ that constitute the ni-Vanuatu human being do not exist. As such, the boys face an existential problem. This is reflected in Benson’s words, for as he says: What we are talking about here are ‘human beings’. Drawing from Michael Scott’s (2007a; 2007b; 2005) analysis of Arosi ‘coming into being’, which involves transforming a state of ‘chaos’ into a state of social order, this chapter suggests that the Kingston-4 boys are engaged in a similar process. I argue that the boys are transforming the metaphorical state of ‘confusion zone’, in which they feel they are living as ‘half-man’ (*haf-man*) and ‘second-class’ (*sekon klas*), into a more ordered and social condition of being.³⁴

Ultimately, this chapter provides the context for the thesis as a whole as it suggests that as the boys can neither go back to their home islands, nor enter the formal systems of town, they are practicing their own forms of place making in the Freswota context. It is through the boys’ own place making activities, that the Freswota land becomes transformed, and additionally the boys too become transformed.

The Significance of ‘Having’ a Home Island Place

In town, a person’s relationship to a home island is often assessed and expressed by whether a person has or does not have access to ground there. During my time with the Kingston-4 boys I observed that ‘having’ and ‘not having’ ground in their home islands was one of their preoccupations. Their concern is not surprising given that the

³⁴ For the sake of the argument that follows, it needs to be pointed out that the boys do not say ‘second class citizen’, nor ‘second class people’, their saying is specifically: ‘second class’ (*sekon klas*).

anthropological literature of the region, as I will discuss below, has documented the significance of relationship with autochthonous ground and place for ni-Vanuatu. I observed, however, that the Kingston-4 boys showed more interest in this topic than other groups of youth. I found this difference puzzling, and so I try to address it here. I suggest that the distinction arises because the Kingston-4 boys, unlike some other youth in town, do not have the opportunity to supplement the importance of autochthonous place to their identity, with other valued town identifications such as formal education and formal employment and the ownership of ground in town. The boys continue to believe that having ground on a home island is ‘everything’ because in their precarious condition, they imagine that access to it would lead them to living more secure lives.

While the everyday significance of having access to ground on a home island differs among residents in town, I observed that people refrain from explicitly admitting that they do ‘not have ground’ (*no gat graon*). Indeed the Kingston-4 boys were the few people I knew who articulated their loss, despite many other residents in town also having lost access to ground on their islands.³⁵ In an informal survey conducted with 50 youth in Freswota between the ages of 15 and 29, every youth, except one, answered affirmatively to my question ‘do you have ground’ (*yu gat graon?*). The boy who revealed that he did not was a 16-year-old boy who said that his grandfather had ‘sold’ (*sale m finis*) the ground that he would have had rights to, to an Australian developer.³⁶

It was only after spending time with the Kingston-4 boys that I learned that most of them, and most youth in Freswota do not actually have access to ground on the islands, even if they articulate that they do. I also observed that other long time residents in Freswota, who may or may not still have access to ground, nearly always responded to the question by explaining that a family member on the island was looking after it on their behalf. The Kingston-4 boys refer to individuals who do not have access to ground, yet who continue to express that they do, as ‘just talking that’s all’ (*oli toktok nomo*), a phrase reflecting that a claim has no substance behind it. I suggest that people do not openly admit lost access to ground, because such an admission has significant implications for the way the ni-Vanuatu person is constituted. Like Benson stated in the quote above – the loss of ground leads to a loss of identity.

³⁵ Later in this chapter I will demonstrate specific reasons youth have lost access to ground. Many have leased their ground to foreign developers. Statistics show that 9% of the land of the entire archipelago and 44% of the land of Efate Island (location of Port Vila) has been leased to overseas investors, developers and private owners (World Bank ‘Jastis Blong Evriwan Vanuatu National Leasing Profile’, December 2010). Ground leased is often referred to in the literature as alienated ground (cf. Wittersheim 2011; Rawlings 2011).

³⁶ As mentioned in the previous footnote Vanuatu ground is not technically ‘sold’, but leased.

The notion that not having access to ground leads to a ‘loss of identity’ has been well documented in the anthropological literature (Bonnemaison 1985a, 1994; Rodman 1987). In order to understand the boys’ current relationship to original ground and home island place, we need to turn to this literature. This builds on the discussion in the Introduction to this thesis – that through relationship to original ground the ni-Vanuatu person is constituted and productive and reproductive life is ordered.

Throughout the archipelago, ni-Vanuatu differentiate between ground that is an inert substance or earth called ‘ground’ (*graon*) or ‘land’ (*lan*), and ground that is a ‘social reality’ infused with meaning through social interaction and relationships called ‘place’ (*ples*) (Rodman 1987: 35, Bolton 2003: 71). As Carlos Mondragon writes, ‘place’ is the ‘web of sites wherein everyday action occurs: it is the complex of locations where all relationships transpire and which give meaning to the idea of place’ (n.d (2004): 8). Ni-Vanuatu conceptualise ‘place’ as a ‘lived space’- a geographically specific location in which a group of people dwell and live their everyday life (Bonnemaison 1985b: 60).

However, place is not just ‘lived in’, but ‘lives itself’ (Rodman 1987: 35) in that people think of place as alive and as inhabiting their very being. Scott describes this same understanding for Solomon Islanders, where land is regarded as an ‘ingredient’ that makes the person, for, as he writes: the land is seen to be ‘infused with matrilineal being and agency’ (2013: 53). Ni-Vanuatu also believe that the land is ‘ingredient’ to their being; as Margaret Jolly writes: ‘like children, land is not so much owned as part of one’s human substance’ (1994: 59). Mondragon also demonstrates the consubstantiality of the relationship between person and place by pointing out that the local term used by Torres Islanders to describe their relationship with ground is ‘grown’, or ‘living growth’ (2009: 119). Mondragon suggests that the importance of ground is that it is seen to literally ‘grow’ and ‘nourish’ the person of a place. Place is thus often conflated with ‘identity’ and this is expressed in the term *man ples* – ‘person of the place’ which is a condensation of place and person (Jolly 1994: 253; Rodman 1987: 35; Bolton 2003: 68).

One of the reasons place is so important, as many anthropologists have shown (Deacon 1934; Layard 1942; Jolly 1994; Mondragon 2004, 2009; Taylor 2008a), is because it is through relationship with ground and place, and with the people that share the ground of a place, that a ni-Vanuatu person becomes located in the economic, political and social structures of his or her world. As John Taylor writes about the Sia Raga of north Pentecost, but which is also true of people throughout the archipelago, people ‘orient themselves as persons through reference to a corpus of relational categories which, like the

mazy lines of a sand drawing, intersect and link with each other to provide an intricate mesh of social identity' (2005: 76). Mondragon also writes that kinship networks, organised through patriline and matriline rooted to specific territories, and participant in flows of 'gifts and counter gifts, of persons and things' make and order ni-Vanuatu kinship relations, social organization and social reproduction (n.d. (2004): 3; 2009: 119).

This is the importance of being rooted to ground and a home island place. Place constitutes the person and organizes society. In order to understand why most people, even second and third generations in town, continue to believe that everyone has access to ground and belongs to a home island place, the processes through which people have maintained their relationship to their home islands, despite living in other places in the archipelago also needs to be explained.

As mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, in pre-colonial times, people generally identified belonging to places that were small geographical areas managed by single land holding kin groups (Bolton 2003: 67). The anthropological literature demonstrates that despite upheavals and migrations, which resulted in Islanders living away from the geographical location of their autochthonous places, ni-Vanuatu have continued to locate their primary emplacement in their autochthonous places (Bonnemaison 1985a, 1985b, 1994; Tonkinson 1985, 1977; Rawlings 1999; Mitchell 2002; Bolton 2003; Eriksen 2008).

As previously mentioned, Robert Tonkinson notes that Ambrymese born and growing up in Maat, an Ambrym community on the outskirts of town, continued to conceptualise the island of Ambrym to be the source of their identity (1985: 152). Tonkinson writes that after more than thirty years living away from Ambrym, Ambrym Islanders still identified Ambrym as their home place (1985: 147). Tonkinson argues that because most Maat villagers maintain their relationship with their ground on Ambrym and because they visit their place on the island, they continue to articulate belonging to Ambrym, albeit living in Maat.

In 2010 most residents of Port Vila are people living away from their home islands. In the town context, where people live and work among people not familiar with the small areas of their islands, people refer to being a 'person of a place' such as *man Pentecost* – a person from the island of Pentecost, or *man Tanna* – a person from the island of Tanna.³⁷

³⁷ The practice of associating with a larger island as one's 'place' is the product of specific historical processes. Keessing writes that in the early 19th century colonial settlers in the Pacific developed a system of categories, an 'inventory of knowledge' that classified Pacific Islanders into island groups (1985: 19). In

Today, this method of identification is the predominant form of self-identification in town. However, as I argue in this thesis, current conditions in town are challenging the assumed centrality of home island place to ni-Vanuatu identifications.

That people continue to locate their emplacement in a village or island of origin, even though they might be second or third generation migrants in town can be explained by a number of reasons. For instance, some people conceptualise the land in which they live as the territorial extension of their home island (Lind 2010), or see themselves as living in places whose roads and routes back to the original place can be traced (Lindstrom 1990; Bonnemaïson 1985a, 1994; Rio 2002; Bolton 1999).³⁸ Additionally, anthropologists have suggested that continued location of emplacement in autochthonous place despite no longer living there is due to people viewing themselves as literally grown from the ground of their place. As Rodman notes, people believe that their personal ‘essence’ and identity are infused into the ground of their original place (1987: 34) and thus even when they move away from their place, they carry it with them. Annelin Eriksen emphasizes this point by suggesting that original place is seen as ‘portable’ –a person will remain a ‘person of the place’ no matter if he or she moves and even if the physical village of the original place no longer exists (2008: 32). Knut Rio also offers a botanical analogy that captures the understanding of peoples’ continued connection to home island place through travelled roads and routes. Rio suggests that ni-Vanuatu relationship to original ground can be conceptualised like ‘growing vines’, where the story of origin begins when the first sprout comes out of the ground, and as it grows, the vine leads to new places in new directions (2002: 47). A person who knows the genealogy and the history of movements that can lead them back to their place (Lindstrom 1990: 80), and who practices the *kastom* of the place (Bolton 1999: 53) is able to maintain a strong relationship to place, even when no longer living there.

The result is that even through generations of migrations, people still believe themselves to be constituted and ‘grown’ out of the land of their original place. I observed this belief in practice on a number of occasions. For example, many people in town ask

Vanuatu, it was primarily in the 19th century, in the context of the labour trade, where islanders from across the archipelago, and across the Pacific, lived and worked together on sugar plantations in Queensland and Fiji that originating from the same island became an important identifier in their every-day life on the plantation (Corris 1973; cf. Jolly 1994; Bolton 2003). Bolton writes that in the 1970s the concept of ‘person of the place’, which specifically means a person who has the knowledge and practice of a place (and thus was not a colonial) became part of everyday use. Bolton suggests that a person could use the term *man ples* to express affiliation to the small hamlet and or land, to the island, to the greater archipelago, and also to the archipelago as a nation (2003: 72).

³⁸ As mentioned in the Introduction, Melanesian rootedness and mobility have a complementary relationship.

their family members on their home islands to send food items such as mangos, yams, and almonds to them. Often people in town consume these items nostalgically. Additionally however, people consume food grown in their home islands as they see it as an important way in which a person is grown from their place. I encountered this belief one mango season where Alfred, one of the few Kingston-4 boys who still experiences a relationship with his extended family and his home island, went out of his way, hiding a mango from his suspicious girlfriend, so that I could eat a mango grown in his place. Alfred explained that he really wanted me to taste this mango because it was the ‘sweetest and most flavourful mango to be found in the country’. More to the point being argued here, he also said that he wanted me to eat this mango because he wanted me to ‘experience something of the life of his home island’ (*mi wantem bae yu eksperensem smol samting long laef blong mifala lo aelan*). Alfred’s words suggest that he believes that eating the food grown in his place connects a person to the ‘life’ of the place.

Given the strong physical and metaphysical connection between residents of town and the ground of their home island places, how then can we explain the frequent exclamations of the Kingston-4 boys that they have no ground? Exclamations that are always poignantly contextualised by the surroundings in which these conversations took place – the abandoned sheds located on someone else’s rented ground, Bob Marley songs with lyrics about displacement playing in the background. Moreover, what to make of Benson’s notion that loss of ‘everything’ is affecting his very being? The rest of the chapter will examine this experienced existential problem. I do this first by looking at the boys’ frequently used idiom ‘we are just floating that’s all’.

Unplaced Youth

‘We don’t have ground! We are just floating that’s all (*yumi no gat graon! Yumi stap flot nomo*)’, said Toto. ‘Yes it is true’, said Arthur: ‘we are just floating like dry leaves in the wind (*yumi stap flot olsem dri lif lo wind*)’. The Kingston-4 boys used the term ‘floating’ often. It is the metaphor they use to articulate their experienced displacement from ground and from the social structures that a person is involved in through their relationship with a home island place.

I came to understand why the boys characterize themselves as ‘floating’ one afternoon as they talked about what life was like growing up away from the islands. Alfred, like most of the Kingston-4 boys, was born and grew up in town, but unlike most

of the boys, had spent time in his home island. During the conversation, Alfred related the time when he was 16, when he went back to his father's island place to represent his family's lineage at the death of his grandfather. He described the landscape – the dense bush, the different pigeons he had heard singing and how his family's house was on the beach by the sea. His eyes showed excitement; that this experience had captured him for life. Alfred explained that his grandfather knew he was dying and so he had called his children and grandchildren to his side to tell them things. Alfred said he asked his grandfather many questions and urged him to keep talking, to keep telling stories. After his grandfather died, Alfred, as a male representative of his family line, was asked to kill a pig as part of the funeral ceremony. Alfred told the boys listening that he had not wanted to do this, and the boys nodded their heads, sympathizing that they too would have been anxious about killing a pig in the correct ceremonial way. Alfred said that everyone was looking at him, staring at this 'man town' (*man taon*) standing there with a big wooden club.³⁹ Alfred said that being on display like that made him angry, so he took the club and killed the pig with one big swing. 'The pig died right away', he said, 'the pig did not move'.⁴⁰ There was heavy silence as the boys reflected on Alfred's story. After a few minutes, Eddie, eyes downcast, shook his head and said 'I am now also thinking about my place'. Like Alfred, Eddie had also been born and brought up in town, yet Eddie had never been to his home island. After a few minutes Eddie turned to me and said:

When we talk as a group and share stories about the islands, I don't feel right inside, I feel uneasy because I don't know where I come from, I don't know my identity. So I must go back to my *nasara*, I must take back my right to my place...⁴¹ I don't know my place because my father has never taught me my family history. It is quite difficult to get back this knowledge. But I am trying. I found a group of boys from my place who are now living in town and last month I went to see them. I told them the name of my grandfathers' village and they directed me to a chief, an old man in town who comes from my grandfather's village. This old chief recognized the name of my grandfather and said to me 'yes you are one of my children'. He told me that my family has big ground on the island and that there are two old men living there who could teach me about my family history and about my place. I am quite lucky to have received the chief's authorisation to go back there. I know lots of

³⁹ In the same way that people in town refer to people on the islands generally as 'man island' (*man aelan*) people on the Islands refer to people in Port Vila as 'man town' (*man taon*). People in town do not often reference themselves this way.

⁴⁰ Often when pigs are killed ceremonially with a wooden club the single swing to the pig's head does not kill the pig outright and so the pig dies slowly. Alfred seemed proud that his swing had killed the pig right away, that he performed the ceremony with skill even though he is a person from town.

⁴¹ *Nasara* is a ceremonial meeting place usually located on ancestral land. The *nasara* is the 'quintessential aspect of place' (Mondragon n.d. (2004): 8). Stones and other marks of ancestral activity usually mark the *nasara*.

people who have tried to learn about their family-line and their history but have faced hard times because some people on the islands do not want to share the ground with them. But me, I hope to visit my place soon. When I think about going back I feel joy. I feel happy because I will finally get back my 'base' (*stamba*), my 'roots' (*rus*).

Eddie was interrupted when someone outside called his name. He left the shed and when he was gone Alfred and two other remaining boys, Benny and Manu, who had heard pieces of our conversation, clicked their tongues and said 'Ah it's a pity, he has lost his passport already' (*ah sori, hemi lusim paspot blong hem finis*). Alfred, Benny and Manu explained that Eddie had been 'out' of his place too long, and so it was unlikely that he would ever recoup the knowledge that could trace him back there.

Alfred, Benny and Manu presented several explanations for why many Kingston-4 boys, like Eddie, would not be able to trace their roots back to their place. Firstly, they said that growing up, their parents and families had been more focused on building their work, church and social lives in town as they were part of a first generation of migrants to town, than focused on transferring the social knowledge of their home islands to their children. As the literature on Vanuatu has demonstrated, it is through knowing and practicing particular emplaced social knowledge that ni-Vanuatu build and sustain relationships to particular places (Bolton 1999: 48). As Lissant Bolton has argued, it is through the 'practice of place' that people in Vanuatu demonstrate their identification with a place, even when they are not physically living there (Bolton 1999; 2003).

I observed that in Freswota the transfer of this kind of social knowledge has not been common between parents and their children. Social knowledge of this nature includes *kastom* stories that relate to the landscape of the home island, information about lineage and family origins, cultural practices such as ceremonies, *kastom* ways of living, and importantly the indigenous languages of a place. However, as Alfred, Benny and Manu told me, it was usual, while they were young, for their parents to leave them with neighbours during the evenings so that they could frequent the many nightclubs in town.⁴² The boys explained that their parents did not teach them the social knowledge that would have connected them to their home island places. The boys told me that while their parents had migrated to town with the idea that they would be giving their children a better life in

⁴² According to my observations, the transition from rural to town life was not without its problems. In town, people use the expression *hemi sek lo taon*, which means 'he/she was shaken or surprised by town', to describe the phenomenon where new arrivals to town go 'out of control'. As Owen explained: 'my parents' generation were shaken by town because they came from the islands and when they came to town everything for them was new'. Drinking, smoking, and adultery are frequently cited symptoms of out of control behaviour in town.

town, this has not been realised. The boys said that as a result, they neither possess this 'better life', nor the social knowledge of how to live an 'island life'. The boys expressed not knowing how to build a garden, how to build a house, or how to fish, and that if they are forced back to their home islands, as the Government often threatens to do, they would not know how to survive. Owen once said: 'I have been schooled with the life of town, I know how to live in town, but if I go back to an island, well I don't have the knowledge for island life'.

Parents of youth in Freswota also expressed that because they have not passed this social knowledge to their children, many of their children have a diminished connection with their home islands. One mother, for instance, showed remorse at not having taught her children her indigenous language. She said that she had not seen this to be important at the time. She told me that as she and her husband originate from different islands, they speak Bislama in the house and so her children learned neither of their parents' languages. Similarly, when the grandmother of one of my adoptive families came from the rural islands to visit, she criticised her son for not having taught his children their indigenous language. She expressed sadness at her inability to properly communicate with her grandchildren as they do not speak her language and as she does not speak very good Bislama. She said that although she wants to tell her grandchildren stories about the island, she finds that the limited vocabulary of Bislama hinders her ability to convey the information. Another parent in Freswota revealed to me that it is only as she ages that she realizes the extent of the mistake of not having passed social knowledge onto her children. She remarked that because she did not teach her children their *kastom*, 'they now don't have any' (*oli no gat kastom*). These examples reveal that the social knowledge that connects people to their home islands is not being learned by youth in Freswota. This is not only the case in Freswota but is occurring in other communities of town as well.⁴³

On the one hand parents have not transferred this social knowledge to their children, on the other hand learning this type of knowledge only discursively is not sufficient for its knowing. As Jocelyn Linnekin and Lin Poyer have argued, Oceanic ethno-theory is formed through practice and experience in a place rather than from an inheritance of or identification with an original place at birth (1990: 8-9). The problem for many youth

⁴³ A 2008 study conducted by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's Young People's Project interviewed 1,572 Port Vila youth between the ages of 13 and 25 to survey their engagement with *kastom*. 61% surveyed said they do not 'follow' *kastom*. 26% said this was because they have never had a chance to take part in a *kastom* ceremony; 17% said this is because they live in town; 14% said this is because they have no interest; 4% said it is because their parents who are Christian do not support or allow it (2008: 33).

in town, especially youth in the mixed island communities, is that they lack experience of their home islands, and thus do not sufficiently learn this social knowledge. Moreover, youth such as the Kingston-4 boys, who spend the majority of their waking hours with their peers, and who have been doing so since a young age, have also been largely unavailable for the implicit transfer of knowledge that occurs in for example ways of eating, and in being together in houses. I observed that the social knowledge that many young people in Freswota have acquired is a 'mixed knowledge' made up of the stories, practices and words of the array of *kastom* and cultures found in their mixed island community. For example, I observed that young people in Freswota frequently greeted each other in languages that were not the language of their parents' places. As practicing the culture and *kastom* of a place is important to the maintenance of connection to the place, and as Freswota youth have, as we see here, limited experiential knowledge practice of their places, it can be argued that their relationship with their home islands is diminishing.⁴⁴

Returning to the conversation with Alfred, Benny and Manu, they further explained that the high cost of living in town is another reason young people experience a diminished experiential relationship with a home island place. As transportation between islands is unaffordable for many families in town, parents are not able to send their children to spend time in their home islands as previous generations have done (cf. Tonkinson 1977; Lindstrom 2011). The consequence is a weakening of young people's relationship with the ground of their home island and with the extended kin of their place.⁴⁵ In addition the boys explained that the high cost of town living has hindered many families from purchasing the gifts needed to participate in *kastom* ceremonies, particularly ceremonies through which kin relationships are maintained and through which land rites are transferred. This has resulted in youth in town not inheriting the rites to the ground of their home islands for, as Rodman has written for South East Ambae, failing to give gifts and to participate in rituals,

⁴⁴ Writing in 1999 Bolton hinted that she thought that the relationship between people, practice and place might be changing in the urban areas as 'the growth of urban centres in Vanuatu since Independence is bringing new pressures to bear on the relationship between people, practice and place' (1999: 53).

⁴⁵ The 2008 study conducted by the Vanuatu Cultural Centre's Young People's Project (YPP) surveyed how many young people have visited their home islands. The study reports that 85% of youth surveyed said that they have visited their home island while 14% said they had not (2008: 79). Despite the YPP report showing that many town youth have visited their islands, the analysis of their findings states: 'While it can be argued that it is important for young people to go at least once to their islands, the data suggests that many spend very little time on their islands' (2008: 80). I believe this reported percentage of youth who have been to their islands is higher than what I observed and perhaps reflects the discussion in this chapter about disclosure surrounding access to ground and that people often do not reveal their diminished relationship with their home islands.

paves the way for someone else to do so and thus to claim access to the land (1987: 44; cf. Eriksen 2008: 75).

The boys also told me that many youth do not ‘have’ fathers (*no gat dadi*), which they explained means that they live life ‘without having a place’.⁴⁶ In Vanuatu, children who do not know their biological fathers are often referred to as ‘children of the road’ (*pikanini blong rod*) a derogative phrase which suggests that without a father a person belongs to a ‘road’ – with all its transience and movement, and not to a *nasara*, a ‘traditional ceremonial ground’ and the centre of a person’s place as it is where the founding ancestral spirits reside (Curtis 1999: 61, in Bolton 2003: 70). For the boys, being outside this important kinship system means that they do not have access to its support and resources.⁴⁷ This is seen for example, in the case of Kingston-4 boy Jack whose father left his mother when he was a baby and whose mother refuses to tell him who his father is. Jack told me that living without a father is difficult because he does not have ground or his father’s family whom he can count on. Another Kingston-4 boy, Allon, made a similar point. Allon’s father was a French man who had a brief relationship with his mother during a business trip he made to Vila. Like Jack, Allon’s mother has also not told Allon his father’s identity. Allon explained that his mother wants him not to dream about his biological father but to respect his stepfather instead. Allon said however, that his stepfather has never given him money or food, and often reminds him that they are not of the same blood. Allon told me that on the islands a fatherless child would have been incorporated into a system of inheritance through adoption, but that this does not often happen in town. Allon’s and Jack’s comments reveal that because they do not know their biological fathers, they do not possess an important avenue for accessing resources for social life. Indeed I suggest that referring to not knowing their biological fathers as not ‘having’ a father, reflects the boys’ general perception that a father’s kinship network is a resource, the possession of which, would help them live more secure lives.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ I do not have statistics for how many boys did not know their biological fathers, however, out of the Kingston-4 boys whom I knew, approximately six did not know their biological fathers.

⁴⁷ Land inheritance patterns vary throughout the archipelago. The majority of islands follow patrilineal inheritance rules with the exception of the Banks Islands, Northern parts of Santo Island, South Maewo Island, South Ambae Island, North Pentecost Island, and Efate Island, who organise along matrilineal inheritance rules. When speaking about land inheritance most youth, even those articulating originating from matrilineal islands, articulated that land was inherited from their patriline. Indeed I observed a general confusion among youth in town about land inheritance systems in Vanuatu and sometimes even about which home island they should identify with – their father’s place or their mother’s place or both. I suggest this is a sign of town young people’s diminished experience in the practice of island life.

⁴⁸ While the boys talked about not having a father, I never observed girls speaking about not having a father.

Alfred, Benny and Manu also explained that some families are ‘blocking’ (*blokem*) youth in town from accessing and or inheriting access to the ground of their home islands. They said that some Freswota youth did not have ground because family members had leased the family ground to overseas developers. Additionally they revealed that some youth did not have ground because their family on the islands were ‘hiding ground’ from them (*stap haedem graon*). The term ‘hiding ground’ refers specifically to the hiding, or not sharing of the knowledge of the ‘roots’, or lineage, that is connected to ground, and which is the basis upon which claims to ground are made. The boys told me that many people are ‘hiding ground’ since ground is increasingly being viewed as a valuable commodity and also as a finite resource. The boys explained that many people in the rural islands feel that their town families have neglected them by not sending them remittances, and are therefore keeping the ground for their own future subsistence living and future economic gain.⁴⁹ The boys told me that they suffer as the result of these practices and that blocking one’s own family from accessing family ground is ‘un-Melanesian’. Thus the problem faced by the boys, is that not having access to the land is affecting their ability to actively share in the social identity attached to the land.

This ethnography reveals why Benson articulated, in the opening quote above, ‘we don’t have ground’. It demonstrates that many town youth have not been taught the relevant social knowledge that is needed to maintain a relationship with ground and with their families who would share the ground with them. As well, it shows that some young people are being blocked from accessing their ground. I suggest that the boys’ condition is one of ‘dis-*ples*-ment’ as they are not just dislocated from their territory, but from their very *ples* or ‘original place’ as well. The next section will explore the significance of not having ground and why Benson articulated that not having ground is leading to a loss of identity.

⁴⁹ The high cost of items in town prevents families from sending things back to family in their home islands. In a Workshop run by the Vanuatu Family Health Association, I observed youth being told that it is important to send money, rice, soap and cooking equipment back to the islands because it strengthens the relationships between children and their family. If they do not send things back, the leader of the workshop said, then ‘the relationship is going to close’. During my travels in some of the rural islands I asked people whether their family in town sends goods to them. Most people told me that their families in town send things seldomly and only after they make several direct requests. One of the widespread narratives in town is that people living in the islands are richer than people in town because people in the islands ‘live free’.



Figure 11: Life on 'the Islands'



Figure 12: 'On the Islands Everyone Eats Free'



Figure 13: The life in the 'ghetto'

Floating

The conversation with Alfred, Benny and Manu described the processes through which the boys have come to 'float' (*mi fala stap flot nomo*). However 'floating' is a condition that reflects more than just a lack of access to autochthonous ground, but also reveals the boys' experience of being disconnected from the wider social systems connected to their ground and home island place. The following quote from Owen makes this clear:

What used to connect all the people, the ground that people shared, all the *kastom* exchanges, and the support from family, well we don't have the same here in town, and this means that we are just floating that's all.

Drawing on Owen's words, I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys are additionally concerned with their condition of 'floating' because they view a relationship with a home island to be 'everything' for the constitution of the ni-Vanuatu person.

That the boys' experience themselves as 'floating', the result of being away from the ground of their home islands, is not a new condition of being for people in Vanuatu. Indeed writing about Tannese, Joel Bonnemaïson (1994) describes a similar condition of 'drifting'. Bonnemaïson writes that Tannese believe men resemble a world of stones, or one of firmly rooted banyan trees. Men reach self-realization by rooting themselves deeply into the ground and by pushing their foliage up toward the sky (1994: 304). Bonnemaïson contrasts 'rooted men' with men who through a lack of control over their own mobility find themselves away from their place, and without the roads to take them back. Bonnemaïson writes that these men are in a state of 'misfortune', 'warfare' and 'disorder',

and lacking ‘depth’ and ‘strength’ they ‘drift’ (1994: 304). Bonnemaison argues that Tannese see this state of ‘drifting’ as a problematic condition of being because ‘drifting’ produces a disordered present that threatens the possibility for generation and social production in the future.

I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys’ expression of their condition of ‘floating’ is comparable to this described condition of ‘drifting’. When the boys describe their condition of ‘floating’ they say that they are ‘floating like dry leaves in the wind’ (*mifala stap flot olsem ol drae lif lo wind*). By likening themselves to ‘dry leaves’, to leaves that are dead, they reflect that they are in a condition with no chance for the generation of new life or the possibility for a good future. The idiom additionally speaks to Bonnemaison’s notion that ‘drifting’ is a condition of ‘uncontrolled mobility’. Indeed the very lightness of a dry leaf, as opposed to the heaviness of a leaf that is still green, suggests that when caught in a gust of wind the dry leaf floats arbitrarily and without pre-determined or predictable destination.

I suggest, however, that for the Kingston-4 boys, this leads not to ‘disordered movements’ but to ‘pre-ordered’ movements, as they are in a metaphorical pre-social and pre-ordered place. The boys employ the metaphor ‘floating’ to reflect that their experience of being outside the social structures of their home islands has led them into a life where social movements are not yet ordered and in which they follow an unproductive and unknown course – a point I will return to below. Given this notion, it is not surprising that the Kingston-4 boys regularly express the phrase: ‘We have no chance in the future’ (*mifala no gat janis lo fiuja*).

The boys’ condition of floating implies a negative evaluation. As Margaret Jolly has pointed out for the Sa of south Pentecost, who refer to Europeans as ‘literally ‘those who float’ (like driftwood on a stream)’, such movements are morally judged (1982: 340). As mentioned in the Introduction, Jolly argues that the Sa Islanders negatively evaluate this way of life and contrast the weak condition of ‘floating’ Europeans, to themselves, who, are strong, resistant and tough-skinned because they live on their own land, cultivate their own food, and maintain a relation to their natural world which is sacred and ancestrally ordained’ (1982: 340).

For the Kingston-4 boys, their ‘floating’ as a condition of rootlessness, poses an existential problem. We see this reflected in Benson’s words at the beginning of this chapter, where he says he is ‘losing his identity’ – that which makes him a ni-Vanuatu

being.⁵⁰ Bonnemaïson acknowledges this concern among Tannese as well, writing that ‘drifting men’ who are removed from their places and devoid of roads back have ‘no identity’ (1994: 305). Without territory, people become ‘nameless and homeless creature(s)’ (1985a: 52). People who are out of their place lack identity because, as mentioned in the introduction, being a *man ples* – a person who traces his chain of ancestors to an original place – is a ‘“true man’ (‘really man’ in Bislama)’ (1985: 40). Drifting persons, men who cannot trace their roots are men without roots and as such are ‘deprived of any customary power and, in principle, of any land or political rights’ (1985: 40).

The boys’ use of the idiom ‘lost passport’, as seen in Alfred, Benny and Manu’s discussion of Eddie, shown above, reflects this existential problem.⁵¹ ‘Passport’ is an expression of a pre-given existential condition. For the boys, ‘passport’ is the ni-Vanuatu person’s inalienable right to ground and to absolute autochthony. In what the boys consider to be ‘traditional’ Vanuatu, or the Vanuatu social system of ‘before’ (*bifo*), every person was part of the social system.⁵² Even children ‘without fathers’, as Allon expressed above, were incorporated into a system of inheritance. The boys use the term ‘passport’ to refer to a person’s belonging, a condition of being in which everyone ‘has ground’ and in which everyone belongs to a place. The term ‘passport’ reflects what Scott suggests for the Makiran term *auhenua*, which means autochthonous matrilineage, the notion of a ‘pre-given’ and ‘unalterable’ ‘reproduced condition’; a condition of ‘absolute autochthony’ (Scott 2007a: 201). When the boys refer to a person who has ‘lost his passport’ as Alfred, Benny and Manu did with Eddie above, they are claiming that Eddie’s inalienable right to ground and to absolute autochthony no longer exists.

The consequence, as reflected in Eddie’s remarks, is that ‘floating’ makes him not feel ‘right inside’, he feels ‘uneasy’. As another boy, Ritchie, once said: ‘Your place is your culture, your place is your identity, without place you will not have identity, and if you do not have identity you will be a half-man that’s all, you will be a pretend-man that’s all’. Here Eddie and Ritchie both express the notion that without ground and a home island

⁵⁰ The term ‘identity’ could be interpreted as *kastom* identity since throughout the archipelago *kastom* and identity are conflated. However, I suggest Benson understands ‘identity’ here as an expression of being human.

⁵¹ For another usage of an ‘immigration idiom’ see Scott’s discussion of Arosi likening the ancestral beings who reside at burial sites to ‘immigration officials’ who ‘inspect closely anybody who enters their land’ (2007: 176).

⁵² The boys use the term ‘before’ (*bifo*) to generally refer to the Vanuatu lifestyle before missionaries and colonial settlers introduced Christianity, the Westminster Political System and Capitalism.

they feel like incomplete beings. They no longer have that which ni-Vanuatu ontology assumes is needed to constitute ni-Vanuatu life, a point I will return to later in this chapter. It is thus not surprising, that when the boys talk about the life of ‘before’, they see it as a condition in which their predecessors’ ‘vines’ were growing strong. In contrast they see their town life, one in which they do not have ‘passports’, to be a life in which the ‘vines’ which should be connecting them to the core that gives them life, have been cut.

It is important to point out that some migrants to town welcome the freedom that cutting or diminishing ties with home islands and with family members brings. As Eriksen (2008) has noted, some Ambrym migrants choose to live in areas of Vila away from kin and people from their home islands as they want to escape the gossip, restrictions, and social obligations that would be imposed upon them by these networks. However, as the Kingston-4 boys predominantly imagine the life of the islands as ‘better’ (*mo gud*) and as ‘more easy’ (*mo isi*), they conceptualise their *dis-ples-ment* primarily as a loss.

Marginalisation in Town

Not all youth in town are concerned with the condition of ‘floating’. Young people who have access to education and employment opportunities, and who are supported by kinship networks in town are, as the boys say, ‘already inside the system [of town]’ (*oli stap insaed lo sistem finis*), and do not experience their *dis-ples-ment* as a loss in the same way. The Kingston-4 boys, however, in addition to experiencing themselves outside the wider social system of their home islands, experience themselves as living outside the ‘system of town’ (*sistem blo taon*) as well. In this section I define what they mean by ‘system of town’ and outline the social-economic circumstances that have led to their being outside of it.

The boys use the word ‘system’ (*sistem*) as a general term to describe the social organisations that they see as structuring living in town – the ‘system of education’ (*sistem blo edukesen*), the ‘system of money’ (*sistem blo mani*), and the ‘system of politics’ or the ‘system of government’ (*sistem blo politik / sistem blo gavman*). The boys describe these social systems as non-indigenous systems that enforce their rules and values on ni-Vanuatu populations.⁵³ They frequently referred to the ‘system’ as the ‘Whiteman’s system’ (*sistem*

⁵³ The boys have an ambivalent relationship with Christianity and do not speak about a ‘system of the church’, although they do often criticize religion and the observed corrupt activities of pastors. Many of the boys attended church as children, and some believe that as the church provides a framework for better social

blo Waetman), the ‘modern system’ (*moden sistem*), the ‘foreign system’ (*foren sistem*), the ‘system of town’ (*sistem blo taon*), and drawing from roots reggae -the ‘Babylon system’ as well. As Samuel once explained: ‘This system that we have here in town is the system of the Whiteman and we are just surprised by it because it is not how we lived before.’ The boys believe that in order to live securely in town people need to go ‘inside the system’ (*insaed long sistem*). The boys say that this entails having access to the ‘road that leads into the system’ – education, as well as access to the ‘product’ (*prodakt*) used by the system – money. The problem for the boys, however, is that their access to both is limited. Their sense of anger towards the ‘system’ is revealed regularly in their talk.

As discussed in the Preface, the boys’ particular condition of being is the outcome of Vanuatu’s recent colonial history and transition into a post-colonial independent nation state. As previously mentioned, most of the Kingston-4 boys’ parents migrated to town in the years around Independence (1980). While during the colonial period Vila had been a ‘space of white commercial interests and temporary black labour’, in the post-colonial context, many new possibilities became available for people moving to town (Mitchell 2002: 213; cf. Rodman 2001:1). Post-colonial developments such as the end of the colonially imposed ‘Unemployed Natives Regulation’ Act, which had previously controlled Islanders’ residence in Vila; the return of alienated land to Indigenous owners; the transformation of Vanuatu from a plantation economy to a service economy; the establishment of the nation as a tax haven, and the development of the tourist industry, all provided new opportunities for Islanders to live in town (MacClancy 1980; Haberkorn 1989; Connell and Lea 1994; Rodman 1999; Rawlings 1999; Mitchell 2002). As already mentioned, these developments turned Vila into a ‘boom town’ (Haberkorn 1989: 11).

However, notions of prosperity quickly gave way to disappointment. Jean Mitchell writes that finding employment, a main reason for migration to town became increasingly experienced as a ‘game of chance’ where being in town offered ni-Vanuatu a chance ‘to win money’ (*winim vatu*) and to ‘win work’ (*winim wok*) (2002: 292). While some ni-Vanuatu found success, many others did not. Finding employment was hard, and the jobs often had long hours, little pay, no holidays, bad bosses and no job security (Mitchell 2002: 293; cf. Rodman 2007).

living, they might return to the church to help them out of the ‘confusion zone’. Possibly the reason the boys do not include the church in their definition of the ‘system’ is because the church is one context they can enter if they want.

As unemployment started to characterise the life of many people living in town, the socio-economic problems that researchers have observed in other rapidly urbanising Pacific cities like Honiara (cf. Berg 2000) and Port Moresby (cf. Connell and Lea 1994, 2002; Godard 2005, 2010) started to develop. A UN published report concluded in 2002 that rapid urban growth and high unemployment in Port Vila has led to a lack of affordable, available and officially approved dwellings and thus a general condition of insecure living has emerged (Chung and Hill 2002: 8-9). While I have not yet come across reports about poverty in Port Vila, Freswota, youth admitted that they did not always have enough food to eat. Moreover, I observed that many residents were unable to afford their rent, electricity and water bills, and many struggled to purchase clothing and household items as well.

One of the main problems young people suffer from today, is because access to formal education, the 'road' that leads to 'winning money', after independence became increasingly inaccessible for Vila residents, many young people who were children at the time were not able to complete formal schooling. Tuition fees for schools, which had been free for French schools and a small fee for British schools during the colonial period (Miles 1998: 50), increased after independence, and thus schooling became unaffordable for many families. The post-independence education system also only provided places for one-third of those graduating from primary school (Mitchell 2002: 422). Subsequently, many young people in town, including the Kingston-4 boys, who started their primary schooling in the early and mid-1990s, do not have more than a class six education.

Mitchell (2002), who was researching young people in Blacksands Community on the outskirts of Vila in the late 1990s, suggests that 'restlessness' became a distinguishing feature of this first post-colonial generation. Mitchell describes how some of the youth with whom she worked referred to themselves as members of the *Sperem Pablik Rod Kampani* or *SPR's* in short. This was translated as the 'Hitting the Road Company' and these youth saw themselves as the 'biggest company in Vanuatu', whose speciality was walking the streets and 'killing time' (*kilim taem*) (2002: 416). Mitchell notes that large groups of unemployed men, idling on the roads, became a concern as people feared these groups, and worried that they would develop into organized criminal gangs like the

‘rascals’ (*raskols*) of Port Moresby.⁵⁴ Mitchell notes: the ‘spectre of the violence of alienated youth looms large in Melanesia’ (2002: 418).

Mitchell writes that for many of these youth, aspirations were shaped by being the first generation to grow up in an independent nation where formal education and full-time wage employment were increasingly valued (2002: 412). However as they found themselves increasingly cut off from accessing the systems of education and the wage economy, disappointment and ‘disempowerment’ became the characteristic of many youth growing up in this time (Bolton n.d. (2010): 7 referring to Mitchell 2002). Consequently, Mitchell writes that many youth saw themselves as ‘failures’ as they had not succeeded in the town context (2002: 422). Yet, she states that even though youth believed they were ‘failures’, there were ‘other constraints beyond their control that were limiting their chances’ (2002: 422).

Ten years after Mitchell’s research, education and employment continue to be major concerns for people in town. I observed that the Kingston-4 boys, none of whom were engaged in regular formal employment, often said that jobs in town require high school certificates and as they do not have this qualification they are unable to participate formally in the wage economy of town. As Jaksil stated:

It is the parents’ responsibility to pay the school fees of their children. But if they don’t, like with me, well then what has happened is that I don’t have a certificate or piece of paper or anything to prove that I can do one work. So even if there is a chance to work out there, I can’t even go and apply. It is the problem of the system because here in town education is the only road that will let you go inside the system. But when you don’t have education, when you don’t have that paper, then what do you do? The product I need to live in town is money, but I can’t get it, I am a school-leaver, I only have a small education. In town there is only one road to win money and I had to leave the road halfway. My feeling is that this is not right. Yes it is true there are good sides of education, if you school good then you will have money then you will have a good life, but me, well I’m a school-leaver so what can I do? The system of the government says that we young people are the future of the nation, but when you throw the future of the nation out in class six, well then what do you expect?

While I am not certain whether all jobs such as work in restaurants, hotels and in shops, for example, require high school qualifications, most people I knew, young and old, said that to get a job one must have a ‘paper’ (*pepa*). As there are many post-secondary school programmes that offer training for work in the hospitality industry, or in offices, for

⁵⁴ This is the context within which the Vietnam-2 gang that dominated Freswota in the mid-1990s existed (For discussion of PNG ‘raskols’ see Goddard 2005; 2010; Sykes 1999).

instance, it is likely that the few jobs available are given to candidates who have the highest qualifications.

Part of the problem is that while the affordability of education has decreased, there has also been a decrease in the availability of untrained jobs. In a discussion about youth unemployment the 70 year old father of the owner of a kava bar in Freswota, explained that:

Before, in the 1950s and 1960s very few people went to school but many people were employed in what we called free labour or unskilled labour. The main work at that time in the islands was cutting copra and the main work at that time in town was loading and unloading the copra into containers onto ships. Gone are the days of plantations on the islands, so everyone goes to town to find work. But in town there are no unskilled jobs. Before, lots of people also worked on barges to help move the goods. This gave work to plenty of the youth and the pay was good too. But today to get a job on a barge requires a school paper, and today the barges don't employ a lot of people because they use machines to move the things around. So this is a problem for the youth in town today. Especially those who are age 30 who are stuck in between who don't have the paper. Gone are the days of unskilled people and unskilled labour.⁵⁵ The younger children today...well the Government is trying to get more children through school now. But these unemployed youth in town today...well they must create their own work. They shouldn't rely on the jobs in town. What they need to do is build their own company and employ their family and community, like my son here has done with his kava bar.

A published *Youth Monograph* on Vanuatu also states that to compensate for high levels of unemployment, youth are becoming involved in a variety of 'cash and non-cash work' that have not been counted into the category of 'work' in the National Census, such as producing goods for sale, voluntary work, unpaid work for families, and producing goods for their own consumption (2012: 38). In Chapter 2 I discuss the informal work that the Kingston-4 boys engage in. Suffice it to say here, this work does not provide the boys with a consistent income, or enough money to be self-sufficient.

The statistics show that rates of unemployment are higher among the boys' age group, than among the age group of the boys' parents (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2012: 14). Indeed I observed that many of the boys' mothers and fathers seemed to be

⁵⁵ During my fieldwork the Government of Vanuatu engaged in a pilot program – the RBS 'unskilled work program' known popularly as 'apple picking'. This program offers paid employment to ni-Vanuatu to pick fruit on plantations in Australia and New Zealand. At the time many ni-Vanuatu saw this as a positive development, and youth I knew who signed up for this scheme said they intended to use the money to build a house. However, reports from workers have revealed corruption in the program, significant violence, drinking, and spending rather than saving money. Incidents of returned apple pickers being beaten by family members for not having saved money, or for having had affairs were also widely reported (cf. Cummings 2013 In Press).

working in jobs they had secured during the economic boom in town. These people also frequently complained, however, that their income was not enough to cover the high cost of living and the many (unemployed) dependents who relied on their income.

Parents generally reproach their unemployed sons for their condition of ‘idleness’ and thus in addition to the lack of opportunity for education and employment, I observed that many Kingston-4 boys also experience themselves outside the support of their town families. While some of the boys’ basic needs such as shelter and some food are usually provided for, their parents do not meet many of their other needs, which adds to their insecure living. I discuss the boys’ experiences of diminishing kinship relationships in Chapter 2. I suggest that as they do not have money to participate in exchange practices in town they are finding themselves increasingly outside the important kinship networks through which they could access support and resources.

Yet despite town life becoming increasingly precarious for its residents, there has not been a significant return migration back to the home islands. One reason for this, as I mentioned in the Introduction, is that many people in town are permanently settled in town and see themselves as being too involved and accustomed to living the ‘life of town’, and not the ‘life of the island’. For the Kingston-4 boys, return to their home islands is even less likely for, as I outlined in the previous section of this chapter, they feel they do not have island places to which they can return.

These were the socio-economic conditions within which the Kingston-4 boys have grown up, and the reasons the boys have not been able to ‘go inside the system’. One of the main differences between the young people with whom Mitchell worked in 1996-1999, and the Kingston-4 boys who I knew, is that the Kingston-4 boys do not see themselves as the ‘failures’ or cause of their condition. Rather, they explicitly state, as reflected in Jaksil’s quote above, that having to leave the ‘road [of schooling] halfway’, is the reason why they cannot access the system. *SPR* - the popular expression reported by Mitchell, was not being used by young people during my fieldwork. As one youth explained, referring to someone as an *SPR* is an insult as it implies that a person is lazy. In contrast, young people I knew referred to their unproductive passing of time with the expression ‘I am just a white page that’s all’ (*mi jes waet page nomo*).⁵⁶ I suggest that unlike *SPR* and ‘killing time’, which reflected youth disempowerment, disappointment, loss and restlessness, the idiom

⁵⁶ Mitchell also notes the shift in young people’s expressions (2011: 39).

‘white page’, which likens youth to blank pieces of paper, encompasses notions about being ready to be given a chance- a blank page is a page ready to be filled.⁵⁷



Figure 14: ‘White Page’



Figure 15: Alienated Ground



Figure 16: The ‘System of Money’

‘I’m Just Doing Nothing At All’

The Kingston-4 boys’ experienced marginalization is also reflected in the usage of the popular expression ‘I’m just doing nothing at all’ (*mi stap nomo*), a phrase used by many youth in town to convey that they are not doing anything with their time or have no plans.⁵⁸ It must be pointed out that ‘doing nothing at all’ is not the same as ‘killing time’. While ‘killing time’ is likened to ‘wasting time’, and as previously mentioned, reflects disempowerment and restlessness, ‘doing nothing at all’, similar to ‘white page’ reflects notions about not being occupied, yet being ready for opportunity.

For the Kingston-4 boys, the idiom specifically reflects issues of social unproductivity. I translate the boys’ usage of the expression this way as I see it as a shortened version of a popular saying of the 1980s – *stap nating nomo*, which is translated as ‘unemployed’ or ‘idle’ (Crowley 2011). As I demonstrate in this section, I consider that like with ‘floating’, ‘doing nothing at all’, is also experienced as an existential problem.

⁵⁷ Mitchell argues that it is important to recognise the ways in which youth exercise agency against their marginalisation (2002: 415). Jourdan also demonstrates that unemployed marginalised men ‘stress cultural agency’ as a way to find their ‘urban identity and social space’ (1995a: 203; 1995b).

⁵⁸ ‘Doing nothing at all’ (*stap nomo*) was the most frequently used expression among youth in Port Vila during my fieldwork. I observed it used by all youth even those who were being educated or were employed.

As mentioned previously, participation in wage labour has been a central aspect of Vila's development as during the colonial period ni-Vanuatu permission to be in town depended on being employed. Thus I suggest that for the Kingston-4 boys, 'doing nothing at all' encompasses deeply held notions about not being able to participate in productive social engagement. This comes across in something Owen said one afternoon:

Our parents thought that they were giving us a good standard of life here. They thought that we would have a chance to grab this system in town. We believed that we too would get a chance to contribute to this society, to work, to contribute to this life here, but then we look, and well, we have only a little education, and we have no jobs, and so at the end of the day here we are doing nothing at all. Really, us boys of the road we don't have a chance. We depend on the system. We need work to have money but we can't get work. So life is very hard. It is very hard especially if you want to start a family in the right way, to start your own life and you don't have anything to start it with.

Here Owen speaks of the boys' general experience of not being able to 'grab the system', to go 'inside the system', which they see as the means through which people in town build their life and future. While most of the Kingston-4 boys already have children, many are unable to establish their own households and feel hindered from transitioning from the status of youth to the status of adult. Not surprisingly, when the boys speak about their future, they often suggest that their future is a 'question mark' (*kwestin mak*) implying that there is no knowledge or certainty about what their future will bring.

One of the problems of the condition of 'doing nothing at all' is that as the boys do not participate in the wider formal social structures of town, such as school and work, they experience themselves without formal structure and guidance for their living. For instance, the boys feel that as they spend most of their time in Freswota, they do not learn, nor have experience of the objectified knowledge that guides living in the wider town, such as how to open a bank account or how to speak to someone in an office. Samuel told me that the boys are often surprised when they learn some of the rules and norms of town living, such as for example, the requirement to wear shoes when entering a shop in town, as these are not standards that are known to all ni-Vanuatu, even residents of town. Even though most of the boys have grown up in town, and thus possess certain urban knowledge, it is knowledge that they admit is not the 'right' kind of knowledge that would lead a person into 'a good life'. The boys say, for example, that they know how to manipulate guards in prison to bring them water to drink and cigarettes to smoke, but they do not know how to fill out a job application form. The boys frequently exclaimed that as the 'system' was not developed by ni-Vanuatu, it is a 'foreign system', one that is unknown to them.

More importantly to the discussion which will follow, the Kingston-4 boys' condition of 'doing nothing at all', like with the condition of 'floating', is experienced as an existential problem. I make this claim as themes in the ethnography above reflect the boys' sense that as outsiders of the 'system of town', they cannot access what gives 'life' to the 'Port Vila resident'. Indeed in the same manner in which ni-Vanuatu speak of the importance of ground as 'growing' and 'nourishing' the 'being' of the ni-Vanuatu person, the boys refer to people who are 'inside the system' as having 'eaten of the system' (*oli kaka'e sistem ia finis*). This is a continuation of the notion of the consubstantiality between person and place noted above. Jaksil's and Owen's words, quoted in the paragraphs above, express that consuming the 'system' or 'being inside the system' is an ingredient for town life. As Owen exclaimed – he needs urban products like money to 'start' his life, and as Jaksil said, formal education, which he does not have, is the only road to having a 'good life'.

The boys experience their condition in town as an existential problem since not having access to the system effects their very 'being'. When the boys refer to their social position in town they say that they are 'second class' (*sekon klas*). For the boys, expressing that they are 'second class' points to their experiences of being ignored and disrespected by general society who regularly exclaim that as they do not work they do not qualify to be in town. The exclamation 'second class', without the addition of 'person' or 'citizen', which completes the phrase in English, also points to the boys' conceptualisation that as they do not have access to the urban ingredients that make the 'good' 'town person', they are not living the life of complete beings. They are not 'second class people', they are just 'second class'.

Confusion Zone

In keeping with their description of the past as the time of 'before', and the future as a 'question mark', the boys persuasively refer to their present condition as a 'confusion zone' (*konfiusen zon*). For the boys, the 'confusion zone' is the metaphorical space they inhabit, a space between two social systems - the home island place and the system of town. As Ritchie explained: 'In town today, we are living in a foreign system with new ways of doing things. This means that we don't know the tradition of the Black-man, and we don't know the tradition of the White-man, and so we just live in this confusion zone'.

It is their experience of being in this 'confusion zone' which makes the Kingston-4

boys different from previous generations of ni-Vanuatu, for it is not a phase through which all ni-Vanuatu men pass. Rather, the ‘confusion zone’, is a new condition - the nexus between two competing value systems and thus between two ways of being. As I will argue below, the boys’ experience this condition of confusion as pre-ordered ‘chaos’ and themselves as ‘half-human’.

I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys’ articulation that they are living in a ‘confusion zone’ is somewhat analogous with Scott’s (2007a; 2007b; 2005) analysis of Arosi place making on the island of Makira in Solomon Islands. As discussed in the Introduction, Scott suggests that Arosi imagine primordial Arosi land, or ‘utopic land’ as one of ‘spatial vacuity’ (2005: 205). He writes that Arosi see primordial land as having been a ‘potential place’, not yet shaped by social meaning (2005: 198-205; 2007b: 28). He argues that Arosi transformed the ‘utopic land’ into ordered socialised place through their place making.

The ways in which the Kingston-4 boys speak about Freswota-4 land before its settlement by Freswota residents resonates with Scott’s notion of pre-social place. As mentioned in the Introduction, the pre-ordered Freswota place is conceptualised as having been unruly bush.⁵⁹ The boys view this pre-Freswota land as one without meaning as the land was not inhabited by their ancestral spirits, did not have topographic landmarks, place names, gardens, stones or other materials placed in the ground that resonated with genealogical meaning and emplaced history.

That the boys conceptualise the context – the pre-Freswota land, their displacement from their home islands and their concomitant marginalisation from the formal systems of town in terms of ‘confusion’ is not surprising given the prevalence, also noted in the literature of Vanuatu, of ni-Vanuatu notions of displacement as a state of ‘disorder’.⁶⁰ While Bonnemaïson (1994), in his discussion of ‘drifting men’, did not use the word ‘confusion’, he did describe Tannese Islanders’ understanding that uncontrolled mobility through which a person cannot find their way back to their place, leads to a condition of ‘warfare’ and ‘disorder’, and that this is inimical to the state of ni-Vanuatu being.

Moreover, like Arosi, the Kingston-4 boys experience their pre-social place as a condition of ‘chaos’, where ‘chaos’ refers specifically to space that can be said to be metaphorically ‘pre-social’ as it does not offer the structured social relationships that order

⁵⁹ I do not imply here that the land of Freswota was without meaning, indeed the land has a history of meaning for Man Ifira and for residents of town who lived in town during the Colonial Government, yet as I discuss in Chapter 3, for residents of Freswota, young and old, Freswota has a very clear origin moment, a moment when Freswota became invested with experiential meaning for Freswota residents.

⁶⁰ A ‘pre-ordered’ state can be described as being a condition of disorder.

everyday lives. That they conceptualise the ‘confusion zone’ as this condition of chaos is revealed in Arthur’s words. As he explains: ‘We are living in a place without structure. But ours is a history of great structure and this tension of not having a structure is causing problems’. Furthermore, for the boys, ‘chaos’ refers to space, that again, as it is metaphorically ‘pre-social’, does not provide known knowledge needed to guide inhabitants into a secure future. Indeed as Arthur also said: ‘We are living in a new system with new rules. We don’t know these rules and we don’t know the old rules, and so we are living in this confusion zone’. I observed the boys’ perplexity about rules in town frequently, as seen, for instance, when speaking about dating. The boys sometimes remarked that in town a youth can easily have a sexual relationship with someone whose kinship connection on the islands would mean that their relationship is taboo.

I have suggested here that in contemporary Vanuatu, ‘confusion zone’ is a new term of language to talk about ni-Vanuatu experience of ‘disorder’. Indeed when the boys speak about living in a present state of confusion, they say that in the confusion zone everything is ‘buggered up’ (*bagareap*), a term translated as ‘out of order’ and where something mechanical is not working (Crowley 2011). This is a term used frequently by the boys, and additionally reflects their experience that the ‘confusion zone’ is a space in which the wider social structures of the two different systems which should operate to grow the ni-Vanuatu person, are not ‘working’.

That the boys are engaged in place making in town is also not unexpected, as the literature of Vanuatu also shows that ni-Vanuatu believe that it is through coming into greater relationship with the land that order, stability and society are seen to emerge. For example, Bonnemaïson describes how the progenitors of Tannese were stones ‘moving around the island in howling gangs’ and ‘wild hordes’ (1994: 122-123).⁶¹ They were in a state of ‘free-mobility’ where besides chance encounters there was ‘no connection’ among them (1994: 122). Bonnemaïson suggests that it is only when they ‘settled down’, when they received names and turned into places, that these stones sank into the soil and became connected with the ground (1994: 122). Bonnemaïson argues that in Tannese cosmology, the ‘wild horde progressively gave way to a rooted society’ (1994: 122-123).

Furthermore, as with Arosi who conceptualise the first residents of their land to be ‘not quite human’, as they were different types of beings who were not yet in social

⁶¹ Bonnemaïson writes that Tannese do not ‘necessarily claim a genealogical affiliation with stones; they only suggest that they are inhabited by the same ‘spirit’ and share the same power’. Some stones gave birth to animals, some stones gave birth directly to the first men (1994: 123).

relationships (Scott 2005: 205), I suggest that the boys' use of idioms like 'half-man' and 'second class' expresses an analogous experience of themselves as metaphorically not complete humans. I suggest that this is because they experience themselves as living in a condition in town in which the practices of being relational beings have been undermined. As discussed in this chapter, the boys' 'floating' and their 'doing nothing at all' are idioms used by the boys to reflect a condition of unproductivity, and non-engagement in social reproduction.

Conclusion: Argument for Town Emplacement

Scott argues that Arosi 'coming into being' involved the transformation out of a state of 'primordial chaos' and into a state of 'dynamic' living and being as fully formed humans in 'socialized territory' (2007a: 34). He suggests that for the Arosi, this transformation occurred by means of human activities and reproductive relations with other beings and with the land (2007a: 34).⁶² Bonnemaïson also argued that Tannese Islanders emerged from stones when the wild stones sank into the soil and became connected to the ground (1994: 122).

I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys are engaged in a similar process of transformation, where their particular practices with the Freswota land is transforming the 'confusion zone' into a more ordered social state. In the chapters that follow I show how the boys' place making activities in Freswota are part of the process of transforming the 'confusion zone' from a condition of pre-ordered chaotic confusion into one of ordered socialized forms. Furthermore, I suggest that it is through this process that the boys also become transformed from the metaphorical 'half-man' and 'second-class', into 'fully grown' beings – that they come into being as 'Freswota men'. As it will become clear throughout this thesis, they achieve this transformation by engaging with their land in ways that are analogous to the ways their original ancestors are said to have formed their land.

I chose to write the first chapter of this thesis about the 'confusion zone' as I believe it provides the contextual detail for what is to come. While this chapter has focused on youth discourses of place in their contemporary understandings of place making, the next chapters will explore the ways the Kingston-4 boys are practicing their own place making in the Freswota context.

⁶² Scott writes that Arosi view these practices as social practices of 'truly human' ancestors who socialised territories by fusing them with matrilineages through the 'production of ancestral spirits in the land' (2007a: 34).

Chapter 2

The 'Squad' and the Making of Community

Introduction

'When we first came to Freswota it was not like this' said Owen. It was mid afternoon and we were sitting watching some of the boys prepare the kava that would be sold to patrons at the kava bar the boys had just started running in Freswota-4.⁶³ 'Point' (*poen*), exclaimed Toto, a term the boys often used to show their agreement. Owen continued: 'In the beginning, Freswota was not cooperative like it is today. The people who came to live here they came from all over. You had people from the island of Tanna living next to people from the island of Pentecost. People did not know each other and everyone was a stranger'. 'It is true', added Benny: 'At this time people in Freswota did not organise together. People fought each other everywhere, and stole. Freswota had a very bad reputation. All of Port Vila knew that Freswota was wild.' Owen picked up the story once more:

Those older boys they were real troublemakers. Now you see them leading our community, but in the beginning, us younger boys, we didn't cooperate with them. They would stop anyone on the road and ask for money, and if the person didn't give them money then they would punch them. They would stop moving trucks and beat the people inside if they didn't give them money. This fighting made us not want to talk to the older boys. So for a while we weren't united. The groups all walked around separately. Eventually there was a meeting between the older boys and the younger boys and we all made peace. Since then we cooperate. Now Freswota has come good a little bit. Now we are organised and we cooperate together. Slowly we are building a better place, a better community.

By all accounts, this description of Freswota prior to approximately 2002/ 2003 is accurate, aptly summarised by Toto's word – 'wild' (*wael*). It was a period when Freswota-3 and Freswota-4 were in the early stages of settlement and development. Although the community, as I discuss in Chapter 3 was formally established earlier, in 1977 (see Time line), many families, including those of the Kingston-4 boys, only began moving into the area in approximately 1991-1992, as police dismantled a violent criminal gang, the 'Vietnam-2 gang', who dominated Freswota-3 and 4 between approximately 1986-1992.⁶⁴

⁶³ Operating this kava bar was part of the initiative of having a pool table mentioned in the Introduction.

⁶⁴ Members of the Vietnam-2 gang were sons of the first families in Freswota-3. Ex gang members told me that they named themselves 'Vietnam-2' after watching a documentary on the Vietnam War. Martha Macintyre notes that young people in many countries are attracted to films, especially martial arts films as

However even after the gang had been dismantled, Freswota continued to be a ‘wild place’. During this time, much of Freswota was ‘bush’ and there were not many houses that were connected to electricity.⁶⁵ When its first residents describe Freswota at that time, they say the area was ‘too dark’ (*tudak*), which in Bislama means ‘darkness’, but can convey the meaning of ‘un-Christianized’ (Crowley 2011) and ‘uncivilised’ as well.⁶⁶ Not surprisingly, long time residents say that Freswota was ‘not a community then’, as there was little cooperative social order, shared structural organisation, discipline, nor a shared sociality between the people living there.

Not specific to Freswota, anthropologists have shown that people in newly urbanising places the world over are living in similar contexts of social insecurity (Brown and Larson 2002; Simone 2005; Brison and Dewey 2012). What is specific to Freswota, however, as this chapter will show, are the ways residents have responded.

Adboumalik Simone (2005), who works in Douala, Cameroon, attributes conditions of social insecurity to a ‘crisis of sociality’. Simone explains that two specific issues have led to this ‘crisis’. The first emerges from the cultural heterogeneity of newly urbanising places. Simone writes that new urban localities are often a ‘hodgepodge of kin, strangers, passers-by and neighbours’ (2005: 521). He argues that previously relied-upon structures of authority are unable to operate, as it is ‘often unclear just who has the right and ability to do what’ (2005: 519). The second point Simone makes, is that in newly urbanising contexts, where resources are in short supply, processes through which social relationships would previously have formed, such as practices of gift exchange, are increasingly hard to sustain and as such people find themselves with reduced access to reliable sources of material and social support (2005: 517). Drawing on these two points of Simone’s analysis, this chapter demonstrates that a ‘crisis of sociality’ has occurred in Port Vila. This is reflected in the popular expression: ‘relationships in town are broken’ (*relesensip lo taon i brokbrok*).

they enact fantasies of power and are linked to ideas of organised resistance and hostility toward the state (2008: 186). Indeed, ex-gang members told me they felt marginalised by the rich expatriates in town and so sympathized with the Vietnamese who were fighting against the American military. The Vietnam-2 gang burgled expatriates and fought ni-Vanuatu trying to enter Freswota.

⁶⁵ The Port Vila Municipality connected Freswota-3 and Freswota-4 to the town’s electricity and water supply in approximately 1999. However, it has taken many years for individual houses to activate their access to the services and many houses in Freswota-5 and 6 were still not connected when I left the field in 2010. It was in approximately 2002/ 2003 that the Municipality put up streetlights.

⁶⁶ Writing about Christianisation, Bonnemaïson notes that ‘many Melanesian places of identity and dwelling sites, loaded with meaning and symbols, were abandoned. The forest in which they had previously lived was associated with the idea of dark bush, the world of darkness and paganism in contrast with the brightness of the coastal areas, where the missions were’ (1985: 55).

Simone argues that urban youth, in particular, respond to the ‘crisis of sociality’ in innovative and creative ways (2005: 517). Simone writes that although literature generally suggests people living in precarious urban conditions narrow their social worlds into ‘manageable domains of safety or efficacy...from which they can better deal with the insalubrious or insecure conditions that surround them’, urban youth are, in contrast, broadening, not narrowing, the terms of the territories and the kinds of social relationships they are engaged in (2005: 517). The general point Simone asserts, is that urban youth are navigating a context of social disorder and eroded social networks by developing ‘new modalities of urban social organisation’ – new informal infrastructures which serve to manage and order their social world (2005: 517). Furthermore, Simone makes a point which is also central to the argument of this thesis, that it is out of these new modes of social organisation, that new forms of ‘social connectedness and collaboration’ develop, as persons become connected in relationships in and of a particular place (2005: 521).

Motivated by Simone’s arguments, this chapter suggests that out of the ‘chaos’ and ‘confusion’ of Freswota’s early years, and amidst the emergence of eroding or ‘broken’ kinship relationships in the town context, new models of order making are emerging in Freswota. Maintaining my focus on the Kingston-4 boys, this chapter examines the development of the ‘squad’ (*skwad*) or ‘gang’ of boys, and argues that the ‘squad’ is a new informal infrastructure or ‘modality of social organisation’ creatively emerging in this context. Additionally, this chapter examines the formation and development of a new community-wide network known as the ‘Freswota councils’ (*Freswota kaonsol*), and suggests that it is through ‘cooperation’ and ‘organisation’ between the councils and the squad, that Freswota residents, particularly the youth, are developing a new social system through which needed social support and resources can be accessed.

Crisis of Sociality

As Owen, Toto and Benny’s words above reflect, a ‘crisis of sociality’ similar to that which Simone (2005) notes, has been occurring in Freswota. It is a crisis that can also be explained, by Simone’s two aforementioned conditions. First, as the boys note, Freswota is referred to as a ‘mixed island community’ (*miks aelan komuniti*). This means that unlike many of the other residential areas of Port Vila, where people originating from the same island place group together, Freswota residents come from all across the archipelago. As mentioned in the Introduction, Freswota’s mixed environment resulted from Freswota’s

initial development as a residential community for low income earning migrants. Plots of land were sold to any ni-Vanuatu who could afford them, regardless of island affiliation. Freswota thus emerged as a community where people with diverse culture and customs, but also with varying degrees of prior relationship lived side by side.

In Vanuatu this is still generally considered to be an unusual condition of living. Villages are mostly homogenous, and many people in town live in communities among extended kin and with people from their same home islands.⁶⁷ This enables a continuity of networks of social relations (Mitchell 2002: 255). In contrast, as the boys explained, in a heterogeneous community, where people live among people with only varying degrees of prior social relationship, they live without the shared framework through which social order and group cooperation traditionally develops. In its early years, Freswota, as described by the boys was an area populated by the feared social category of ‘strangers’ (*strenja*) – people not embedded in each other’s networks of relationships. A general context of social disconnection was thus the starting point for Freswota Community, and the reason why the lack of trust and fear, described by the boys above, continued for many years.

Significantly, in examining the boys’ words above, we see that the most frequently used descriptors of Freswota’s early days are ‘organise’ (*oganaes*) and ‘cooperation’ (*kopiraeten*). This clearly was a time when there was limited ‘organisation’ and limited ‘cooperation’. In contrast, Freswota today is considered to be a community of people in greater relationship with one another. People say that ‘Freswota is a good community because it is organised, and because people cooperate’. This is taken to mean that people work together towards a common goal – in this case ‘building-up’ (*bildemap*) Freswota as a community of people in relationship with one another. Their meaning of ‘organised’ refers to having a coordinated social structure which frames shared daily life in the community. The frequency with which this is repeated, reflects the positive value which is attached to the notions that the community be ‘organised’ and ‘cooperative’. This reveals the residents’ perception that life is better (*mo gud*) when it is structured, ordered and when people are in relationship with the people with whom they live.

Simone’s (2005) other explanation for the ‘crisis of sociality’ in newly urbanising contexts is that due to the lack of resources, urbanites cannot afford to participate in

⁶⁷ Many communities in Port Vila are organised around island divisions. Sisaed community, for instance, is divided into migrants from Paama (Sisaed Paama), and Tongoa (Sisaed Tongoa). Freswota does not have these divisions and is fully mixed.

important practices that build social relationships and social networks, practices such as gift giving. I observed this in Freswota. As Kingston-4 boy Samuel said:

In the time before, people shared, supported and cared for each other. But now in town, since people can't afford very much, they don't share, and so relationships are different, relationships are not strong like before. In town relationships are broken. This is mostly because of money. Now, people only think about money for themselves, and they forget about other people.

Two points emerge from Samuel's words. Firstly that people living in the town context struggle to afford gifts required for giving practices, as they spend their limited incomes on meeting the needs (and wants) of members of their immediate households.⁶⁸ While people with gardens grow many of the items used in gift exchange, items such as yams, kava, pigs and pandanus leaves out of which mats are woven. People in residential areas who do not have gardens, or relatives on the islands who send them garden produce, have to purchase these items in town. When people cannot afford to make these purchases, their participation in exchange practices is diminished, in turn, this means that the social relationships previously formed through these practices are eroded.

People in Port Vila refer to this experienced erosion of social relationships with the popular phrase (as found in Samuel's words above): 'relationships in town are broken'. Clearly this phrase refers not only to individual social relationships but to a 'breaking' of the structural system through which relationships in Vanuatu are formed. This is not surprising, given that the anthropological literature on practices of gift giving in Melanesia has demonstrated the significance of gift giving to the production and reproduction of social relationships and social systems (Mauss 1954; Strathern 1988). As Strathern writes: 'the concept of 'the gift' has long been one of anthropology's entry points into the study of Melanesian societies and cultures. Indeed it provides a springboard for general theorizing: the reciprocities and debts created by the exchange of gifts are seen to comprise a form of sociality and a mode of societal integration' (1988: xi). As participating in gift giving practices in Port Vila becomes unaffordable, people find themselves with diminished links to their home islands and thus increasingly outside this important social system.

The second point to emerge from Owen's words is that they find themselves much less embedded in the important social networks with extended kin through which they

⁶⁸ This is changing quickly as Freswota (particularly Freswota-1, 2 and parts of 3) are increasingly desirable places to live. According to Dan McGarry who lives in Freswota-3, a strong middle class presence in Freswota is growing (pers. comm. 10/06/13). More research needs to be conducted on emerging class divisions in Freswota.

would have had access, in other contexts, to social and economic support. It was during a wedding (*kastom marid*) in Freswota-3 that I first observed the importance of reciprocity and the practice of gift giving in town to maintain social relationships and secure their future access to material resources and family support. Alice, one of the guests at the wedding, a 33-year-old woman, who lives in a predominantly Paamese community, explained that although she finds it quite unaffordable to give gifts at the many weddings she attends in town, she will forgo lunch for several days, because she sees gift giving as an ‘investment in the future of her children’ (*invesmen lo fiuja lo pikinini blo mi*). As she explained: ‘I give gifts at weddings because when it will be time for my children to marry, all these families will give gifts back and so then my children will have everything they will need to start their own homes’.

In marked contrast, I observed that youth in Freswota were generally unable to earn or gather the money required to purchase gifts. For example, when Griffith, my neighbour for a short time, and not a member of Kingston-4, heard news of his paternal grandfather’s death, he was distraught for he did not have money to purchase the 5-kilo bag of rice that he needed to give to the mourning family. As a result he did not go and mourn with them. What is significant is that in contrast to Alice who through gift giving was securing her children’s access for future support, Griffith’s family members will most likely not support him in the future. As this cycle of ‘not giving’ continues, familial ties weaken.

In Freswota, I observed that most aspects of peoples’ relationships are informed by received ideas about reciprocity. For example, while many Freswota families provide their unemployed sons and nephews spaces in which to sleep, they discourage them from spending time in the house, as their bodies tax the small amount of space available, as well as the household resources.⁶⁹ This is particularly in terms of food and many of the Kingston-4 boys said they usually only eat breakfast in their homes each day. I suggest that this is because who eats, and how much, is controlled by principles of reciprocity.

I learned this one afternoon when I accompanied Robert, one of the Kingston-4 boys, to his house so he could fetch something. I waited outside, and after a few minutes I overheard an older man exclaim: ‘Good you are leaving’. When Robert came outside he was visibly upset. He explained that it was lunchtime and everyone was eating. He said that his mother’s cousin who was visiting had expressed distress that there was not enough

⁶⁹ There were some exceptions such as Griffith who ‘lived’ in the rent house neighbouring mine but slept, until the family moved, on an old mattress in the not yet completed rent house that neighboured mine on the other side. According to the 2009 population census, the average household size was 4.8 (Vanuatu National Statistics, 2009).

food for everyone. As Robert had neither contributed to the meal with money nor with his own labour, the cousin, who had purchased the food items the family were consuming, did not want to share any of it with Robert. I noted this attitude in town on many different occasions. Another example is seen when Jaksil arrived unannounced at my house one time during a meal I had prepared with some of the boys. He responded to my giving him a plate of food with confusion saying that he did not deserve to eat because he had not contributed to the meal.

The boys explained that most households in Freswota do not have sufficient money to feed the number of people living in them and so there are often conflicts about whether unemployed boys who do not contribute to the household should be given food to eat. The boys explained that families monitor individual contribution to the household and share with those who give, and not with those who do not. Benny told me, for instance, that he is one of the few boys whose parents do give him food every day, and a few coins each week. He explained that this is because every morning he sweeps and mops the floor. Benny said that his parents ask him to do these tasks because he has no sisters living in the house. Most boys told me, however, that they do not contribute much to the households in which they live, and so they accept that often when they return to their houses: ‘there is no food for them in the saucepan and so they don’t always eat’.⁷⁰

This was described as a ‘Catch-22’ as many said they would contribute more labour to the household, yet the heads of households discourage their spending time within them. I believe this reflects strongly held notions about gender roles, where a boy’s valued contribution to the household is money, while a girl’s domestic labour inside the household is sufficient to earn their support. I did not encounter instances where families questioned giving daughters food or money.⁷¹ A parent of one of the boys’ offered the income earner’s perspective. He said: ‘a parent will never tell a child to leave the house and not come back. No! Children are like your right hand, they are very important. But parents will not give

⁷⁰ In 2010 hunger was not part of a wider discourse, but especially among unemployed youth it is a problem.

⁷¹ The reason I use the term ‘households’ rather than nuclear families is because according to my research many households in Freswota include, in addition to the nuclear family, a single cousin; an aunt and her children; a grandparent; or very often one or more of the children’s partners and their babies. This is different from Eriksen who writes that a consequence of diminished involvement in gift giving is that it is leading to the development of a ‘new family structure with more emphasis on the nuclear independent family’ than on the kinship network (2008: 75). While I observed a general weakening of the extended kinship network, I did not observe that households were becoming limited to the nuclear family. Furthermore, it did not seem to me that the financial resources of the households were mostly directed towards nuclear family members than non nuclear family members, rather it was that resources are shared with those members of the household who they believe will reciprocate at some point.

food to boys who are not working because they want them to work for the food they eat. Parents believe that it is not fair that others work and they eat for free’.

Notions about the importance of reciprocity in households are also reflected in the politics surrounding the payment of school tuition fees. Parents explained that they ‘work hard’ (*had wok*) to pay the school fees of their children. They see it as an investment in their own future, as their children’s successes will provide security for them during their old age in town. As such, parents, as well as young people, frame young people’s formal education in terms of a debt that needs to be repaid, referring to it as an ‘account’ (*akoant*). Formally educated youth, who were employed, often complained that they felt guilty making purchases as their parents reminded them regularly to repay their ‘account’. They also explained that they were delaying marriage until their ‘account’ was repaid, because only then would they be able to use their earnings freely to set up independent households.

Furthermore, since educating children is conceptualized as an investment for their own future, parents are aware that educating daughters is riskier than educating sons. A common perception among parents is that if a daughter becomes pregnant before she completes her studies, the money spent on her education will have been for naught. Parents in Freswota are subsequently more controlling of the social activities of daughters still enrolled in school, than daughters who were not.⁷²

These ethnographic examples demonstrate the extent to which notions of reciprocity inform relationships between kin in town. This exemplifies the second point of Simone’s ‘crisis of sociality’ – that a condition of insecurity is created as people increasingly cannot draw on extended family as reliable and stable sources of support.

Writing about Ambrym Islanders in Port Vila, Annelin Eriksen (2008) notes how decreased participation in gift giving in town is leading to weakening support from extended kin. Eriksen writes that many of the women with whom she spoke, prioritize paying the school fees of their children over contributing gifts to ceremonies, that strengthen the relationship between, for example, children and their mother’s brother. Eriksen writes that when these ceremonies are not performed, the relationship between a child and a relative is not maintained and ‘people say that the child is cut off from this relationship and cannot rely on him for help’ (2008: 75).

We see therefore that boys like the Kingston-4, who generally do not have the means to reciprocate gift giving, are limited in who they can draw on for support. It is

⁷² In 2009 in Port Vila, 6.2% of girls ages 15-19 have at least one child and 39% of girls ages 20-24 have at least one child (Vanuatu National Statistics 2009a).

important to note that the Kingston-4 boys' level of involvement in kinship networks differ from other boys such as Griffith, who grew up in communities that are not mixed. While Griffith is also unable to give to his family, he is seemingly still embedded in his kin networks. Visiting his extended family is still an option, and he is aware of the consequences of visiting empty handed. In contrast, I never heard the Kingston-4 boys complain about not being able to give gifts to their extended kin and take this as a reflection of the extent of their dis-embeddedness from kinship networks.

Jaksil contrasts his ideas about what relationships with extended kin were like in the past with how many of the Kingston-4 boys experience them today:

In the time before you could go into any of your families' homes and eat or sleep, but today in town you can't go and spend time in other houses because only a few houses will be happy to feed you. If you go inside a home they will talk at you strongly because of the problem of money because there is not enough money to pay for food, electricity, water, so the relationships in town are not strong. In the system before, a person's needs would not be ignored, yet, in the system of town, well people ignore other people all the time. Some families in town build big walls around their houses and ignore their poorer family members especially ones like me –uneducated boys of the road. This not sharing happens a lot and this is not right because if they are successful they should be open to every man, especially towards their family – this is what family in Melanesia is about.

Jaksil's words correctly point out that resources are not circulating in the same way as before. However, Jaksil's rationalisation about what has gone wrong appears uninformed by his personal experiences. It is not that people are no longer giving, but rather, that some people, like Jaksil, are positioned outside the gift giving systems within which the practices of giving take place. Jaksil seems not to fully realise that the families whom he claims are 'not sharing' are practicing ni-Vanuatuan principles of reciprocity.

Indeed it often struck me that the Kingston-4 boys hold an implicit assumption of entitlement. To me this assumption always appeared unusual, as it seemed in tension with some of the boys' other explanations, such as their awareness of why they do not eat regularly in their households. It exhibits an apparent lack of understanding that some social relationships do provide individuals with support, but they are the ones that have arisen out of practices of reciprocal exchange. This attitude stands in contrast to Griffith, whose words and actions express his explicit understanding that he is outside gift giving networks due to his own inability to return given gifts. Jaksil's words suggest resentment about the lack of giving he experiences around him, as he describes- not giving is un-Melanesian. This tension in speaking about gift giving in town leads me to conclude that while the boys

have adopted the general narrative that ‘in town relationships are broken’. For many of the Kingston-4 boys, the situation is less that their relationships are ‘broken’, but more that they have not had the opportunity to develop them in the first place.

Subsequently, as the rest of this chapter will show, youth in Freswota are developing their own practices of sociality and modes of social organisation as they try to manage the insecure social context in which they live. As the ethnography will reveal, these practices are new and evolving, and while they might provide Freswota youth with a wider set of relationships from which they can access the support and resources they are seeking, in many cases this support is still unreliable and unstable.

The ‘Squad’: A Mode of Social Organisation

I met the Kingston-4 group of boys by chance one afternoon. They were in the Freswota football field building the structures that are used as food-stalls during Vanuatu’s Independence celebrations. As I walked past the field, one of the boys called out to me and I stopped and returned their hello. There were at least thirty of them, sawing bamboo and fastening poles together with rope. They introduced themselves and explained that it was their ‘squad’ (*skwad*), or group, who were responsible for organising the Freswota Independence celebrations that year.

Indeed, later that week, as I sat with my adoptive sisters in the football field watching the celebration’s opening ceremonies, I observed these boys leading a parade of Freswota children into the field. As well, during the days of the celebration, I noticed members of this group speaking with the chiefs of Freswota, and I saw them on the Freswota stage directing the sequence of entertainment events.

Seeing these boys as ‘organisers’ and in relationship with other members of the community struck me as unusual, as all the information I had learned about such groups of boys, up until that time, had been negative. Boys like them are generally stigmatised. Newspapers, radio ‘talk-back’ shows and statements given by members of parliament mostly portray these groups of boys as delinquents. Many Freswota residents describe boys like these as ‘lazy’, and young women who do not interact with them see them as threatening. As I show later in this chapter, it is the community members who regularly interact with these groups of boys, such as the chiefs, who acknowledge the important role these boys play in the running of the community. They look beyond the stereotypes of these boys as ‘unruly’ (*no gat man wea hemi kontrolem hem*); ‘trouble makers’ (*ol trabol*

maka); ‘dangerous men’ (*ol danga man*); ‘men who fight’ (*ol man wea oli stap faet nomo*); men who drink (*ol man blo drink*); and ‘men who smoke marijuana’ (*ol man blo smok*).

In Vanuatu the term ‘gang’ is not often used to describe groups of boys like the Kingston-4. Groups of boys also rarely use the term gang, as ‘gang’ has the popular connotation of organised violence and crime. Previously the term was used to describe the groups of young men involved in criminal activities in the 1990s, like the Vietnam-2 gang mentioned above.

Members of these groups rarely and usually only jokingly, refer to themselves as ‘rascals’ (*raskol*), the label given to groups of young men in Port Moresby, who are involved in criminal activities such as theft, burglary and ‘street crime’ (Goddard 2005: 81). While it must be mentioned that some boys in some of these groups do steal, and are sometimes violent, it is usually only individuals or small numbers of boys who commit these crimes. The groups of boys in Port Vila are thus different from the ‘rascals’ of Port Moresby, who Michael Goddard describes as a gang and sub-gang network involved in extensive organised criminal behaviour (2005: 82).⁷³

Instead of ‘gang’, the boys (and girls) in Port Vila communities use the term ‘squad’ (*sqwad*) to refer to the groups of youth with whom they spend their time. The term ‘squad’ originates from sports as it refers to a sports team (Crowley 2011). People in Freswota believe that the first squad, a Freswota football team, is the inspiration behind the squads in Port Vila.⁷⁴ Today, ‘squad’ generally refers to a group of young men or young women (usually single sex) who assemble regularly, usually due to close proximity, or longevity as neighbours. ‘Squad’ can be used casually to mean a group of friends, as with one of my adoptive sisters who often spoke about eating lunch at school with her ‘squad of girls’ (*skwad blo ol gel*), or with one of the boys of Freswota-3, who meets the ‘squad of boys of Dog Street’ (*skwad blo ol boe blo Dog Street*), every evening to drink kava.

Yet, squads can take on a much more formalised identity as well, such as with the Kingston-4 boys who are organised, have leaders, an ideology, and cooperate together. Due to these characteristics, I suggest that even though the boys do not refer to themselves

⁷³ That *raskols* did not develop in Vila as they did in Port Moresby can be contributed to the commercialisation of kava in town after Independence (Paul Nalau pers. comm. August 2012; cf. Taylor 2010: 286; Lebot 1992; Lindstrom 1982). Kava is seen to be a peaceful alternative to alcohol.

⁷⁴ One of the founders of the football team, who was also an ex-member of the Vietnam-2 gang, told me that when the police started to disassemble the Vietnam-2 gang they started to think about their future. The boys established a football team, the *Freswota Raiders*, as a specific attempt to develop new kinds of cooperation and organisation among Freswota boys. While the *Freswota Raiders* are no longer operative, I was told that the current practice, throughout all of Port Vila, of referring to groups of youth as ‘squads’, evolved out of this first squad in Freswota.

as a ‘gang’, the ‘squad’ is analogous with groups conventionally described by the literature as gangs.

Indeed, analysing the squad in terms of its characteristics as a gang is useful to this discussion as it helps to conceptualise the squad in terms of Simone’s (2005) theory – that in new urban contexts young people are creatively developing new modes of urban social organisation. It is necessary to point out that not all gangs are criminal or delinquent groups – a stereotype that emerged out of a particular historical context, and one that is being contested (see for example Jankowski 1991).⁷⁵ Rather, some gangs evolve with other motivations in mind such as ordering social worlds.

According to the literature on gangs, gangs are a type of social organisation (Thrasher 1927; Whyte 1943; Jankowski 1991; Bourgois 2003; Kinnear 2009). Sociologist Frederic Thrasher (1927) was the first to treat ‘the gang’ as an organisation that develops as youth from the same area with common interests gather together and then become integrated into a group following a social conflict. Natural leaders emerge, and individuals start to solidify under collective behaviour and common purpose (1927: 58). Thrasher writes that the outcome of this is the development of ‘tradition, unreflective internal structure, esprit de corps, solidarity, morale, group awareness, and attachment to a local territory’ (1927: 57).⁷⁶ Thrasher argues that the group ‘becomes conventionalized and seeks incorporation into the structure of the community, imitating some established social pattern such as a club, but in reality retaining many, if not all of its original attributes’ (1927: 58).

Taking-up Thrasher’s approach, Martin Sanchez Jankowski (2001) also examines gangs in terms of their social structure rather than the context out of which they emerge (usually poverty or recent rural to urban migration), or their stereotyped characteristic of delinquency, which he suggests are the two main focal points of most gang studies.⁷⁷ Jankowski defines the gang as an:

Organised social system... whose size and goals have necessitated that social interaction be governed by a leadership structure that has defined roles; where the authority associated with these roles has been legitimized to the extent

⁷⁵ The term ‘gang’ was first applied to Western outlaws in the 19th century; men who robbed stage coaches, banks, saloons and mines. In the 20th century, groups of immigrant workers who had moved into American cities began participating in criminal activities that developed into established organised crime groups. Sociologists studying these groups began referring to them as ‘gangs’ (Jankowski 1991: 2-5).

⁷⁶ Defined as a feeling of pride, fellowship, and common loyalty shared by members of a group.

⁷⁷ I suggest that William Whyte’s (1943) *Street Corner Society: The Social Structure of an Italian Slum* is a notable exception, as is the more recently published ethnography by Philip Bourgois (2003) *In Search of Respect: Selling Crack in El Barrio*.

that social codes are operational to regulate the behaviour of both the leadership and the rank and file; that plans and provides not only for the social and economic services of its members...They believe that through the business dealings of the gang, or the contacts they are able to establish while in the gang, they will be able significantly to improve the quality of their lives (in respect to money, status, but some include power). (2001: 28-29, 30)

Like Thrasher, Jankowski focuses on examining the gang in terms of characteristics that show the gang as a social organisation. Yet what makes Jankowski's work different, and of particular relevance here, is that Jankowski critiques the assumption that gangs emerge in response to social disorganisation caused by poor economic conditions and a desire to create order and safety. Jankowski argues instead that gangs develop as an 'alternative social order' within the social context in which gang members live (1991: 23). Jankowski explains that the gang develops not as a reactive response to experienced social change, but emerges in a pre-existing social context in which its members live, mainly the social context of low-income neighbourhoods with few opportunities for youth.

Applying this analytic framework to Freswota, we can view the Kingston-4 squad as emerging not as a reactive response to social disorganisation created by social change, but as a shared social organisation that has developed in a context that previously had fewer social relations. Following Jankowski, I suggest that in Freswota – a newly developed community, and a different type of community, as it is 'mixed', residents have had to develop a system of shared social order and shared social structure of their own. In the next section I turn to the development of this shared social order. I do this through an examination of the emergence of the Kingston-4 'squad'.

The Kingston-4 Squad of Boys

When I first met Sargent, he was 26-years-old and was a skinny young man who kept his head shaved and often covered by a blue baseball cap. Like many of the other Kingston-4 boys, Sargent was born in town, moved to Freswota with his parents when he was a child, left school after class-six, and from that point on, started spending his time with 'the boys' on the roads. Sargent is soft spoken, and I seldom saw him angry, however I observed that he was usually the first person, when walking into one of the boys' ghettos, to reprimand younger boys (ages 11 or 12) for being too young to smoke marijuana, or if it was daytime, for missing school. Although Sargent was one of the first Kingston-4 boys that I met, it was not until many weeks later, that I learned that his name was not Sargent, and that the

boys called him ‘Sargent’, correctly spelled ‘Sergeant’, because he is their ‘Sargeant-Major’ – their leader.

In line with Thrasher’s (1927) theory that all gangs develop along a trajectory - where youth with shared interests from the same area frequently gather together and eventually, through a moment of conflict, become integrated into a formalised group, we see that the emergence of the Kingston-4 squad follows Thrasher’s outlined course.

According to the boys, it was in 2003 when Freswota was still a ‘wild’ place, that a Freswota boy who had been attending school in Fiji, returned and introduced the older boys to marijuana. Samuel explained that the effect of the marijuana ‘opened their eyes’ (*ae i kam open*), and they became attuned to ‘knowing what was right and what was wrong’.⁷⁸ Samuel said that through smoking marijuana the boys realised that the violence that they had been a party to was wrong; that they needed to change their ways.

In 2003 the older boys arranged a meeting with the younger boys, and, as Benny mentioned in his quote above, ‘they all made peace’. As they spent more time together the boys started referring to themselves as the ‘squad of Freswota-4’, and by all accounts Sargent and one other boy emerged as the group’s main leaders. I observed evidence of their leadership many times as these two boys regularly led squad meetings, sent younger boys to run errands, allocated how squad funds were spent, supported boys when chief held disciplinary meetings, and often used their own money, or exerted influence on their contacts, to pay for kava and food for the squad. In return, I observed that the boys treated these two with respect, referred to them as ‘leader’, ‘boss’, and ‘patron’, implemented their requests, and adhered to being disciplined. An example of the boys’ adherence to being disciplined is seen, for instance, in that Toto obeyed Sargent’s judgment that he not drink kava for three months following an incident where Toto, drunk from kava, had spent a night dangerously asleep at the side of the road.

Around 2005, the squad started referring to themselves as the boys of ‘Kingston-4’, also sometimes spelled ‘Kingstone-4’, because, as they said, they are the ‘Kings’ of marijuana, and thus the ‘kings’ of being ‘stoned’. As I will discuss in more detail in Chapter 3, their name also refers to their identification with Kingston Jamaica – the birthplace of Bob Marley and roots reggae music, whose ideas the boys, to a greater, or

⁷⁸ The boys gave the title ‘Now I Can See’ to the documentary they made because the issues the film addresses are ones they said they became attuned to when their ‘eyes became open’ through smoking marijuana.

lesser extent, all subscribe to, and which they say is what makes their group different from other groups of boys in Freswota.

It was in 2007, that the ‘conflict’ Thrasher suggests serves to integrate gang members into a more formalised group, and into relationship with the wider community, took place. The conflict occurred following the alleged poisoning of a woman from Tanna Island, by her husband and his brother, men from Ambrym Island, and led to violent clashes between people of the two island groups starting in the Ambrym community of Blacksands and then spreading through the residential communities including Freswota-3.

Freswota residents reacted strongly to this outbreak of violence and in response, the ‘Freswota Council of Chiefs’ (*kaonsol blo jief*) was re-established.⁷⁹ The council of chiefs is made up of one elected chief from each of the Freswota areas and is led by a chairman. Each area in Freswota has area chiefs – men who have been elected by their area due to their respectable community service (some Freswota chiefs also come from a line of chiefs on their home islands).⁸⁰ These area chiefs take on the responsibility of managing area projects, chairing community disputes and disciplining area youth.

When the council re-established, following the conflict, they did so under the mandate of ‘building-up’ Freswota ‘cooperation’ and ‘organisation’ so as to make Freswota a safer and better place to live. As part of this mandate, the council set out a directive to end ‘islandism’ – the antagonism and violence that sometimes occurs between people of island groups. As I will discuss later in this chapter, the idea of ‘no islandism’ (*no aelanism*) is intended to break down the barriers between island groups so that people no longer view each other as threatening ‘strangers’.⁸¹

A second council, the Freswota ‘council of youth’ (*kaonsol blo ol yut*) also formed during this time to assist the chiefs in building cooperation between young people. It is necessary to point out that it is a council predominantly run by boys. No girls have leadership roles and very few girls attend meetings, however girls do participate in their events and initiatives.

⁷⁹ The council was first set up in 1995 to assist the police in breaking down the Vietnam-2 gang.

⁸⁰ The practice of Freswota chiefs is informed by previous experience with appointed or elected chiefs. Jolly writes that one of the main ways in which the colonial government established control over people in the archipelago was through the establishment of ‘institutions with indigenous personnel’ (1982: 350). The colonial government introduced the ‘role of the chief’, and initiated and formalized a system of chiefs throughout the archipelago.

⁸¹ Jourdan writes that ‘part of becoming a successful urbanite in Honiara is precisely being able to negotiate otherness’ (1996: 4).

During my time in Freswota I observed that the council was effective in ordering, organising and disciplining hundreds of youth (boys and girls) from Freswota-1 through to Freswota-6. This is partly due to the council's leader – Yalu a boy in his early thirties, who is the leader of the squad of boys of Freswota-3, a member of one of the first families to move to Freswota-3, a younger brother of some of the boys who were in the Vietnam-2 gang, and also the son of one of Freswota's oldest and first chiefs. Boys and girls from all the Freswota areas refer to him as the 'leader of all youth', and as many boys told me: 'when Yalu calls out, everyone goes'. Like the council of chiefs, the council of youth is made up of the leaders of each of the Freswota squads. Thus during my fieldwork, Sargent was the Freswota-4 area youth representative.⁸²

It was in March 2008, following another violent incident in Freswota, that the Kingston-4 boys' identification as boys of Freswota, in contrast to boys of other communities, was cemented. The incident occurred when men, not from Freswota, raped two Freswota girls in the bushes between Freswota and Ohlen Community. Apparently, when the news spread, over 100 boys from Freswota-3 and 4 marched to Ohlen. They did not find the perpetrators and in their rage smashed cars and windows and frightened Ohlen residents.

Apparently at the time, the boys believed that the perpetrators were boys from Ohlen although in actuality the perpetrators were prisoners who had just escaped the Port Vila prison. Following the violence in Ohlen, Ohlen boys, apparently led by the prisoners, marched down to Freswota and attacked Freswota boys.

The next day, the Freswota chiefs organised a meeting - a reconciliation ceremony held in the Freswota Park. The ceremony included the killing of six pigs – one for each area of Freswota, as, according to Sargent, the Freswota chiefs said this was the requisite gesture they needed to make to Ohlen residents for having wrongly accused them of the crime and for having destroyed Ohlen property. Sargent said that Yalu killed the pig on behalf of Freswota-3, and he killed the pig on behalf of Freswota-4.⁸³ The ceremony was described by one newspaper article as unique for town as 'there were no lawyers involved' just like there 'would not have been lawyers to arbitrate a case if it occurred in the rural islands' (The Vanuatu Independent 2008). For many Freswota residents, this ceremony

⁸² A third counsel, the 'counsel of mothers' also exists but was inactive while I was in Freswota.

⁸³ According to the boys, when Sargent killed the pig he became a 'heavy man', a man with 'rank' and thus deserving of respect.

became the impetus for the efforts to build up the organisational structure seen in the community today.

Significantly, this altercation happened between two communities, not between two island groups. As such, it was an important incident in the development of cooperation between boys in Freswota. It was through the boys' joining together in attempted retaliation against the perpetrators, and by means of their cooperation during the reconciliation ceremony, that a self-identification as 'boys of Freswota', in contrast to boys of other communities firmly developed.

Indeed, I observed that community identifications were often expressed in the boys' daily conversations. The boys would sometimes describe boys from other communities, noting, for example that Ohlen boys are disrespectful as they swear at people on the road, Sisaed Paama boys are 'village boys' as they eat and live together like people do in the rural villages, Blacksands boys are dangerous as they know how to poison; and Numburu boys are 'cool' (*tuff*) as they dance hip-hop on the streets.

Craig Lind, writing about Paamese notes a moment when, walking with Paamaese friends in town, they pointed to a group of boys and said 'that's Tanna, they don't respect people' (2010: 125). While Lind's point here is that Tannese embody Tanna, and Paamese people embody Paama, the point that is interesting for this discussion here, is that the Kingston-4 boys, as well as most youth I knew in Freswota, do not make judgments based on home islands, but evaluate people, particularly youth, based on which community the person has grown up in.

Emerging from these details is a picture of the Kingston-4 squad as a group much more organised, and much more embedded in the life of the community, than most people see them as being. Furthermore, as Thrasher and Jankowski both argue, a gang is an organisation when it has defined leaders, internal structure, cohesion, collective behaviour, common purpose, ideology, group awareness, regular gatherings, attachment to a local territory and incorporation into the structure of the community (Thrasher 1927: 57-58, Jankowski 2001: 21-28). The Kingston-4 boys possess these characteristics, some of which I have illustrated in this section, some of which will be demonstrated in the next two sections as I turn to examine specific practices carried out by the squad both to develop social order in Freswota, and to widen the breadth of their social relationships so that social and economic resources can be accessed.

Practices That Build ‘Organisation’

In this chapter, I argue that the squad and the Freswota councils are ‘modalities of urban social organisation’ (Simone 2005: 518) – informal infrastructures youth are developing to broaden their social networks and order their social life, as they try to manage a context of unsupported living. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, Freswota residents conceptualise the widening of their social networks in terms of being ‘organised’ (*oganaes*), which generally refers to the development of a coordinated social structure to frame shared daily life in the community. Particularly for the boys, this social structure revolves around how resources such as money, food, alcohol and kava are accessed and distributed. Returning once again to Simone’s work in Douala Cameroon, he writes that much of the literature on urban development ‘makes the assumption that discernible, if not necessarily formal, groupings or institutions are necessary structures of mediation... [Yet] it has been my experience working with urban development NGOs across many African cities that there are more provisional, less visible modalities through which such intersections can be made’ (2005: 517). As this section will show, the squad and the Freswota councils are Freswota residents’ own creative means of developing organisation in the community.

It is necessary to point out, however, that while the squad and the councils might come across as the most effectual, albeit informal, organisational structures in Freswota, this is not yet the case. They are still very much ‘grass roots’ organisations that have been predominantly developed by youth like the Kingston-4 boys and the chiefs.⁸⁴ As such, many community members who are formally employed, enrolled in educational institutions, and or are participants in church groups, for instance, do not generally participate in these informal structures. Thus, as Simone writes about youth modalities in Douala Cameroon, in Freswota, these modes of organisation are also ‘provisional’ and ‘less visible’ than many of the other modalities of organisation in place. However for the boys, and other youth, the squad and the councils are the primary means through which they order and expand their social world.

The extent of the boys’ agency in expanding their networks did not become evident until one afternoon when a text message from one of the boys directed me to a kava bar in which the boys liked to spend time during the day. When I entered, I saw over a dozen

⁸⁴ In Vanuatu ‘grass roots’ is defined as ‘local’ ideas or initiatives rather than international or foreign ones.

boys busy breaking up marijuana into small pieces and rolling them into uniformly sized joints.⁸⁵

As the boys explained, the squad runs a ‘marijuana cooperative’ (*koprativ blong smok*) – an organisation through which they sell single marijuana joints for 100vt each.⁸⁶ The boys told me that youth from Freswota as well as youth from many other communities come to them to buy these joints. Benson describes their operation to me. He said that they run the cooperative like an ‘association’, with a president who orders and manages the different tasks involved, and a vice president, secretary and treasurer as well.⁸⁷ Benson said they take 50% of each joint sold and put the money into a fund held by the treasurer.⁸⁸ Benson revealed that the money they had at that time was being saved to purchase music-recording equipment so that they could produce their own music. Benson told me that the other 50% earned from each joint sold is used to buy items in town, such as DVD players, which they send to the growers on the islands in exchange for more marijuana. Any money remaining gets distributed between the boys. Benson described the cooperative to me as ‘one creative work of the youth’ (*wan kriativ wok blong ol yut*). A chief in Freswota who works closely with the boys also revealed that he thought the cooperative was a positive initiative since the boys used to ask him frequently for money but now have found another means of earning an income.

A second initiative, one that takes the boys into relationship with a wider community, is their participation in an enterprise initiated by the youth council- the Freswota carwash. The youth council negotiated the use of an empty plot of ground located at the corner of the main road and the road leading into Freswota, and established the car wash there. Each squad of Freswota 1-6 was allocated a day where they would operate the car wash, and most days I observed at least twenty youth taking turns washing the cars at a cost of 200vt per car. At mid day, youth would take the funds and collectively purchase food, which they cooked and ate together. Samson, a 31 year old, a boy from the squad of boys of Freswota-3, a leader of the youth council, and an initiator of the car wash, told me that they began the carwash because they kept hearing about youth who did not have enough food to eat and decided that they needed to raise money to feed them. Writing

⁸⁵ I discuss the boys’ use of marijuana in Chapter 5.

⁸⁶ Approximately £0.67 (xe.com currency converter 12/06/13).

⁸⁷ While I was in the field development organizations frequently hosted workshops titled ‘what makes a good leader’. People are taught that successful organizations divide the responsibilities into positions – president, vice-president, secretary and treasurer. In Port Vila this seems to be the accepted standard format for how best to become ‘organised’ and I observed it repeated frequently.

⁸⁸ I heard many complaints of initiatives that had failed as the treasurer had mismanaged the funds.

about Tanna, Bonnemaïson notes that alliances between people are conceptualised in terms of 'hot food'. He writes that people within alliances share cooked food, which symbolises 'human fraternity' (1985a: 47). The example mentioned here of young people's cooking and eating food together, can similarly be seen as an important part of their building their wider relationship network. As Bonnemaïson further writes, 'those who share the same food also share an identity' (1985a: 47).

I observed that the car wash created other opportunities for Freswota youth as well. Members of the community often approached youth leaders and asked whether the squads could be hired to help with construction or yard work in private households. The optimism of being hired by other members of the community was such that at one point the Kingston-4 boys conversed about using their marijuana cooperative money to purchase a lawn mower, which they would use to start their own grass cutting service. While I do not know whether this came to fruition, I did observe other additional requests for labour in practice. For instance when a chief of the community asked the youth council whether boys could build a shelter in the park to house women coming to town to sell produce at the Freswota market. About 30 boys, including many of the Kingston-4 squad participated in this task. I noticed, that when the work had been completed, the youth leaders directed younger boys to go to their houses and bathe and change, and afterwards to return to a kava bar, where I saw the leaders use the money earned to pay for the boys' kava.

A final example relates to more formal employment, the result of Sargent's persuasive skills as the leader of the Kingston-4 squad. From what the boys told me, the Kingston-4 squad has a good relationship with several members of the municipal government. This is because, during elections, candidates seek out squads of youth and make promises to them in exchange for their collective support and vote. One of the politicians whom the boys agreed to vote for achieved his position, and in keeping with their arrangement, employs the squad formally from time to time. Thus I observed the boys working as security guards at the National Vanuatu cultural arts festival, and another time clearing the overgrown shrubbery on the main roads leading into the centre of town. In both instances the boys told me that the Municipal government was paying for their labour. Each evening following an occasion of formal employment, Sargent would pull out a plastic bag of coins, which he would distribute to the boys so that they could pay for their own kava.

These examples illustrate some of the ways in which the Kingston-4 boys are widening their social networks and thus their possibilities for accessing resources. For the

boys, the squad and councils are modes of organisation that are resourceful and beneficial to them. Moreover, it is through these practices that the boys enter into relationships based upon principles of reciprocity and obligation with other people.

While many of the initiatives described above are examples of labour or service in exchange for payment, they reflect greater complexity than pure transactional exchange. As the case with the politician demonstrates, a relationship of generalised reciprocity has developed as the politician, wanting continued support, employs the squad from time to time. Relationships of obligation are also evident in the young people's interactions with the chiefs. As I will discuss below, the boys often explicitly state that 'the chiefs help them and thus they help the chiefs'. Similarly, the relationship between the Kingston-4 boys and Sargent, as well as between the squad and the council of youth, reflects bonds of obligation and mutual support as the boys do the work provided by their leaders, and their leaders find ways of expanding the squad's work opportunities, and order and organise the manner of the work, and the distribution of its payments.

The emphasis of this section is that the squads and councils are one way the boys expand their network and thus their access to resources. Much can also be said about how their networking, which is a heterogeneous networking, also works to define and build their own conception of 'organisation' in town. Indeed as the above examples demonstrate, the boys' initiatives take them into relationship with youth in other communities; with a broader Freswota community; with people in other parts of the archipelago; and with people in the government. Simone describes this as an engagement with the 'heterogeneity' of the place (2005: 521), and I also see this particular detail of their mode of organisation as an important point for understanding how the boys, and other Port Vila youth, are redefining and building their own organisational structure of town.

For the boys, their most important 'cultural capital' is that they have grown up in a heterogeneous community and have learned to extend the lines of connections into networks spanning multiple contexts. In contrast to many other ni-Vanuatu, who continue to operate through networks based on kinship and shared home island place, boys like the Kingston-4, traverse island-based boundaries and thus bring groups into relationship with a greater population and a greater Vanuatu. As Simone describes for Douala youth, youth, 'trying to find more effective ways of living in their cities operate outside of the conventional rubrics for how to achieve, accumulate and exert influence – conventional rubrics that for the most part do not work for them anyway' (2005: 529). The same can be suggested for the Kingston-4 boys who find that living among 'strangers', does not serve

to help them develop their own means of social reproduction. As such, they are building ways of engaging with the new composition of their living environment.

Thus the bigger picture is that the squad and the councils demonstrate one of Simone's (2005) general arguments - that a 'crisis of sociality' is full of 'possibility'. As Simone writes: a crisis of sociality leads to the possibility 'for the creation of new urban sensibilities and collaborations', ones that are 'increasingly being expressed through more transversal ways of experiencing, navigating and conceptualizing everyday life in the city' (2005: 517).

Although in his article Simone discusses how these transversal ways take Doula youth physically out of their neighbourhoods and across the city, the expansion of sociality that the squad and councils are involved in occur mostly in Freswota. For the boys, Freswota is the centre of their social world. Yet, as these practices include building relationship with people with whom they have had much less prior relationship, I believe that the squad and the councils can also be viewed as operating 'laterally' and in a 'dispersed' way (Simone 2005: 527).

In the next section I look at this more lateral and dispersed operation as I examine in greater detail the transformation of 'strangers' into relations. While Martha Macintyre has noted that in urban Papua New Guinea the spaces in which people live take on new forms that 'militate against the development of close social ties' (2008: 185), the rest of this chapter will show that in Freswota, the squads and councils are working towards developing close relationships among community members.

Practices That Build 'Cooperation'

At the beginning of this chapter I offered a definition of 'cooperation' (*kopiraeten*). I suggested that Freswota residents use the term generally to refer to people working together towards a common goal. For many residents of Freswota, especially its first residents, 'cooperation' additionally, refers to building relationships of obligation and responsibility between people who previously had none. In this section I look at the building of this type of social connection by examining practices of the Freswota councils and the squad, and how it is through these practices that strangers become transformed into 'family', the living area becomes seen as a 'community', and subsequently the life that was experienced as 'disordered' starts to be experienced as one that is more ordered.

Indeed, as Jean Mitchell, who was one of the first anthropologists to do extensive work in town suggests: the project of building community is an important way in which people in town try to make sense of conflicting frames of meaning and conflicting values (2002: 18). Mitchell was writing at a time when many Port Vila's residential areas were more transient than today, although she refers to their condition as one of 'settled transience' (2002: 225). Mitchell describes the 'settlements' of that time as 'in many ways fragmented and alienated places' (2002: 19). As the rest of this chapter will show, I suggest that Freswota residents' focus on 'building up community' is an attempt to navigate this 'settled transience', to build a more integrated and cohesive living place.

Returning once again to Simone's analysis of the newly urbanising Douala in Cameroon, he writes that people in new localities try to come up with 'imaginative ways' of building connection between people with varying degrees of prior relationship (2005: 521). Simone suggests that this process does not involve people becoming permanent members of a specific locality, but rather is a process that 'orients the construction of 'locality' to an ability to continuously, if only temporarily, root specific persons to a series of collaborations and obligations' (2005: 521). As I will demonstrate, in Freswota, collaborative activities and taught notions about community obligation and responsibility work towards transforming Freswota and its residents.⁸⁹

It was in the aftermath of another significant incidence of violence in the community that I observed the councils' agency in constructing Freswota as a place made up of people in 'cooperation' with one another. This particular incident stands out, as residents themselves articulated that it was a moment when the Freswota endeavour of 'community building' had temporarily failed. The incident happened on a morning in April 2010 during my fieldwork – the rape and murder of a young woman and her 6-year-old daughter in an empty kava bar not far from the Presbyterian Church in Freswota-4. The community was shocked as people tried to understand why such an incident had occurred. The Port Vila police ran an investigation, and the Freswota councils led a community wide meeting as well. The meeting was held in the Freswota park with chiefs and 'adults' at one end, and youth leaders and Freswota boys and girls at the other end.

⁸⁹ Bonnemaison has written that for Tannese Islanders, 'strangers' are 'an unknown identity', they are 'beyond the bounds of what is human; there could be no roads with them and consequently no relations' (1985a: 48). I suggest that the boys notion of 'strangers' as a social group to be feared, moreover as a social group which does not contribute to their social reproduction is informed by a similar view.



Figure 17: Freswota-4 'Bush'



Figure 18: Opening the Kingston-4 Boys Pool Table and Kava Bar



Figure 19: Freswota Youth Meeting

Two things struck me during the meeting with the youth. First the language used, which, in retrospect has elicited this analysis. The leaders of the youth council opened the meeting with the words 'thank you for coming Freswota family' (*tank yu blo kam Freswota famili*), and throughout, referred to individual Freswota youth who volunteered to speak, as 'my brother' (*my brata*) and 'my sister' (*my sista*). They also referred to the adults attending the other meeting respectfully by 'papa' 'mama', 'auntie' and 'uncle'.

Secondly, the meeting included much talk about how the murders had occurred as the result of the 'Freswota family' not looking after one another. Apparently, following a dispute with her family, the young woman and child left the house, and having nowhere else to go, had spent the night in an empty kava bar at the side of the road where they were attacked. Youth leaders urged young people to take better care of one another so that members of the community will never be left unsupported again.⁹⁰

I suggest these two points reflect a concept about 'community citizenship', about what makes a good community member. It has been modelled on the category of 'family',

⁹⁰ A week after the murder a small squad of girls from Freswota-3 formed the 'Freswota Girls Association'. The intent of the association was to create a network of support for girls living in Freswota as many girls felt that they did not know each other well. Before I left the field this association was meeting every week, was organizing fundraisings and was receiving support from many male community leaders. As the girl who took the role of vice-president of the Association said at its first meeting: 'If we build cooperation between girls of Freswota we will create a strong community, so if a girl finds herself out at night and in trouble, she will have more people to support her'.

which people understand to be a group to which a person is morally bound, responsible and committed. Indeed the youth leader's use of sibling terms was not unusual here, but was reflective of a wider practice in the squads where youth refer to each other by 'sister', 'brother', and *tawi* a 'jocular address term' that is also a kinship term meaning 'in law' (Crowley 2012).⁹¹ In contrast, I noted that when youth did speak about a biologically related family member, they would employ the term 'straight family' (*stret famili*) to distinguish between fictive and consanguinal kin.

I take this to reflect a broadened notion of what it means to be family. For many youth, the people in Freswota are one's 'family', and the people whom one is biologically related to, who do not necessarily live in Freswota, are one's 'straight family'. Moreover, I noted that while the boys, in particular, would call other Freswota boys 'brother', and often *tawi*, they generally referred to boys from other communities as 'friend'. I suggest that for Freswota youth, employing kinship terminology invokes a greater sense of responsibility and obligation than referring to someone as a 'friend'. As I saw on many occasions the Kingston-4 boys were more likely and more successful asking their 'sisters' and 'brothers' and their *tawi*, for money and other things, than when they asked their 'friends'.

The responsibility the Kingston-4 boys feel towards one another can frequently be seen in practice. For instance, when one of the Kingston-4 boy's learned that his 'straight' sister was pregnant and that the young man involved was forcing her to have an (illegal) abortion he was distraught. He told me that he was upset for the health and safety of his sister and also because he had seen his grandmother crying over the issue. The boy said he had no choice but to confront the young man, and members of the squad accompanied him to do this. What is interesting about this example is that while this Kingston-4 boy told me that he did not have a particularly strong relationship with this sister, he has learned that the role of the brother is to help and protect his sisters and the family. Indeed, I observed many instances when brothers would confront a sister's boyfriend or lover, for not asking permission of the girl's family, as they say it is customary to do, before starting a relationship.⁹²

Such confrontations were usually carried out by groups of related men, as this task is seen to be the 'work' of brothers. That the squad supported the Kingston-4 boy in

⁹¹ *Tawi* is a term also meaning 'in law' (Crowley 2012). A girl would often jokingly refer to a friend as *tawi* if the friend had started a relationship with her brother, or if she wanted to make fun of a friend who was attracted, or also in jest if she was not attracted, to her brother.

⁹² This is because families moderate marriage relationships in Vanuatu. Notably, many of these boys did not ask their own girlfriends' families for the same permission.

confronting the sister's boyfriend reflects just such a brotherly commitment. Confronting a person who lives in another community could have repercussions of many sorts. Yet members of the squad understand their duties to one another and do not shy from them, as they also know that they will require this brotherly support themselves on other occasions.

Returning to the literature on 'gangs', Jankowski (1991) writes that it is common for gangs to socialize their members through identification as a 'brotherhood'. He notes, however, that members do 'not really look on one another as brothers, at least not with the intensity that the brotherhood ideology intended' (1991: 84). Jankowski notes the 'viciousness' of gang members often towards one another and argues that gang members choose to participate in the gang 'not because the gang represents a family (with brothers) that they have been deprived of, but because they perceive the gang to be, at least in the short run, in their best interest (1991: 148). He concedes that 'brotherhood ideology' acts nonetheless as a kind of 'bonding agent' (1991: 84).

I suggest that the use of kinship terms among the Kingston-4 boys and Freswota youth does more than loosely bond them, but elicits actions of mutual responsibility, obligation and giving, thereby building a system of reciprocal support between people who previously had no reason to extend support to one another.

I witnessed this in practice when one of the chiefs of Freswoa-4 died. As is customary throughout much of the archipelago, a 'mourning feast' was held five days after a death (Layard 1942: 544). Unlike the case in other mourning feasts, which I attended in predominantly homogenous communities, participants in this mourning feast were made up mostly of 'community family' and not 'straight' family. For example, the Kingston-4 boys, who are not 'straight family', assumed a visible and significant role in the feast's preparations. They worked full days following the directives of Freswota-4 chiefs preparing the shelter, collecting firewood from forested areas, butchering cows, and preparing the kava roots for drinking.

Additionally, I observed the boys make a 'payment' to the council of chiefs. Anthropologists writing about funeral ceremonies in different parts of the archipelago have shown the importance of payments at funeral ceremonies to maintain social connections (Rodman 1987). It was in a similar fashion, that the boys pooled their money and purchased several big sacks of rice, half a dozen baskets of yams, and a few impressive kava roots. Sargent and the boys presented this payment to the chiefs of Freswota-4. When I asked the boys why making this payment was important they explained that it was the

kastom way to secure continuity in the social relationship between themselves and the chiefs.

When I also asked the boys once why they adhere to the instructions of the chiefs, Samuel explained that ‘the chiefs are like our papas. Whenever there is a problem in the community, the chiefs straighten the problem for the people. So we do not need police here, the chiefs do it. So we must respect the work of the chiefs. We help the chiefs and in return the chiefs help us’. The chiefs also often likened the boys to their children.



Figure 20: Squad of Boys Cooking Lunch Together



Figure 21: Boys Preparing the Mourning Feast



Figure 22: Kingston-4 Boys Working as Security Guards at the National Arts Festival

Accordingly, I observed the boys assisting the chiefs with their duties in the community on many occasions. Besides their work for the Independence celebrations already mentioned, the leaders of the squad monitored the behaviour of other squad members and other youth in the community and referred problems, such as youth who were regularly stealing, or children who often missed school, to the attention of the chiefs. In return I observed that the chiefs found paid work for the boys and also on occasion purchased bags of rice and food items for the boys to eat. The chiefs also negotiated with police on behalf of boys, when they were in legal trouble.⁹³ As well the chiefs disciplined

⁹³ Freswota-4 Chiefs have an agreement with Port Vila police to discipline community members themselves. Tonkinson notes that for Ambrym living in Maat, their ‘self-regulation’ – their solving of their own problems -in conjunction with little interference from Government was an important part of maintaining their identity

individual boys who would respond accordingly. For the boys, ‘cooperating’ with the chiefs serves to develop, in the context of the mixed community, a shared structure, order, rules and consequences where no shared community structure previously existed.

It needs to be noted again, that as the transformation of strangers into relationships is still a new endeavour in Freswota, many relationships are tenuous and unstable. Indeed, cooperation between the boys and the chiefs was not always as ‘strong’ as it was during the example of preparing the mourning feast. Chiefs often expressed gratitude for the ‘cooperation’ of the boys, and referred to the boys as the ‘soldiers’ of the community, the ones who do the work of the chiefs. However, the boys often resentfully explained that they were not merely the soldiers of the community, but were actually the ‘backbone of the chiefs’. That without their cooperation and hard work the chief’s initiatives would not get done.

Displeased with the work of the chiefs, the boys would, on occasion, withdraw their support. Indeed when I first started to spend time with the boys they were in the middle of a dispute with the chiefs of Freswota-4 and thus were not assisting the chiefs in any of their community duties. The dispute pertained to differences in opinion as to who residents of Freswota-4 were to support in the mayoral election. The dispute lasted three months until eventually the boys accepted a reconciliation meeting with the chiefs. During the meeting the chiefs repeated to the boys that the boys were the ‘children of the chiefs’ and the chiefs were their ‘fathers’. The chiefs admitted that they have to accept the opinions of their children, and that in the future they will listen more to the boys. The chiefs apologized, the boys accepted, and kava was drunk to put the issue behind them.

Returning to the Freswota meeting following the murders, one last term of reference struck me as important, as it further demonstrates that the squads and the council are developing fictive kin relationships. This term was used by Freswota leaders throughout the meeting and referred to Freswota as ‘one basket’ (*Freswota hemi wan basket nomo*). The usage of the term ‘basket’ is interesting here as ‘basket’ is also the Bislama term for ‘womb’ – ‘basket belonging to the baby’ (*basket blong bebe*) and is seen as a person’s first ‘basket’, and a person’s first home. I suggest that by employing this term, Freswota councils are actively engaged in discouraging differences produced through young people’s parents’ attachment to home island places, i.e. the concept of ‘no islandism’, mentioned above, and are fostering instead, a notion of being ‘one people’ in

as Ambrymese (1977: 280). I suggest that for the boys, solving their own problems within Freswota is contributing to the development of a Freswota community identity.

the same womb. As one of the chiefs remarked in the speech that closed the meeting: ‘people in Freswota need to work harder to become one people, one family’.

Notably, the terms used by the councils do not elicit ideas about building up Freswota as a place of origins. Quite the opposite, speeches in Freswota usually exclaimed variations of: ‘Even though we come from different places, we all live in Freswota and so we are all the same’. Using the term ‘one basket’ does not invalidate people’s different levels of attachment to their home island places, rather it is an attempt to develop a Freswota way of conceptualising the community as a concomitant place of belonging – a person has origins, and a contemporary place where they live in strong relationship with one another.

As the literature on town communities in Melanesia shows, focussing on kin relationships is not a new practice in Melanesian towns. Citing a study of a settlement in Port Moresby, Goddard quotes that ‘Port Moresby is... a “replica” town of ‘Rabia camp’ as indigenous immigrants try to recreate the social relationships they had at home (Hitchcock and Oram, in Goddard 2010: 14). What is different, however, is that while the literature on social life in Melanesian towns has predominantly shown Melanesians to be focused on maintaining kin relationships as a way to ‘maintain ethnic identity’ (Goddard: 2010: 14), what is occurring in Freswota instead, is an example of a community creating kin relationships based on the idea of ‘being one’, as an attempt to override ethnic differences.

Conclusion: Becoming a ‘Good’ Community

This chapter has argued that the squad and the councils can be analysed as new modes of social organisation which Freswota residents, particularly Freswota youth, are creatively developing in order to negotiate both a lack of support from their ‘straight’ kinship networks in town and their living in a ‘mixed’ island community. Throughout, I have suggested that the squads and the council are examples of emerging models of order making in Freswota. Their particular focus on ‘building-up’ ‘organisation’ and ‘cooperation’ is intended to develop a community with structure, discipline, collaboration, and mutual responsibility, and thus a greater sense of stability, safety and order than what existed before.

What this amounts to, for many Freswota residents, is the development of a ‘community’. As mentioned in the Introduction to this chapter, residents explain that prior

to the 1990s the area was not yet a community, as there was little cooperative social order, shared structural organisation, discipline, or a shared sociality between the people living there. In contrast, they describe the greater order of Freswota today as a sign that Freswota is ‘becoming good’ (*stap kam gud*).⁹⁴

Freswota residents can often be heard comparing Freswota to other Port Vila residential areas such as Numburu, Ohlen and Beverly Hills, its neighbours. These areas are often described, as one Freswota resident said: ‘not as good’ (*oli no gud olsem*) because ‘the people on the road don’t talk to each other, they only talk to their immediate neighbours and don’t have a system of cooperation like we do in Freswota’. For residents of Freswota it is this widened sociality and thus the development of relationships of mutual responsibility, care, and fictive kinship relationships, that makes Freswota both a community and a ‘good’ community in which people want to live. Even residents, who do not participate in the system of the councils, seem to appreciate Freswota’s mandate of ‘no islandism’. One resident confirmed this, explaining to me that it is also in his best interest that conflict and crime be reduced and that people in the community get along.⁹⁵

For the Kingston-4 squad, the community is not just a collection of houses or residences. Indeed as the next chapter will show, the boys spend little waking time inside houses, but are found much more often on or along Freswota’s many roads. For the boys, the value of Freswota as a place is their social relationships in the community, and it is through these social relationships, that they not only are able to be socially productive beings, but are also developing greater purpose for their everyday lives.

⁹⁴ Writing about Port Moresby, Michael Goddard notes that the residents of squatter settlements are perceived as ‘maladjusted and undesirable in urban society’ (2001: 3). Perhaps one other reason residents are building a greater sense of a ‘good’ community is to curtail similar stereotypes of the ‘settlement’ in Vila as a less desirable place to live and be from.

⁹⁵ There are exceptions and the boys criticized some families for living behind big walls and not participating in the community.

Chapter 3

‘Boys of the Road’

Introduction

The Kingston-4 boys are ‘boys of the road’ (*boe blo rod*). This is an expression which originated in the late 1990s when groups of young men ‘hanging out’ on Port Vila streets became a fixture of Port Vila life. The boys do not reject this classification; they admit that they ‘live a life of the road’. One of the Kingston-4 boys, Manu, once described the boys’ daily routine: ‘We wake up. Drink tea. Go outside to the road. Find one boy, then two boys, then three boys. Eventually the full squad is there. Sometimes we only go back to the house at night. This is our life as boys of the road’.

Houses in Freswota are often small, over-crowded and usually dominated by women and small children. From about age ten, boys who are not otherwise occupied with school or paid employment, start spending more and more time with peers on the road.

Yet in Vanuatu, being *of* the road is a problematic condition of being. Firstly, being *of* the road implies that a person is not *of* a place (*man ples*). As described in Chapter 1, not being of a place is experienced as an existential problem. A person who is alienated from place is a person who moves purposelessly in an unproductive and un-reproductive condition. Moreover, unmotivated time spent on roads is often considered improper ni-Vanuatu social behaviour. Indeed, most people in Vanuatu have houses, gardens and established places in which to be, and so do not linger on roads.

Roads are generally seen to be the routes that connect people, both metaphorically and practically to planned destinations. Time spent on roads is usually in the form of travelling and is directed and with intention. Margaret Jolly notes that ni-Vanuatu disapprove of ‘unmotivated’ movements (1999: 284), and John Taylor writes that anyone seen ‘drifting unaccountably out of their usual network of paths is treated with suspicion’ (2008a: 136). Extended time on roads is also feared, for being on a road, in contrast to being in a place, leaves a person vulnerable to attack by agents of black magic and by unknown men. As well, since roads are public, movements along them can lead to gossip and ridicule. Lissant Bolton correctly states that in Vanuatu: ‘it is not a good thing to be only on a road; one must be able to use a road in relation to a place’ (2003: 71).

The Kingston-4 boys, however, live the majority of their everyday lives (metaphorically and practically) on and along Freswota roads. When considering their relationship with Freswota roads it becomes clear that their time on roads is not static, unproductive, nor severed from relationship with place. Indeed by examining the Kingston-4 boys' relationship with Freswota roads, it becomes evident that the boys do not experience themselves as 'boys of the road' in the popular sense of the phrase. Rather, they are boys *of* the road because as Manu implies above – the road in and of itself is their place.

In this chapter, I examine the Kingston-4 boys' every-day life on Freswota roads. It is through their particular practices on and along Freswota roads that they are creating new social and spatial relationships. I suggest that the boys' experience the road as a place in and of itself, and this is different to previous ni-Vanuatu understandings of the road as means to an end, as the travelled route towards a destination point, and as the metaphorical pathway that connects a person to place.⁹⁶

As this chapter will show, activities on roads do not always have to be destination focused to engender the creation of social and spatial relationships; rather, destination-less movements on and along roads can also be analysed. This chapter will demonstrate, that although Freswota residents generally perceive the Kingston-4 boys as 'wasting time' (*westem taem*) on unnamed roads, the boys are bound up in practices that are not dissimilar to the practices of their predecessors. The boys activities on the roads produce their landscape, and establish the spatial and social relationships that emplace them.

This chapter will first examine the importance of 'roads' for Austronesian peoples and then will consider the processes through which the boys are constructing Freswota community as their place, and the means through which they justify their emplacement within it.

In her work on young people in Blacksands community, Mitchell examines 'how roads are used to claim space and to make places' (2002: 12). Mitchell looks specifically at young people's 'restless' walking along urban roads and how through this walking youth 'create roads that encounter, critique and embrace modernity' (2002: 399). In this chapter I also examine how young people's creative relationship with roads is one register through which they claim space in order to make their own places. However, my focus on place making and engagement with specific roads takes a different analytic approach to

⁹⁶ Place in Melanesia can be constructed and experienced in multiple ways (Fox 1997; Rodman 1992).

Mitchell's who located her discussion of *spirim pablik rod*, which means to 'walk restlessly along the roads in town', within a broader socio-economic discussion of how young people navigate living in the rapidly changing post-colonial context.

The Meaning of Roads

Throughout Vanuatu, as well as the Austronesian-speaking world, local people use the word *rod*, meaning 'road' or 'pathway' (Crowley 2011) as a metaphor to signify spatial relationships, relationships with place, and ways of being (Bonnemaison 1994; Mitchell 2002; Patterson 2002; Bolton 2003; Taylor 2008a). Many Bislama phrases reflect 'roads' as a metaphor signifying both the creation and the limitation of relationships (Bolton 2003: 71). Expressions like 'new road' (*niu rod*) and 'road of the woman' (*rod bong woman*) are often used when speaking about marriage to describe new alliances and kin relationships, and 'they have blocked the road' (*oli blokem rod*) or 'the road is broken' (*rod i brokbrok*) are used to reflect a relationship's constraints or diminishment.⁹⁷

The literature on Vanuatu shows that ni-Vanuatu also use the term 'road' as a metaphor to reflect movement, mobility and flows. Goods, people and knowledge circulate along 'exchange roads', mediated by 'road middlemen' who control the passage of goods and information and subsequently the social relationships between people along the way (Lindstrom 1990: 124-125). Experiences of migration and mobility are also expressed through notions of 'roads' such as following the 'road' back to one's autochthonous place, or following 'new roads' that take a person to new places (Patterson 2002). In its most general sense, the significance of the term is, as Joel Bonnemaison describes, that Vanuatu society itself is believed to be a 'flexible spatial network evolving from and building itself by means of roads' (1994: 321). Ni-Vanuatu ideas about roads thus reflect the importance of place, as roads signify a person's relationship to places (Bolton 2003: 71).

In this chapter I broaden the academic focus on people's metaphorical usage of 'road' in Vanuatu, by additionally examining everyday physical movements and practices on and along the roads. I take this approach because the Kingston-4 boys reject being defined by many of the road metaphors which frame boys like them. This is seen in the metaphors often used to describe boys like them such as: they are 'on a broken road' (*stap*

⁹⁷ Mitchell discusses the metaphor 'road of the woman' which signifies the role of women in creating new relationships (2002: 330).

lo wan rod wea i brok), ‘at a half-road’ (*stap lo haf rod*), and are ‘children of the road’ (*pikanini blo rod*), which all reflect a general understanding in Vanuatu that a ni-Vanuatu person’s growth is impaired when they are ‘of’ the road and not ‘of’ a home island place.⁹⁸ As mentioned in the Introduction to the thesis, the boys’ place making is also about fashioning themselves in ways that supersede this popular discourse.

J.B. Jackson (1994) argues that the road has for too long been neglected by historians and students of landscape whose writings have continuously positioned the road as subservient to place. The reason for this, Jackson suggests, is that the purpose of each road, lane or path has been seen to always lead towards a destination. Jackson writes that the question of having a road presupposes having a house, and therefore the true function of the road has been to lead a person home. Jackson suggests that without a specific destination, ‘a road has no reason for existing’ (1994: 189). Accordingly, Jackson calls for a redefinition of our conception of the road. He writes that the road can no longer be ‘identified solely with movement from one place to another’, but is increasingly the location of work, leisure and social activities, and as such, roads ‘no longer merely lead to places, they are places’ (1994: 190).

Drawing from Jackson, this chapter analyses the ‘boys of the road’ in the sense that it is through their being *on* the Freswota roads and their being *of* the Freswota roads as well, that they are making and experiencing the road as their place. As described in Chapter 1, the Kingston-4 boys experience themselves as neither having a home island place, nor the opportunity to enter the system of town. The consequence of this, as argued here, is that they are forming themselves, and the land available to them, in ways they find meaningful.

A Prelude to Place Making in Freswota

The Kingston-4 boys, as well as many other Freswota residents say that Freswota Community has a precise starting point or origin – a day in 1977 when a municipal bulldozer cleared the Freswota land of its trees and bush, preparing it for development into saleable residential plots. While residents are aware that the Ifiran people of South Efate are the autochthonous owners of the Freswota land, most residents say that Freswota is a newly established community; a newly inhabited place.

⁹⁸ The metaphor ‘child of the road’ (*pikinini blo rod*) is translated as illegitimate child. A person who does not have a relationship with their biological father is seen as not having a home island.

In what follows, I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys have constructed a notion of Freswota as a previously empty landscape, and themselves as its first place making inhabitants. Although this section does not discuss roads specifically, the boys' emptying of the area of its pre-Freswota meaning is an important part of the boys' project of transforming this land into their Freswota place.

While the small faded sign hanging above the performance stage welcomes people to the 'Matua Park', residents never refer to Freswota, or to the 'Freswota Park', by its original Ifiran name - *Matua* or *Mauro*.⁹⁹ Indeed it was only when I asked a chief about the Freswota landscape that I was told of the prior history of the land. Yet even he revealed that the spirits of the Ifiran ancestors had long since left this place as during the colonial period the land was a French owned plantation and following Independence it was purchased by the Vanuatu Housing Corporation and lay idle until its development.¹⁰⁰

In their descriptions, the Kingston-4 boys imply that the pre-Freswota land was a pre-socialized place. They describe the landscape before its development as having been 'bush territory', an area without roads and without people living there. They say that it was neither lived in by Ifirans, by the spirits of Ifiran ancestors, nor by the spirits of the boys' own ancestors as their parents are migrants to Efate Island and thus they live on 'foreign ground' (*foren graon*). Moreover, the boys describe the land literally as a 'wasteland', as it was the site of the Municipal landfill and was, for many years, scattered with discarded construction materials, rotting food items, old tyres and other refuse. The boys remarked that stray bullocks, which had escaped the plantation and had wandered inland into the bush, would, from time to time, emerge and roam the piles of rubbish. People did not come to this area, the boys told me, unless it was to throw away rubbish, or to hide from the police. Thus in the boys' imaginings, the land, before being bulldozed, was 'vacuous' - a pre-socialized territory in disorder and chaos with 'no identity as a place' (Scott 2005: 206).

That Ifirans would give a different description to this same landscape leads to questioning why people in Freswota frame the pre-Freswota land in such a way. What emerges is the understanding that Freswota residents emptied the landscape of previous

⁹⁹ Similarly, residents do not refer to the Freswota Presbyterian Church by its official name - the Malasitabu Presbyterian Church which refers to the Ifiran name of the area.

¹⁰⁰ According to my research, a Frenchman named M. Demeaux owned the plantation. After Independence, the land that is now Freswota-1 and Freswota-2 was purchased and subdivided by a French Company called Gas Central, owned by a Frenchman named M. Rousset. The land that is now Freswota-3, 4, 5 and 6 was purchased and subdivided by the Vanuatu Housing Corporation.

social meaning as a prelude to forming it in ways that are meaningful for them. For Freswota residents, an Ifiran history of the territory would impinge on their own project of place making, as they would then view the land as belonging to others.

Having emptied the area of its pre-Freswota meaning, the boys transformed the virtual ‘no-place’ into socially meaningful place. In the following pages I describe how the boys have inscribed the ‘empty space’ with social meaning through the development of an origin story and a genealogy. I suggest that while the place they are making is new, the manner in which they are making it is informed by practices received from their forebears. The boys have developed their own history of Freswota because this type of social knowledge is one way in which ni-Vanuatu justify a person or a group’s emplacement in a particular territory.

For the boys, Freswota began (see Time Line) when the bulldozer cleared the land of its overgrown bush and trees, removed piles of rubbish, and divided the land into residential plots. Several boys recounted the history of Freswota to me one evening. The following is a compilation of their words:

The tractor came in 1977 and cleared the land. Afterwards a few families moved into the area. These families built small houses out of pieces of wood and scraps of iron and covered them with blue plastic. Most families did not have money to build houses as they had only just paid for their plots of land. Many families who had bought plots did not yet move to Freswota. Another reason people did not move to Freswota right away was because the gang of boys- the Vietnam-2 gang were in control of the area. For about six years the gang frightened people and so many people stayed away. It took the police and some of the people already living in Freswota one full year to shut the gang down. Because many people were not yet using their plots the land became wild again.¹⁰¹ Most of us boys came to Freswota between about 1991 and 1992. At that time Freswota area was still bush and there was only one small road. Many houses were being built but none were yet connected to electricity, or to the municipal water supply. People would walk this small road down to the river at Freswota-5 to get their water. This was how Freswota got its name. When a neighbour asked a person ‘where are you going?’ the person would answer ‘I am going to the fresh water’. The community adopted the name *Freswota*, meaning ‘fresh water’. When most of us boys arrived in Freswota there was only one store. It sold rice and toilet paper and single cigarettes. We would sometimes go to the store and just buy one cigarette, or a cigarette and an ice cream that we would all share. In 1995 the municipal council pulled out all the grasses and turned the small road that people walked on into the big road that now goes from Freswota-3 to Freswota-5. We first called this big road the Chocolate Road because every time it rained the dirt of the road turned into soft mud like melted chocolate. Then the municipality connected Freswota houses to electricity and to the

¹⁰¹ Some people living in other communities used their Freswota plots of land as gardens during this time.

water supply. About 2000 they built the Freswota Park on the boundary between Freswota-3 and Freswota-4. We used to sometimes go and play football there. The big Presbyterian Church was also built near the park. The Presbyterian Church is built right where the landfill used to be.¹⁰² Around that time the municipality started building the Freswota football field and the Freswota School. The municipality came into the community again later in about 2002 or 2003 and paved the chocolate road and put up streetlights. Now they are building a roofed market-house in the park for the women who sell island food. They are also going to put coral down on the road at the back of Freswota, behind the Freswota School, so that buses and trucks can take people to their homes all the way in Freswota-6. Soon they might pave that road and put up street lamps. This will make life more difficult, because then there will be no area in Freswota that is quiet and doesn't have people. Freswota-4 is a holy place. This is what the Jamaican reggae singer Jah Mason said when he visited us here (in 2008) after his concert in town. He stepped off the bus by the Alick Noel store and when he saw our name 'Kingston-4' written on the shed there in orange he asked us what it meant. We told him that this was our name - 'Kingston-4'. Jah Mason said that being in Freswota-4 with us was just like being home in holy Kingston Jamaica. He said that Freswota-4 is a holy place too. He said this and then he removed his head covering and took out his dread locks. We walked around Freswota-4 with Jah Mason and all our dread locks flying loose. Before Jah Mason jumped on the bus back to town he tucked his dread locks into his hat. This day when Jah Mason visited us here, this was a great day.

This story, told to me by several boys one evening can be viewed as the boys' history of Freswota. I suggest that as the boys did not inherit a history of Freswota that is relevant to them, they have formed their own story of the community. This is in keeping with Austronesian practices of place making, where history and origin stories are the social knowledge that legitimises a people's emplacement in an area.

In the edited volume on place making in Austronesia, James Fox and the other contributors stress the importance of 'narratives of the past in defining a landscape of specific places' (1997: 6; cf. Jolly 1999). In particular, origin stories and a history that documents a people's emergence from the ground are seen to be important indicators of a person or group's emplacement in a particular territory. Bonnemaïson (1994) describes, for example, that Tannese creation stories reveal that Tannese progenitors were stones who moved around the island in howling gangs. When the stones settled they received

¹⁰² It is interesting to note that while the boys mention knowing about the landfill that was previously situated on this site, they did not acknowledge the Ifiran name for the area where the church is located (even though the church's official name – the Malasitabu Presbyterian Church refers to this heritage). This reiterates a point made previously, that residents in Freswota have emptied the land of its prior social meaning as a prelude to forming it in their own meaningful ways.

names and turned into places by sinking into the soil. Bonnemaïson writes that Tannese believe that it was out of these ‘stone places’ that the first Tannese ancestors emerged.

The boys’ specific focus on roads throughout their story is somewhat analogous to stories that focus on how humans emerged from non-human entities that became emplaced in the ground. Indeed we see that when the boys first write themselves into their story, their emergence coincides with their first mention of a small road. Moreover, the boys make explicit that the name Freswota itself emerged as a result of movements along the road. As well, much of their description of the growth of the community maps the transformation of a community with no roads to a community with two large thoroughfares. Thus while the boys’ history does not suggest that the roads ‘have given birth to the Kingston-4 boys’, their focus on the roads and in particular the transformation of the roads, does convey a sense that the boys own maturation has coincided with the development of the roads. The boys’ story reveals that the boys are boys *of* the road, since their own growth and constitution is entwined with that of the roads themselves.

Anthropological literature has also documented that ni-Vanuatu use the recitation of genealogies to demonstrate connection between living people and the first ancestors of a specific place, and that this is another practice through which ni-Vanuatu legitimize emplacement in a particular territory. Knut Rio (2002) recounts, for example, the genealogy recited by people from the village of Fanla in North Ambrym who trace their first ancestor to a man born out of a black potato-like root. Returning to the history recounted by the boys above, I believe that it can be viewed as a recitation of an ordered sequence of events that resembles what Fox (1997) refers to as ‘migratory topogenies’. Fox writes that ‘migratory topogenies’, like topogenies generally, mark succession in space, but as they often (not always) recount a past migration of a group, they also mark the dimension of time that is associated with genealogy as well (1997: 12). I suggest that the boys’ recitation of their history in the form of a sequence of events reveals the boys’ concern with time and it’s passing. In the boys’ history they consider that Freswota is changing rapidly and moreover that these changes are slowly impinging on their way of life.

The boys’ focus on the changes in the roads is not surprising as it is on and along the roads that they spend most of their time. In their imagination, the municipal government is impinging on their freedoms on and along the roads – by putting in road lamps, and by turning small roads into main thoroughfares. As I discuss in the next

section, however, the boys have appropriated the Freswota roads as their place and are imbuing them with meaning.

Road Naming and the Production of Locative Identities

In his Introduction to the *Poetic Power of Place*, Fox writes that throughout Austronesia, the ordering of space is fundamental to the creation of ‘locative identities’ (1997: 4).

Through specific ethnographic examples, Fox, and the other contributors to this edited volume, explore processes through which Austronesian peoples create relationship with their land, relationships that serve to locate them in a particular place. Accordingly, I suggest that in Freswota, unbeknownst to many residents, young people have named the Freswota-4 roads.¹⁰³ I argue that through this practice, the boys are inscribing the roads with meaning – a process that creates their ‘locative’, or emplaced identity.

It was late one night when I realized the significance of roads for the Kingston-4 boys. Walking back from a nightclub, we approached the large banyan tree that marks the turn into Freswota. ‘We are safe now’, Jones said. He continued: ‘Sometimes when we walk in other neighbourhoods we don’t feel safe. But as soon when we arrive onto our big road then it’s like we have come home already’. I noticed that when we turned onto the ‘big road’ leading into Freswota, the boys’ pace slowed and they returned to their usual manner of joking with each other and making fun. For the boys, time spent in other areas is seen to be dangerous where they say they are ‘strangers walking on other people’s land’ (*strenja wea oli wokbaot lo graon blo nara man*). In contrast, they describe being in Freswota as being in their own ‘yard’, an idiom that likens the Freswota community to the yard of their homes, which are familiar and safer places.

This particular evening, as we walked through Freswota, bidding good-night as each boy turned onto the smaller road that would take him home, I asked a boy whom I had only just met where in Freswota he lived. The boy pointed to the road we were approaching and said ‘I live there, on Angel Street’. I was puzzled. I had been living in Freswota a few months yet had not heard a road being called by name. Rather, I had become accustomed to referencing the ‘big’ road in the community, the only road that was paved, and the ‘small’ roads – the dirt roads that branched off the ‘big’ road. None of these roads had formally marked street signs, nor as it appeared to me at the time, names

¹⁰³ Bonnemaïson writes that on Tanna roads have names and frequently their own origin myth (1985a: 48).

either. I was surprised, therefore, when, as we approached the boy's road, I noticed for the first time, 'Angel Street' painted on the nearest lamppost.

The next day I asked Toto, Alfred and Benny whether other roads were also named. They told me that they were and as they told me the names of each road, an ordered map of Freswota-4 was revealed (See Map 4). I learned that while none of the other roads had their names written on posts, every road had a name, and each name referred to an original resident in the community, to a moment in time, or to an experience. The boys explained each road's name and meaning:

Bani Street is named after Chief Bani, one of the first elected chiefs of Freswota. *Fairua Street* refers to Mr. Fairua, an old man from the Solomon Islands who used to live there and was well known among Freswota youth, as he used to coach boxing. *Golden Street* is named after the many rich men who live there. This street is also described as the 'gateway to heaven', because it is money that makes a person in town happy. *Dog Street* earned its name because many households use dogs for their security on this street. *Waking Street* means 'brother' in Pentecost language and some of the first residents on this street were from Pentecost Island. *Babylon Street* refers to several police officers who live on the street, though it was first named *Revolution Street* after some ex-prisoners who lived there. *Rebel Street*, and *Ex-Cell Street* - short for 'ex-prison cell mates', also refer to ex-prisoners and remind everyone that in the early years of Freswota, escaped prisoners used to hide in the bush surrounding these roads. *Dak Street* (Dark Street) and *Dak Kona* (Dark Corner) point to the lack of access to electricity still in this part of the community. *Holi Street* is named after its 'holy' (*holi*) residents who regularly attend church. *Angel Street* is named after the 'nice looking' 'good girls' who live there. *Hop Street* reminds us that 'if you want something you must always have 'hope' (*hop*). *Mortein Street* is named after the many 'mosquitos' (*moskito*) who hang around at the kava bars there.¹⁰⁴ *Paul Street* earned its name from an old man named 'Paul' who 'lost his head' and spent his days walking up and down this road. *Snoopy Street* and *Highstone Street* are both named after popular hip-hop dances a few of the boys used to do. *Natty King Street* is named after an international reggae artist. The Bislama term *kapkapsaed* means 'very good' and *Kapkapsaed Street* is a street the boys said is 'a very good street'.¹⁰⁵ Lastly, the 'big' road, the road that goes through Freswota, known before as the *Joklet Rod* 'Chocolate Road' is called the *Kingston Highway*. This road is named after Kingston Jamaica, the birthplace of Bob Marley and reggae music. It also has this name because this part of Freswota is the place of the Kingston-4 boys.

¹⁰⁴ Mortein is the brand name of an insect repellent spray. The term 'mosquito' is used to describe people who frequently ask for money, cigarettes and kava and who are said to 'prick a person's neck to suck out the sugar' (*stikem nek blo karem aot suga*).

¹⁰⁵ *Kapkapsaed* is not to be confused with the Bislama term *kapsaed* which means to 'tip over' (Crowley 2011). Linguistic Anthropologist Leslie Vandeputte-Tavo notes no known connection between these two terms (pers. comm. March 2013).

As soon as I learned the street names I noticed the frequency with which the boys used them when communicating, organizing and locating their movements. I observed that when trying to locate each other they sent messages saying they were on *Hop Street* or by the *Dak Kona*. The boys used road names also when communicating and monitoring the observed movements of others. For example, the intentions of a girl, seen walking alone late at night could be identified by which road she was seen walking along as the boys know where all the young men in the community live and suspected boyfriends could thus be collectively identified.

While most Freswota youth, even boys who do not regularly spend time with the Kingston-4 squad, as well as many of the Freswota-4 girls, seem to know and use these road names regularly, I observed that this knowledge was not ubiquitous across generations. I only heard one Freswota-4 chief, the chief who said he was responsible for the Kingston-4 squad mention that he needed to collect something on *Hop Street*. Neither the parents of my adoptive family, nor my landlord, nor the parents of the boys seemed to know of these road names, reflecting a generational difference in the meaning given to roads. Unlike other residents of Freswota who refer to the roads, as ‘big’ and ‘small’, for the Kingston-4 boys, who spend the majority of their daytime and night-time on the Freswota roads, mapping the roads is an ‘organizing strategy’; it is a reference system- the knowledge and usage of which serves to locate them in the land (Fox 1997: 5).

However, practices of place naming can hold significance for local populations beyond the ordering and organization of physical space. Place naming is also a process through which memories, practices and experiences become spatialised. Writing about the Western Apache, Keith Basso notes, for example that:

Place names are arguably among the most highly charged connection to specific localities, place names may be used to summon forth an enormous range of mental and emotional associations – associations of time and space, of history and events, of persons and social activities, of oneself and stages in one’s life. And in their capacity to evoke, in their compact power to muster and consolidate so much of what a landscape may be taken to represent in both personal and cultural terms, place names acquire a functional value that easily matches their utility as instruments of reference. (1988: 103)

The particular names the boys have chosen evoke the boys’ experiences living in town and are a means through which they become emplaced in the area.

Noticeably, the boys’ chosen names do not signal any attachment to home island places, as is the case in other areas of town such as, for example, ‘Sisaed Paama’ whose

name reflects that its residents originate from the island of Paama (cf. Eriksen 2008; Lindstrom 2011). Since the boys come from diverse island backgrounds, their origin story, history, and their named roads, are not based on knowledge from any one cultural group. The social knowledge reflects their identity as heterogeneous boys who have mostly all grown up together in Freswota. In this way their place naming forges a sense of place in accordance with their cosmopolitan town lives. This is what makes this example of the boys' road names particularly interesting – unlike in many other contexts, where evidence of past ancestral activity in the land is mapped onto the landscape (cf. Basso 1988; Fox 1997: 7; in Vanuatu cf. Rodman 1987: 35; Bolton 2003: 97; Lindstrom 1996: 127; Taylor 2008a: 135), for the boys, the Freswota landscape does not contain such evidence. The Kingston-4 boys have not inherited a collective record of remembered meanings from predecessors. They are therefore producing a landscape of their own relevant shared social knowledge.



Figure 23: Freswota-4 Road
After a Rain



Figure 24: Freswota-4 'Small'
Road



Figure 25: The Kingston
Highway

The road names can be classified into four groupings, and the stories about the names reflect specific social knowledge about the boys. *Bani Street*, *Fairua Street*, *Waking Street* and *Paul Street* reference some of the original residents of Freswota. As the boys have neither inherited a history nor inherited topographies, these particular names reflect the boy's concern with creating their own-shared story. I suggest that the boys' choice of these particular names can be described by what Barbara Bender terms 'landscapes of memory' – place names that 'record the actions of human agents who played a role in transforming the country', in contrast to what she terms 'landscapes as memory' –place names that refer to ancestral action (1993: 14).

Golden Street and *Angel Street* reveal the boys' aspirations for their futures. Both 'gold' and the 'nice looking', 'good' girls, whom they call 'Angels' are, as the boys would often tell me, inaccessible for 'boys of the road' who have little formal education and no jobs. As such, these names reflect their concern with growing class inequalities and the social marginalisation they experience. The boys said, however, they have 'hope' and *Hop Street* reminds them 'always to hope for a better future'.

The third grouping of roads reflects the boys' experienced condition of insecurity. *Dog Street*, *Babylon Street*, *Dak Street* and *Dak Kona* represent issues they confront each day such as criminality, interactions with police, and their own personal safety on the dark roads. Furthermore, *Revolution Street*, *Rebel Street* and *Ex-Cell Street* speak to their concern with prison and prisoners. This is not surprising given that 'ex-prisoners' (*ex-prisena*) are one of the most feared categories of people in Port Vila.¹⁰⁶ The roads *Holi Street* and *Mortein Street* reflect the boys' concern with morality. Moral narratives such as prayer, living a life 'that is good', and respect for the property of others are implied in the names of these roads. They are notions brought into the community by original residents trying to move beyond the violent time of the Vietnam-2 gang.

Lastly, *Snoopy Street*, *Highstone Street*, *Natty King Street*, and the significant 'big road' named the *Kingston Highway* are a grouping of roads that embody a particular cultural identity that the Kingston-4 boys subscribe to. *Snoopy Street* and *Highstone Street* reflect their identification with hip hop music as these streets are named after two hip hop dances once popular among Vila youth. *Snoopy Street* also specifically refers to the famous Hip Hop artist 'Snoop Dog'. *Natty King Street*, which is named after Natty King a popular English reggae artist, the *Kingston Highway*, as well as the squad's name – *Kingston-4* reference the boys' interest in reggae music and identification as 'Roots Men'.

The stories about the road names reveal information about the character, experiences and preoccupations of the group as a whole. As Jeff Malpas suggests, we see that names of the roads can be seen to be a reflection of 'culture and society', of the 'very needs', 'hopes', 'preoccupations and dreams' of a people (1999: 1). We see that the boys are drawn to reggae music and reggae culture, which as previously suggested, speaks to their experiences in town. Thus the road names and their naming stories offer a 'statement' about who the boys are and what they believe. I borrow this term from

¹⁰⁶ In December 2008, 38 prisoners broke out of the Port Vila prison. People in Freswota kept their doors locked tight and expressed anxiety and concern for safety.

Margaret Rodman who suggests that for Longanans of Ambae, the details of the naming of places provide a ‘statement’ or explanation about a people (1987: 36).

Anthropologists have demonstrated that throughout Vanuatu, events and lives are remembered by myths and stories worked into topographical features in the landscape, or through the planting of trees or shrubs that mark an occasion (Bolton 2003: 97; cf Taylor 2008a: 12-13; Jolly 1999). In Freswota, the names of the roads do not seem to correspond to landscape features. As the Kingston-4 boys do not own Freswota land, they do not have ground in which they can plant or place markers. Occasionally they paint the group name *Kingston-4* on the walls of the abandoned sheds in which they spend their time. However, since Freswota is still undergoing construction, these markings are often painted over or the shed is torn down. Thus the Kingston-4 boys mostly rely on their every-day use of the road names and the retelling of their meanings to store and convey the social knowledge. The physical location and the existence of the Freswota roads do not change (although the roads may become larger), and so the roads themselves are the place, the name and the sign.¹⁰⁷

One mark of their emplaced identity that seems to exist in prolonged tangible form is *Kingston-4* written in big letters on the outside wall of a corrugated iron shed located at the side of the Alick Noel store where the boys frequently spend their time. This is the marking Jah Mason noticed on his visit to Freswota-4, and the place he declared was ‘holy’. As this shed is right on the Kingston Highway and in the middle of Freswota-4, the squad’s name is in full view of community residents walking along the main road each day. It marks the territory as the place of these boys. Thus even though most Freswota residents do not know details about the squad, they are aware that a group has carved out areas in the community as ‘theirs’.

¹⁰⁷ I observed during a phone conversation with one of the boys in April 2013, two and half years after leaving the field, that the boys were still using the same road names. Regardless of whether there were still dogs on ‘Dog Street’, or the looks of the pretty girls of ‘Angel Street’ had faded, these names were still being used.

Figure 26: *Dack Street* 'Dark Street'Figure 27: *Angel Street*

Figure 28: The Shed with 'Kingston-4' Painted in Orange

Significantly, the shed is named the Kingston-4 *nakamal*. Most villages in the archipelago have a *nakamal* – the central meeting place of a community or group of people. The *nakamal* is also the place where men drink kava, and thus in many parts of the archipelago it is a place only for men. That the boys' refer to this place as their *nakamal* in conjunction with their definition of it as a holy place is evidence of something mentioned in the Introduction, that the boys are developing a notion of their own 'root place', a place in which they are rooted.

A less tangible yet equally powerful marker of their emplacement in Freswota-4 is their smoking of marijuana, which they do freely. They say they have an agreement with the Freswota-4 Chiefs that as long as they do not create disturbances in the community they will not be punished for smoking.¹⁰⁸ The boys often proudly told me that 'Freswota-4 is like a small Jamaica – a place where everyone can smoke.

Their unabashed smoking and moreover their promotion of its positive effects is what they say makes them different from other squads in Freswota. They often compare themselves to the squads of boys of Freswota-3 and Freswota-5 who they say only drink alcohol, which they told me 'makes a person blind to the inequality and corruption that

¹⁰⁸ As I mentioned in Chapter 2, Freswota-4 Chiefs have an agreement with Port Vila police to let the Chiefs discipline residents in the community.

happens in front of peoples' foreheads'. In contrast, they say that smoking marijuana 'opens a person's eyes to the injustices of society'.

I suggest that their unabashed smoking of marijuana is part of the making of their own authority, autonomy and identity in Freswota-4. This is a significant part of their place making activities as they inscribe in the territory their own preoccupations and practices that are denigrated elsewhere. Occasionally boys from other squads spend time with the Kingston-4 boys, but because the boys smoke marijuana frequently, boys who do not smoke seldom join them.

It is the boys' smoking of marijuana, their identification with reggae music, and their strong political beliefs about their marginalisation that has earned them fame among youth throughout Port Vila. At the nightclub, for example, I often overheard young women remark: 'the boys of Freswota-4 have just arrived' (*ol boe blo Freswota-4 oli jes kam*). I also observed young men, not from Freswota, ask the nightclub's DJ to dedicate popular reggae songs to the 'boys of Kingston-4'. These two small observations convey both the nature of the Kingston-4 boys as a group, and that they are a group associated with a particular place.

In the same way in which ni-Vanuatu conflate person and original place in the concept of 'man place' (*man ples*) which means 'person of the place', the boys' squad name *Kingston-4* is of a similar configuration. *Kingston* reflects the reggae identification the boys subscribe to, and *4* refers to the part of Freswota in which the boys live. The squad's name *Kingston-4* can be seen to demonstrate ni-Vanuatu notions, well documented in the literature, about entanglement between person and place.

In the literature on place and place making, anthropologists have argued that it is through the production of shared spatial meaning that individuals and groups become located in a set territory (Fox 1997; cf. McWilliam 1997; Rodman 1987; Basso 1988: 122). Rodman writes, for instance, that place naming can be seen as inscriptions through which people write themselves into place (1987: 36). Returning once again to the saying 'boys of the road', and its meaning that a boy of the road does not have a place, we see that the practice of naming roads produces a bounded place of collective meaning to which the boys all can subscribe. The significance of this practice is that through naming roads the boys are creating their own 'locative' or emplaced identity.

We see evidence of this, for example, in the behaviour of Alfred after his parents divorced and when he moved with his mother to live in a different community. Although the community his mother moved to was on the other side of town, Alfred took a bus each

morning to Freswota, and only returned to his mother's house in the evenings. Alfred told me that he did this because he did not like walking on the roads in the other community as the roads are unfamiliar to him and he did not know the boys there. Furthermore, he said that he did not like the boys in this other community as they only spoke about 'rubbish things like girls' whereas the Kingston-4 boys 'talk about politics, corruption and life in town'. Here Alfred brings together three notions – time spent on the road, being with the group, and the boys' mutual preoccupations and town experience. This demonstrates the interwoven notions of town living, location on the familiar roads and membership and attachment to a group.

Does the boys' road naming have any greater significance beyond their own experience? I suggest that it does because as the population of young men like the Kingston-4 boys increases in town, it is their practices and behaviours, and what they are interested in, that is shaping the town culture.

'Walking About': Social Relationships *On* and *Of* the Road

By analysing the meanings the boys have mapped onto the roads, their experience of life in Freswota emerges. The ways in which the boys frame their everyday is also made explicit. I will now turn to the boys' social relationships as they are played out along and in relation to the Freswota roads.

With respect to what I have presented about Freswota roads and about the meanings the boys have mapped onto the roads thus far, I suggest that focusing on roads is significant to understanding the types of social relationships emerging in Freswota-4. The roads, the place in which most of the boys' everyday experiences unfold, are unlike the other places in Vanuatu in which ni-Vanuatu spend time and through which ni-Vanuatu become produced as persons.

It was during a night-time 'walk about', not long after I started spending time with the boys, that I realized the importance of roads to the formation of their social relationships. The following is what I wrote in my field notes about this experience:

It was already quite late when a knock at my door revealed Manu, Jones and Ricky carrying a plastic bag with several bottles of beer. They said that they were on their way to meet Gina, Jones' new girlfriend and did I want to join them. I agreed and followed the boys out of my yard, down my road and onto the small and well-trodden short cut that leads to Rebel Street, the road that passes behind the Freswota School. It was nearly midnight and so the road that in the evenings is usually brightened by the coloured lights of the

kava bars was dark and the kava bars were empty. The boys said that this was their preferred time in Freswota – quiet and with few people. When we reached the corner where the football field meets the Freswota School we stopped. The boys sat down on the gravel and started to roll a joint. I observed in the football field the outline of at least a dozen small groups, like ours, sitting in the overgrown grasses, drinking, listening to music on their mobile phones, and some couples embracing. After a few minutes, Jones' phone rang once – a 'missed call', and the way young people in Freswota communicate without having to spend money on phone credit.¹⁰⁹ Jones raised his mobile phone so that its light shone into the darkness and soon we saw Gina approach. The boys stood up and with quiet smiles greeted Gina and we started walking. We moved off Rebel Street and onto a small-unnamed footpath that led us away from the kava bars and houses, and up a rocky hill. During our ascent Jones slipped on a loose rock and tumbled a few feet down. As Jones picked himself up the boys jokingly asked Gina whether she really wanted to be with this 'kind of man'? Everyone laughed, including Jones, although he seemed embarrassed. At the top of the hill we came to a large pit. I saw that behind the pit was the overgrown bush that marks the boundary between Freswota and its neighbouring community Ohlen. The boys explained that the pit was an excavation site from which the coral that is used to build community roads in town is extracted. We walked down into the pit, found a flat spot and the boys opened and shared the beers. We spent quite a bit of time sitting there surrounded by darkness and quiet, telling stories, jokes, and pointing at shooting stars blazing across the night sky. At one point Gina and Jones stood up and together walked into the bushes. The boys hurled a few playful remarks towards them, but then continued with the conversation. When Jones and Gina returned, Ricky and Manu pointed to the sticks and small bits of coral stuck to their clothes, gathered the empty bottles, and we started to retrace our steps back down. It was now very late, or very early, and the roosters had already started to 'sing'. The boys led us along Rebel Street and then down Mortein Street towards the Kingston Highway. They explained to me that it would be safer for each person to venture home along the big road rather than the small roads. 'You must always walk in groups', Ricky told me, 'you never know when someone could come and attack you, or a devil could come and get you if you walk about alone at night'. As we made our way down Mortein Street, Manu pointed to several boys walking along the Kingston Highway including a boy who spent time with the squad, but who many boys in the squad did not trust. The boys quickly crouched down on the road in the shadow of a bush and motioned for Gina and me to do the same. Ricky said that if the boy saw us, he would tell Ricky's girlfriend that Ricky had been walking around with girls at night, which would lead to a row. We waited for the boy to pass and then walked onto the Kingston-4 Highway and went our separate ways. The next day, when I saw Jones, I noticed that he was wearing the same trousers as the night before and that they were marked with white dust from the coral

¹⁰⁹ In Chapter 4 I discuss young people's mobile phone practices including making 'missed calls', also sometimes referred to as 'shocking the phone' (*jokem fon*). This is a practice young people use to communicate using the mobile phone without having to pay for phone credit.

pit. I pointed to his trousers and Jones laughed. In the following weeks, each time I saw Manu he would joke about our time in the coral pit. He would ask, for example: ‘seen any shooting stars?’ Or would exclaim: ‘I haven’t seen you in a long time, have you been hiding in that pit?’

This example presents what I observed to be the normative ‘walk about’ of the boys (and girls) in Freswota. I use the Bislama term ‘walk about’, rather than ‘movement’ or ‘walk’, as it is the verb *ni*-Vanuatu use when referring to movements and activities that take place on and along the roads, such as ‘don’t walk about too much’ (*no wokbaot tumas*) which means ‘walk about with good behaviour’.

In the sections above, I have pointed out that the Kingston-4 boys spend their daytime hours in their roadside shelters or ‘ghettos’, in kava bars, or sitting on one of the small roads under the shade of a fence or a tree. In contrast, their night-time hours are more active as they move along and between the roads of the community. Starting in the early evening, groups of 6 or 7 boys, move from one kava bar to another, drinking kava until they have no money left. Afterwards, boys – particularly those who do not live with their girlfriends (although as we see with Ricky there are exceptions), often break into smaller groups to drink, smoke, or visit with girls and girlfriends and do this in the football field, on the small roads that are not lit by street-lamps, or in dark out of the way places such as the coral pit mentioned above.

Although it is outside the scope of this thesis, I will mention briefly here, that many girls of Freswota-4 also ‘walk about’ on the roads at night. Students, employed girls, church goers, athletes, even girls who have small babies sneak out of their houses when their families are asleep usually to meet lovers or boyfriends. Girls I knew were sometimes beaten by their fathers for sneaking out at night.

One of the reasons for this control of female mobility is because many families seek to control the marriage and reproduction of their daughters. Many families in Freswota still try to practice marriage with bride price payments even though the practice is increasingly unaffordable and diminishing. More than their concern with bride price payments, I noticed that parents try to control their daughters’ mobility, particularly if the daughter is still a student, because they view their children to be an investment for their retirement in town. Accordingly, I observed many parents in Freswota controlling their daughters’ mobility because they do not want their daughter’s education and career opportunities, and thus the family’s future security, to be curtailed by an unexpected pregnancy.

During my time in Freswota I only met one squad of six girls (ages 19-25) who moved as a group similar to groups of boys. I never saw girls besides them on Freswota roads and seldom saw girls in kava bars.¹¹⁰ Even though they were more mobile than many other girls, their movements were still quite restricted. I observed that when they drank kava, which they did nearly every night, it was usually in the yard of one of the girls' parents' houses, which operated as a kava bar at night.¹¹¹ I suggest that one of the reasons for the greater leniency in these girls' behaviours, in comparison to that of other girls, is that none of these girls were in school and nearly all already had children.

In this way 'roads' and being on roads, are experienced differently by the different genders. The mobility of girls' time on roads is much more restricted and monitored than that of boys. Yet girls do find ways of being on the road, and these night-time 'walkabouts' are important ways in which young women are acting out their own notions of freedom and desire, and critiquing the social restrictions on their mobility and autonomy.

For the Kingston-4 boys, their relationship with the roads involves other issues. For the boys, shared time together on the roads (both during the day and at night) can be thought of as an important form through which they rebuild and assert themselves as social beings, and as beings with a valued social life, as I will demonstrate here.

Indeed, as previously mentioned, many people in the community denigrate boys such as these who do not have high-school certificates or formal employment. This was implied in a comment made by Benson one afternoon as we were speaking about the National Census that was underway at the time. One of the Kingston-4 boys had been hired as an enumerator, as had a woman whom I knew quite well. One afternoon I observed the woman and the Kingston-4 boy joking with each other. The woman was making fun of the boy's dreadlocks, which were thin, and short and comically stuck out of his head like feelers. When I mentioned what I had observed to Benson he expressed surprise. He said that in most contexts a woman like her would ignore a boy like him; that likely their interaction was due to my presence as I was friendly with both.

An essay written for me (in English) by a Kingston-4 boy, titled 'Attitude of a Well-Educated Towards an Uneducated Youth', further illustrates the boys' sense of denigration by people of different social classes. The essay states:

¹¹⁰ I would see groups of girls in the nightclubs.

¹¹¹ I observed that in Freswota drinking kava was still a predominantly male activity. In Freswota it was rare to see a young woman drinking kava in a kava bar.

Sometimes the well educated think high of themselves. They think that the uneducated spoil the beauty of our town with their dressing code, the way they live, the way they speak using their own language and not the westernized languages, and because of the way the uneducated feed on local food, while the well-educated eat formal foods.

Accordingly, it can be argued that the boys' social life on the road has developed in relation to other people in the Freswota community. I suggest that it is by means of developing their social relationships on and along the roads that they come into relationship with the Freswota land and thus emplace themselves in Freswota.

Returning to the excerpt from my field notes given above, we see that it is on and along the Freswota roads that the boys form their social relationships. On the road the boys find the opportunity to gather together in quiet areas where they can drink, smoke marijuana, listen to reggae music, and have premarital sex. It is on the roads that they can engage in these activities away from the gaze of those who judge these behaviours as immoral and accord them negative value. Thus I suggest that it is through everyday participation in these activities that the boys are reformulating the meaning and value that others have attributed to how they spend their time. On the roads, with their peers, they also resist their denigration within the wider community. What is developing, therefore, are specific ways of being that are necessary for life on the road.

Indeed, as already mentioned, ni-Vanuatu see unmotivated time spent on roads as dangerous. The boys are aware of the risks to which they are exposed on the roads, particularly late at night and when they are alone.¹¹² Accordingly, I observed the boys varying their routings and the places in which they spend time. They take care to walk in groups, or when alone to walk in open areas and along well-travelled routes.

As boys like these spend more time on the roads than any other social group in Vanuatu, relationships with other boys are of particular importance. Boys need other boys to provide the conditions for their individual safety. There were many occasions like the one described above with Jones and Gina, where boys who wanted to meet girlfriends

¹¹² While I lived in Freswota three members of the squad of boys of Freswota-3 were attacked separately by witchcraft (*nakaemas*). One boy was found drowned in the sea after he had walked away from his group of friends during an outing to the other side of the island. One boy was found hanged after he had been seen walking alone back to his house late one night. The third boy survived the attack, which happened late one night while he took a 'short cut' road by himself to his house. Furthermore, I witnessed a number of occasions where, walking with the Kingston-4 boys on a road at night, a boy would, so it appeared to me, jump out of nowhere and punch particular members of the group. The rape and murder of a young woman and her child in Freswota-4 (this time not by witchcraft but by drunken youth purportedly from a different community) occurred as she slept in an abandoned roadside kava bar. Freswota residents blamed the incident on her being out on the road at night, rather than in her home.

would ask other boys to accompany them so that they would not have to walk alone.

The boys' establishment of greater personal safety also concerns issues of their own and others' visibility. The boys try to control, and help each other control, who sees them and their activities, and who does not. As revealed in the ethnography above, Jones chose for the group to go to the coral pit, as it was away from houses and well-travelled roads and so he and Gina could have sex without being seen. The reason the boys crouched in the bushes was also because they wanted to control being seen. These behaviours show the boys' concern with monitoring knowledge, and more importantly 'evidence' (*evidens*) about individual movements and activities.

I have been arguing, in this section, that the roads upon which they spend their time have influenced the boys' social relationships. Indeed as Konstantinos Retsikas, writing about East Java Indonesia, notes: 'social relationships unfold spatially' (2007: 982). Place is 'not extrinsic' to social relations but is an 'active ingredient of their realization, a presence in their unfolding, and a condition of their historicity' (Retsikas 2007: 982). Although secrecy, hiding and mistrust have long been a part of social relationships in Vanuatu, I suggest that the boys' social relationships have formed in these particular ways out of their concern and experience with safety and visibility – the outcome of living a life *of* and a life *on* the road.

'Making History': A Discursive Project

Locative identity and social relationships are not all that develops as the boys engage with the Freswota roads; personhood and 'the group' are produced and reproduced as well. Indeed, as Bonnemaïson has written about Tannese, people 'define themselves as much by their roads as by their places' (1985a: 48). In this section I continue to suggest, like I did in the section above, that the practices *of* the road – the practices that are particular to life on and along the road – act to shape the boys in particular ways. I argue this by examining one of the processes through which the boys' social relationships are produced and reproduced, a practice the boys refer to as 'making history' (*mekem histri*).

It was during a long walk back to Freswota that I first heard the boys use the phrase 'making history'. Samuel, Benny, Toto and I had spent a hot afternoon swimming in some waterfalls outside of town. When it was time to return home, we did not have enough money for our bus fare, and so we had to walk the 9km back to Freswota. I described the walk in my field notes that night:

Our walk back to Freswota began on a narrow dirt footpath that followed the edge of a stream, surrounded by wild bush. After some time the bush dwindled and the path brought us in between two wire fences that outlined a coconut plantation. As we followed the path through the plantation, the boys pointed to ripe bananas and ripe papayas on the trees, and to holes in the fence through which they said it would be easy to climb in order to go to the plantation house and steal. They recounted other times when, as a ‘full squad’, they had ‘run wild through the plantation cutting down papaya and coconuts and anything they wanted’. They said that when they are a big group they are not afraid of security guards or plantation owners or anyone. They are afraid only when they are in a small group like we were then. At one point we came across cows grazing amidst the coconut trees. The boys joked about killing a small cow for us for dinner. Samuel told me that they often talk about the best way to steal and kill cows when walking through this particular plantation and Benny wielded his bush knife and acted out how he would slit the cow’s throat. They told me that sometimes five or six of them come to this plantation at night. They said they have ‘mastered’ how to isolate a cow and how to ‘operate’ on it – how to cut off its head, remove its insides, and cut the meat into strips. The boys said that they take the strips back to Freswota and hang them up to dry and that the meat from a small cow can feed the entire squad of boys for two days. Eventually the footpath turned into a wider dirt road, and then into a paved road that led us into a residential suburb on the outskirts of town. The boys commented on how the concrete was more painful on their feet than the dirt path we had left behind. In the residential area I suggested we knock at a house and ask to fill our water bottles. The boys explained that this was a ‘White man’s’ neighbourhood and the residents would think we were trying to see what was in the house with the plan to return in the night to steal. The boys picked up the pace and we passed through this neighbourhood quickly and onto a small dirt road that took us up a hill and into Beverley Hills, the ni-Vanuatu community adjacent to Freswota. The boys told me that Beverley Hills used to be the best place to steal chickens as there were not many houses with lights there, and there used to be lots of free roaming chickens. Then, cutting in between two houses the boys turned onto a shortcut – a narrow footpath that took us through residential gardens and overgrown bush. We emerged onto a road on the hill that marks the boundary between Beverley Hills and the small valley within which Freswota community sits. This was also just above ‘Dog Street’. By this time, the sun was setting, as the walk had taken several hours. However, before going our separate ways, the boys sat down on the road to ‘relax small’ (*rilaks smol*) and to admire the community from this vantage point. I had accumulated many questions during our excursion and asked one while sitting there. I asked whether they steal chickens and cows out of hunger or for another reason? Samuel responded with two answers: one ‘to eat the meat’ and two ‘to make history’. Later, at the kava bar, I asked the boys what ‘making history’ meant. They said that: ‘making history is about making stories. To make history means that when you hear someone ‘storying’ (*storian*) about having done something like stealing a cow you can relate to it because you have done it yourself’.

Analysis of this conversation shows that ‘making history’ consists of two parts – making the story, which is about producing a memorable event, and the ‘storying’ about it. Firstly, as every mention of ‘making history’ referred to acts outside the boys’ normal every day, such as the stealing of cows, I suggest that for the boys, ‘making history’ is an active creation of collective memorable experiences that break up the monotony of everyday life in Freswota. ‘Making history’ can be translated literally to be the making of their ‘history’ – a set of particular events to which only ‘boys of the road’ relate. Indeed, when I asked Freswota-4 girls about the practice, they told me that: ‘Making history is not something that the girls do. It is something that the boys do and it causes a lot of problems’.¹¹³

Furthermore, returning to the example of walking with the boys, the ‘events’ that the boys pointed out – their running wild in the plantation, their ‘operating’ on cows, and their theft of chickens – are events that are produced and experienced collectively. Which ‘stories’ become ‘history’, in other words, which experiences are accorded more value than others is a choice made through this collective process. ‘Making history’ is an intersubjective experience, and not a process that creates individual fame or a way through which boys produce individual biographies. When the boys told stories, individual boys were rarely named.¹¹⁴ In effect, it is through an individual’s participation in these events, and in the ‘storying’ about these events that individuals become incorporated into the group.

The second part of ‘making history’, as the boys explained above, involves ‘telling stories’ about the event. For the boys, ‘history’ is made discursively; it is through the practice of talking about an event that the experience of an event is turned into social knowledge, and it is through the sharing of this social knowledge that social relationships are produced. Indeed in my field notes I also noted that:

Walking with the boys through the landscape felt similar to my experience walking with a Chief through his ground in south Malakula. In the same way that the Chief’s stories brought the land to greater life, and in the same way that through his telling of these stories he was teaching his daughter, who was accompanying us, specific practices of the land – such as how to crush almonds, I saw that Samuel, [one of the leaders of the Kingston-4 squad, and also one of its oldest members] seemed to be passing onto Benny [one of the younger squad members] specific knowledge about what the boys do and how they do it.

¹¹³ Like the gendered experiences of roads, I note here the gendered nature of ‘making history’.

¹¹⁴ Individual names were not included in these types of stories. Inscribing individuals into stories that often involved criminal acts would create unwanted ‘evidence’ of a person’s participation in the act.

Referring to Alice Legat's work with the Dogrib-hunter-gatherers, Ingold suggests that 'simply hearing the stories is not enough to make an individual knowledgeable... true knowledge depends on the confirmation of stories in personal experience, and to achieve this one must travel the trails and visit the places of which they tell in the company of already knowledgeable elders' (2008: 6). Ingold further writes that 'far from being accessory to the conveyance of knowledge by means of stories, walking is in their view the very means by which stories are converted into knowledge' (2008: 6).

In accordance with Ingold's analysis of the Dogrib, I observed that during our walk, Samuel was passing important social knowledge about the group onto Benny. However, in contrast, the act of walking was not the means through which the stories became converted into knowledge; rather it was through the discursive act of 'storying' about the event, that the knowledge became transformed. The way to slit a cow's throat, which fence holes are easiest to climb through, and that it is not a good idea to knock on the door of a 'White-man's' house is social knowledge created through the practice of recounting stories about events that occurred in a place in the past. For the boys, memories, stories and histories are thus produced discursively and the sharing of the stories is one registry through which the boys form their social relationships.

The telling of stories is a process through which personhood and 'the group' are also produced and reproduced. The case of Arthur, for example, who moved to Freswota a few years later than the rest of the Kingston-4 boys, shows how individuals as well as group identity is constituted through 'storying'. Arthur revealed to me, one afternoon, that, unlike many of the boys of the Kingston-4, who started spending time with each other at a young age, he was not always a 'boy of the road'. He was previously enrolled in Seminary College and was studying to be a pastor. A school infraction led to his expulsion. Problems at home led to his relocation to Freswota. He found himself in Freswota without school, work, money or family support. Arthur explained that when he first started 'hanging around' (*hang raon*) with the boys he was very different from them, a result of his former life. He noted that as he started to spend time on the road, listening to reggae music, discussing politics and other social issues, and hearing the boys tell their stories, he started to 'become like them' (*mi stat blo kam olsem olgeta*).

He explained that through time spent with the boys his 'eyes became open' (*ae i kam open*). He said that this occurred particularly with regards to religion where he 'saw the real meaning of religion – that religion is full of corruption'. Arthur articulated that to become a 'boy of the road' he had to leave behind his former way of being, that he had to

‘come down to the level of the boys’ (*kam daon lo levol lo ol boe*) – a popular local expression meaning akin, aligned or commensurate with a specific group of people. While he might once have been an outsider, when I met Arthur, he was one of the squad’s leaders.

What Arthur’s words reveal is that becoming a ‘boy of the road’ is a process produced and reproduced through the dialogical practice of telling and listening to the groups’ stories. It is through the dialogue that differentiation, such as Arthur’s former support of religion, for example, was curtailed. Moreover, it is through the process of ‘storying’ that Arthur became a full participant in the particular social life and social relations of the group. In this way Arthur became a more socialised and thus a more ‘fully grown’ being.

We see therefore that it is not just the Freswota place that is undergoing transformation through the boys’ practices in it, but the boys’ practices are also influenced by the particular place in which they spend their time. The boys are boys *of* the road, not only because they have invested the road with their own social meaning, but because practices specific to life on and along the road shapes the boys as particular Freswota and ‘Kingston-4’ persons as well.

Conclusion: Reconfiguring Place

Like other research conducted on place and place making in the Austronesian-speaking world, this chapter has explored how practices and social relationships have become spatialised in Freswota. I have shown that through their practices on and along the roads the boys have transformed the roads into their place, and themselves into emplaced persons. By looking at the boys’ development of a historical story, the naming of roads, and their process of ‘making history’ we see that specific Freswota practices and a specific Freswota personhood is emerging. In this chapter I have suggested that the boys are ‘boys of the road’, not in the popular sense that they ‘have no place’, as mentioned at the start of this chapter, but in the sense that they have become boys *of* the road by means of practices on and along the roads which are constituting them, and the group, in specific ways.

Mitchell writes that in the 1990s young people’s walking around was a way ideas about place became reconfigured and space became reclaimed (2002: 417). My data supports Mitchell’s claim. In this chapter, I have argued that through their engagement with Freswota roads, the Kingston-4 boys are identifying and creating their emplacement and are reformulating what constitutes place, and to which place or places they feel they belong.

Chapter 4

‘Do You Have a Mobile?’ Connections and Disconnections

Introduction

Young people in Freswota are quick to ask each other, even if they have only just met: ‘Do you have a mobile? (*Yu gat wan mobael?*)’. Inquiring whether a person has a mobile phone, or ‘mobile’ (*mobael*), is a euphemism asking permission to input the person’s phone number into their network giving permission for it to be called or texted in the future. Asking for a person’s phone number, even after just meeting, is common, so much so, that when I first asked Alfred whether he had a mobile – we were arranging to go some place the next day, he exclaimed: *E kan! Text i fulap!* Which is translated as ‘Oh shit! I receive lots of texts!’¹¹⁵ Alfred fussed that too many people had his phone number resulting in him receiving, and thus having to decide about responding or not responding to ‘too many texts’.

Indeed from my own experience, I learned that giving one’s phone number opens oneself up to a barrage of both wanted and unwanted calls, texts, and requests for credit and money. A case in point is when 15-year old Tommy, who had just arrived from the islands, agreed to speak to me about his experience moving to town. When I met Tommy I had not been in Freswota long, and was naïve about mobile practices, and so did not think twice about giving Tommy my phone number. I wrote in my notes that night: ‘my mobile keeps ringing. It is Tommy. First he sent a ‘plis call me’,¹¹⁶ then he rang and hung up, then he rang five times in a row, then he sent me 100vt credit, then he rang again, then he texted asking whether I received the credit. I didn’t answer. He rang repeatedly until I gave the phone to my neighbour Griffith. When Griffith answered, Tommy hung up and hasn’t phoned again since.’

Like some of the anthropological literature on mobile phones has shown, in Freswota, young people are eager to ask for phone numbers, even of vague acquaintances, in order to build relationship networks that they can draw on to request items such as

¹¹⁵ *Kan* is defined as ‘vagina’ and is considered to be a swear word, but when it is said as ‘*e kan*’ it is a jocular response or exclamation such as ‘oh shit!’ (Crowley 2003).

¹¹⁶ Mobile phones in Vanuatu provide the free option to transfer phone credit between phones and to send someone a text that asks them to phone you.

money, alcohol, food, clothes, and / or additional phone-credit they can use to ask these items from other contacts.

Heather Horst and Daniel Miller (2006) have shown that Jamaicans use mobile phones with a similar purpose. Horst and Miller write that Jamaicans have extensive phone contact lists, up to 400 people, and that besides direct kin, contacts include many numbers that ‘represent potential services, such as someone working at Western Union or a person who can braid hair’ (2006: 94). They suggest that in practice, most of Jamaican’s phone contacts are ‘vague’ and ‘ill defined’ (2006: 94). Closer to Vanuatu, David Lipset writes that for the Murik of Papua New Guinea, mobiles are viewed specifically in terms of their use-value (2011: 8). Lipset gives an example of Papua New Guineans trading phone-credit refill cards to Asian sailors on board tuna ships in exchange for frozen tuna, and even whisky. Barbara Anderson, also writing about phone use in Papua New Guinea, suggests that for the people with whom she works, the system of credit transfer between phones enables those with limited access to cash to acquire the credit necessary to make calls, and it is this capacity for linking formal and informal capitalist and kin-based economies that is behind Digicel’s success (2011: 3).

In Freswota, the mobile phone is also used by people to access credit and other items, however, what I find of greater interest than the fact that people use their mobiles in this way, is that the contacts people make these requests from, are not kin, but are friends, neighbours, acquaintances and even strangers. This is unlike what Lipset reports for the Murik, who he says use mobiles to reinforce normative boundaries in kin relations, groups and persons, and who view the mobile as a tool allowing callers to sustain contact with and fulfil kin-based obligations to each other (2011: 10).

Thus in this chapter I explore not just how youth use their mobile phones to access things they want and need, but how they manage to create strong relationships with non-kin that lead to positive responses to their requests. In this chapter I suggest that the phone is instrumental not only in fulfilling requests but also in developing the positively valued relationships that engender requests to be fulfilled from people with whom one has had no prior relationship.

Anderson briefly mentions in her paper that what is interesting in Papua New Guinea with the ‘phone friends’ – the people who give free credit to strangers, is precisely that the credit exchange between anonymous and random contacts, runs contrary to the principles through which Papua New Guineans generally organize non-kin friendships (2011: 4). While Anderson’s paper, like with other literature on mobile phones, explores

how people use these networks in their everyday lives, it does not directly attend to the issue that in order for requests to be successful, or non-kin networks to be responsive, a relationship predisposed to granting requests first has to be established.

This chapter explores how young people in Freswota build their relationship networks – the group of people upon whom they can make requests, through their mobile phone usage. I argue that young people in Freswota accumulate large contact lists, sometimes upwards of 200 numbers as a way of re-constructing relationship networks in response to diminishing support from kinship networks on the islands (Chapter 1) and in town (Chapter 2). I suggest that young people in Freswota modulate and scale their social relationships through their mobile phone practices, and as such the mobile phone has become an icon of their sociality.

While the other chapters of this thesis focus specifically on the Kingston-4 squad of boys, in this chapter I broaden the discussion to speak about young people (boys and girls) in Freswota generally as I observed that most young people in Freswota use mobile phones and do so in similar ways.

New Technology

Mobile phone technology is fairly new technology for most ni-Vanuatu. People told me that the first mobile call was placed in 2001; by a man who worked at Vanuatu's first telecommunications company Telecom Vanuatu Ltd (TVL). In these early days, TVL employees were encouraged to make random phone calls in order to spark the population's consumption of the new technology.¹¹⁷ With few mobile subscribers to choose from, this man apparently dialled one number, which led to a 'nice conversation' with an 'unknown female'. As I will address later, the practice of random calling, especially by men looking for women, has become a common occurrence in Vanuatu today.

In the early days of mobile phone usage, most people could not afford a mobile phone. Statistics from a report published by the Pacific Institute of Public Policy, shows that even in 2007, 6 years after TVL's network launch, only 23,300 people, just 11% of

¹¹⁷ Anderson has noted a similar practice in Papua New Guinea where Digicel representatives gave people, especially young women, free phone credit 'to encourage consumer uptake' (2011: 2).

the country's population, were mobile phone subscribers (Sijapati-Basnett 2008: 11).¹¹⁸ At this time TVL was the only telecommunication provider in the country and people complained about its high cost and limited network coverage, and pressured the Vanuatu Government to amend the Telecommunications Act and open the market to competition (Sijapati-Basnett 2008: 11).

Eventually in December 2007, a license to operate was issued to Digicel, an Irish owned company already established in the Caribbean and in other pacific nations. Digicel launched its Vanuatu network on June 25th 2008 with the largest free concert in Vanuatu's history. Thousands gathered to see the ni-Vanuatu celebrity singer Vanessa Quai, the popular ni-Vanuatu band Naio and the international reggae star Collie Buddz. When I arrived in the field 4 months later, people were still talking about the big event. No one could forget the free Digicel T-shirts, bags, beach balls, beach towels, a performance by a huge reggae star and a firework show that apparently surpassed those held by the hotels every New Year.

Mobile subscriptions skyrocketed as the launch of Digicel broke TVL's monopoly and led to a drop in prices. Within the first year, Digicel met or came close to reaching its 75% network coverage benchmark (Sijapati-Basnett pers. comm. Feb 28, 2012). Bimbika Sijapati-Basnett who directed the report on mobile phones in Vanuatu, emphasises the great speed at which the new technology was taken up (pers. comm. Feb 28, 2012). In 2009, the time of the last national census, approximately 76% of all ni-Vanuatu households (rural and town) reported using mobiles (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009a: 27), and this number has certainly increased since then. As Kingston-4 boy Toto exclaimed: 'Now every place has a mobile phone! Even a person on the islands who has never seen the lights of town, they already have a mobile phone'.

The Power of the Text Message

The ease with which Tommy asked me for my number, is a normative way young people collect phone numbers. Asking people for their numbers happens both between same sexes

¹¹⁸ This number surpassed the number of fixed telephone-line subscribers which in 2007 was only 7,300 - approximately 3% of the population (Sijapati-Basnett 2008: 11). The adoption of mobile phone technology without prior experience of fixed-line telephones is referred to in the literature as 'leap-frog' technology for it enables low-income households to 'leap frog' previously unaffordable technologies in order to connect to the resources and information that are integral to the global system of communication (Horst and Miller: 2006: 10).

and opposite sexes. However, it is not just getting the number that leads to a social connection, rather it is the way in which a person uses the phone number that engenders the development, or not, of an effective relationship.

Indeed when I told the boys about Tommy's pattern of ringing, they laughed saying it was not surprising as Tommy had 'just come from the islands' and so did not yet know how to use the new technology. In contrast to Tommy's assertive ringing and texting, the contacts that develop into effective relationships through the mobile, are ones that are (usually) cultivated in more subtle ways.

A good example is my friendship with Ken, a 25 year old who lived a few houses down the street from me. I met Ken in the computer shop in town where he worked as a technician. One afternoon, when I was in the computer shop, Ken and I discovered that we were neighbours. Ken asked whether I had a mobile, and we exchanged numbers. What I find interesting about this example is that while Ken and I did not spend more than a few hours together every few months, a friendship formed through our daily exchange of friendly text messages. Many of these text messages were simply 'good morning' and 'good night' greetings or playful messages such as 'it is Friday night I hope you are not drinking too much kava! Take care out there!' Unlike Tommy's more forceful attempt at communicating and establishing a relationship, Ken's mobile phone practice, which slowly built up a relationship through mutually shared jokes, was, I observed, a more acceptable and successful way young people in Freswota build up a connection.

Some text messages exchanged between friends are personally written, but many are also circulated messages such as greetings, jokes, and what seem to be locally written proverbs. The following are examples of popular 'good morning' (*gud moning*), 'happy lunch' (*hapi lunch*)¹¹⁹ and 'goodnight' texts. As young people use a lot of 'short cuts' in their spelling of words in order to fit their message into the limited amount of characters permitted in each text, the spellings of both English and Bislama words in texts are not standardized.

A lovely message to a lovely person from a lovely friend for a lovely reason at a lovely time from a lovely mind in a lovely mood with a lovely style to wish you a lovely morning. Good morning! (*A luvly message 2 a luvly person 4m a luvly fren 4 a luvly person @ a luvly time 4m a luvly mind in a luvly mood wit a luvly stael 2 wish u a luvly morning. Gud morning!*)

¹¹⁹ People in town generally have lunch between 11:30pm and 1:30pm.

As butterflies open their wings to find the coming of a brand new day. May angels do the same and carry you on their wings to keep you safe throughout the day. Good morning! (*As butaflies opn their wings 2 mid da comin of a bran new day. May angels do d same n cari u on teir wings 2 kip u safe thru out da day. gud morning!*).

Don't eat too much, it won't be good if you're sick! Have a happy lunch (*No kaekae 2mas, nogud bae yu sik! have a hapi lunch!*)

May the sun brighten up your day with hopes and prosperity and may the lord lead you with safety and protection. Happy Lunch! And have a pleasant day! (*May da sun brighten up your day with hopes n prosperity n may da lord lead u with safety and protection. Hapi lunch! n Av a pleasant day!*)

Night is silent night is beautiful. Night is calm. Night is quiet. But night is not complete without wishing you a good night. Good night and sweet dreams! (*Night is silent night is beautiful. Night is calm. Night is quiet. But night is not complete without wishing u gud naet. Gud naet and swit drims!*)

Welcome to radio bed FM this is DJ bed sheet hanging out with DJ pillow for now I'll play you a song entitled sleep tight and sweet dreams from the album goodnight. Enjoy! Night-night!" (*Welcome 2 radio bed FM tis is DJ bed sheet hanging out with DJ pillow 4 now I'll play u a song entitled slip tight n swit dreams 4m ta album gudnite. Njoy! N'naet!*)

Could u do me a favour? Plzz. Put ure left hand over ur right shoulder then ure right hand to ur left shoulder. There! I've just given u a hug g'nite!

The following are examples of circulated joke texts:

I. Me. Myself. Yes Me I truly. Madly. Deeply. Hopelessly, purely. Honestly, warmly, dearly. Totally wanted 2 disturb u! Haha!

Congratulations a new puzzle game has been installed in your phone. To play throw your phone against the wall and then try to join the pieces together. I've already tried this! Hahaha!

You like dumb is who person retarded another to it send text this understand and read to trying time fucking your waste u. hahaha (now read it backwards).

3 nuns- a red head, a brunette and a blonde were sitting and having tea together. The red head said 'I was cleaning my daughter's room today and I found a packet of cigarettes, I couldn't believe my daughter smokes!' The brunette said 'that's weird, I was cleaning my daughter's room today and I found a bottle of beer, I couldn't believe my daughter drinks!' 'Oh that's nothing' said the blonde mother, 'I was cleaning my daughters room today and I found a condom, I couldn't believe my daughter has a penis!'

Nase returns a book to the library, bangs it on the table and says – ‘what shit! I read the whole book, there were too many characters and no story at all!’

Librarian: ‘So you are the one who took the telephone directory!’

Rather than ringing incessantly, as Tommy did, I suggest that sending a pre-written circulated text message, such as one of these, is a more subtle way young people convey a to a person. It is a way in which shared meaning between two people can initially be created, and maintained. Importantly, it is also a form that as it is of an impersonal nature will also not leave the sender vulnerable if they are rejected by a non-response to their message.

There are several reasons why young people are keen to send pre-written text messages such as these to people in their networks. Firstly, the very act of sending a text demonstrates to the receiver that the sender values them enough to spend 10vt per text of their limited credit on sending them a message. As Richard Ling and Scott Campbell have argued: texting can confirm ‘the special connection of the interlocutors’ (2011: 4). I suggest here that besides the message in the text, it is the value attributed to sending a text, which is important, and sending pre-circulated texts makes the sending of texts much easier.¹²⁰

Secondly, the content of many of these circulated messages link the senders and receivers to a particular shared cultural moment and thus to each other. The texts often include popular expressions and slang which, when sent back and forth, build shared cultural knowledge and cultural experience among youth. Young people often repeat jokes seen in text messages to each other during face-to-face encounters. Phrases such as: ‘don’t eat too much, it won’t be good if you get sick’ (one of the happy lunch texts quoted above) are adapted and used in other contexts as well, such as: ‘don’t dance too much, it won’t be good if you get sick’. These phrases and jokes circulate among youth and create shared social meaning. While I once heard one of the ‘mother’s’ in the community express one of these circulated sayings, I observed that they were used more by youth and are thus also a marker of generational difference.

I observed that these pre-written texts did not just mark generational difference, but rural / town difference as well. This was expressed clearly by Jaksil, who once told me, that ‘some people in the islands do not understand the texts of town’. He explained that sometimes people in the rural areas on the islands think the jokes or sayings are rude or

¹²⁰ As will be explained later in this chapter, text messages are often used as ‘evidence’ of adulteress affairs. As such, pre-written popular circulated text messages convey the meaning that a relationship is important without creating what could be used as strong ‘evidence’ of the sender or the receiver’s infidelity.

offensive, or they take the jokes personally and then send a text back reprimanding the sender. He illustrated the notion that rural and town interpretations and understandings of the same circulated text creates and reinforces a cultural knowledge among youth living in town.

Thirdly, through the exchange of text messages a shared cultural value among young people in the town communities is being created as well. For instance, many of the circulated texts are locally written proverbs that explicitly refer to friendship, and demarcate what 'ideal' friendship is. For example:

Friendship is a priceless gift that can't be bought or sold. Its value is far greater than mountains made of gold. If u ask God 4 a gift, b thankful if he sends not diamonds, pearls or riches but da LOVE n TRUST of friends. It's good 2 have a wonderful friend like U. Have a blessed day!

Before this world changes I just want you to know that I'm so thankful that you are my friend! Yesterday, today and forever, with time and fortune on our side. I hope we'll never be apart, but if we do just remember that you are and will be forever in my heart!!! *(B-4 dis wol change i just 1 u2 know dat I'm so thankful dat U R my Fren! Yesterday, 2day and 4eva, with time and 4tune on our side. I hope we'll neva B apart, but if we 2 just rememba dat U R and will B 4eva in ma Heart!!!).*

A friend is someone we return to when our spirits need a lift. A friend is someone to treasure for friendship is a gift. A friend is someone who fills our lives with beauty, joy and grace, and makes the world we live in the better and happier place. Thank you for being my friend!

A real friend is one who walks in when the rest of the world walks out. Have a nice Day! *(A real friend is 1 who walks in when da rest of da world walks out. Have a nice day!).*

These friendship texts relate a shared understanding that in the town communities, friendship is both valued and needed. This is particularly the case for youth who experience their kin networks in town as increasingly unreliable. The friendship texts define 'real' friendship – reliability, trustworthiness, endurance, and someone who makes the world a better place.

Friendship texts can be seen to be public articulations of what kind of shared world and what kind of relationships young people want. They reflect many of the issues youth experience in town every day, issues pertaining to trust, jealousy, deceit and violence among peers. They also advise young people how to manage these conditions. Similar in

structure to the more religious proverbs that also circulate in text form, these friendship texts are youth teaching youth new normative ways of creating relationship.¹²¹

‘TVL: To Tell Stories Is To Live’

The relationships youth build with each other through mobile phone technology are neither superficial, nor short-lived. Once a relationship has been established it is then further defined by requests made possible through the mobile phone technology.

Firstly, as anthropologists have reported for other countries, in Vanuatu, a feature of the mobile phone allows for the transfer of phone credit between two phones on the same network.¹²² Phone credit is the currency that is purchased for pay-as-you-go mobile phones and is what is used to pay for phone calls and text messages. Requesting credit operates by typing into the mobile *198# then the contact number of the person from whom one wants to ‘request credit’ and then # and the amount of credit one wants. Usually the requests are for small amounts of phone credit such as 20vt or 50vt. It is both free to send these credit request messages and free to transfer the credit. If the request is successful, young people then use their newly acquired credit to communicate with the person who transferred the credit as well as with other contacts.

The second important feature is the ‘please call me’ (*plis ‘call me’*) text. Like with the credit requests, this is a free text that one can send when one does not have credit. One sends the text and hopes that the recipient will use their credit and ring back. In addition, while it is not a specific feature of the phone’s technology, young people who have some credit use the mobile in a creative way – they make a ‘missed call’ (*mekem missed call*) also known as ‘shocking the phone’ (*jokem fon*) of the person to whom they wish to speak by ringing and then hanging up. The hope is that when a person sees that their phone has been ‘shocked’, they ring the phone number using their own credit. Since the young people I knew in Freswota did not usually have credit, or only had a little credit, these three techniques were used frequently in the hope that someone with credit would send

¹²¹ Many religious text messages also circulated. Two examples are: ‘God puts each fresh morning, each new chance of life into our hands as a gift to see what we will do with it. Good morning and whatever the weather enjoy the day’ and ‘Think big, Think positive. Think smart. Think beautiful. Think great. I know this is too much 4 u so here’s a shortcut just think about Jesus!’

¹²² See Horst and Miller 2006 for Jamaica; Anderson 2011 for Papua New Guinea; Archambault 2012 for southern Mozambique.

them credit, or the person with whom they wished to speak would have credit or find credit through their own credit requests and then return their call.

Young people's responses to the credit requests and the 'please call me' requests further challenge or solidify the relationships. Horst and Miller have discussed the phenomenon of giving credit and suggest that in Jamaica, giving credit is not generalized reciprocity, but is done in the spirit of giving, not receiving, since getting credit back is always uncertain (2006: 113). In contrast to this, I suggest that in Freswota, young people give credit with the explicit intention of attracting contacts and thus expanding (or maintaining) their relationship network, which they can press for money, more credit, or other things in the future. In contrast to Horst and Miller, in Freswota, young people's giving credit is part of a broader system of generalised reciprocity. For example, Tommy, a mere acquaintance, gave me 100vt credit hoping (I believe) that with this credit I would communicate with him and thus a relationship from which he could make future requests would ensue.

Horst and Miller point out that the act of giving credit creates and activates the relationship (2006: 113) and this is not dissimilar to Nancy Munn's (1986) theory of a generalized paradigm of value creation in terms of key acts. Indeed Munn writes that for the Gawans, the act of giving food and hospitality to overseas visitors, for example, is about an actor's expansion of the self, and that by entering into overseas hospitality relations, the Gawan actor becomes known as a man of hospitality, and this reputation circulates beyond his own person and island (1986: 13-15). Munn argues that certain positively valued acts, such as the sharing of food with strangers or the possession of valuable Kula objects, or negatively valued acts- such as not sharing food or witchcraft, generate the kind of subjectivities that form the social relationships (1986: 13).

Among youth in Freswota, the act of giving credit and paying for a phone call is positive value forming, while the act of not giving credit and not paying for a phone call, is negative value forming. By examining credit giving through this framework we see that the phenomenon of giving credit is thus also about the expansion or retraction of the self within social relationships. Young people are modulating which of their relationships are positively or negatively valued by means of spending credit on some relationships while not spending credit on others.

The valuing of relationships in this way is evident among friendship relationships, but particularly among intimate relationships. Indeed one of the common questions a friend asks of another friend when inquiring into the status of their friend's intimate

relationship is ‘does he still ring?’ (*hemi stap ring?*). For young people, this is a euphemism meaning ‘are you still dating him?’ If a person has stopped ringing, the forgotten party will remark: ‘you don’t ring anymore! You are no longer interested in me!’ (*Yu no stap ring! Yu nomo gat interes!*) Young people interpret this as their partner not wanting to spend credit on the relationship because the relationship has lost value. This idiom demonstrates that young people are evaluating relationships in Freswota in terms of the spending and not spending of phone credit. Youth share their phone credit with the people with whom they have or want to have a relationship, while they do not with people they do not.

Anderson writes that many Papua New Guineans are ‘uneasy with the idea of borrowing money from non-kin’ (2011:50). The point I am arguing in this chapter is that young people are creating strong relationships with non-kin through their particular use of the mobile phone technology. It is through their mobile phone practices that they are able to negotiate similar sentiments of ‘uneasy borrowing’ and justify requesting money and other things from non-kin – a practice that has become an important part of navigating their precarious condition of life in town.

When youth in Freswota have credit they use it to expand their relationship networks. Often this includes using credit for entertainment – to have fun with peers, which creates the stories and shared experiences that strengthen and maintain their social relationships. The Telecom Vanuatu (TVL) official slogan states: ‘To tell stories is to live’ (*stori hemi laef*). This marketing slogan refers to the history of Vanuatu as an oral society with a strong tradition of story telling. Young people in Freswota still like ‘to tell stories’ (*to stori*), and the mobile phone is being used, as the TVL slogan implies, to communicate stories with others. However, I suggest that not only is the phone being used to communicate stories, but young people are also using it to create stories. As the following will reveal, young people are doing this by playing jokes and tricking people using the mobile phone.

For instance, when one of my young female friends realised that her boyfriend did not know she had a second mobile phone, she used credit that another friend had sent her first phone to text her boyfriend under a false name. She teased and flirted with him under this false name until her credit ran out. Throughout she laughed at the fun ‘we’ were having tricking him like this.

Another example, an episode with Kingston-4 boy Toni, also shows how young people’s use of credit entertains people and creates stories in devious ways involving

tricks. Toni laughed as he told me the story of what had happened to him that afternoon as he collected data for the national census:

While he was collecting the census information a neighbour asked him to find out whether one of the female census workers had a boyfriend. Toni approached the girl and asked her. The girl wanted to know who was asking and when Toni pointed to his friend, after sizing up the friend, the girl replied that yes she did have a boyfriend. Toni did not like the manner of this rejection of his friend and lied to the girl telling her that he knew her boyfriend and wanted her number so that he could text her boyfriend later. Knowing well the practices of how mobile phones are used, the girl did not give Toni her number. Not willing to let this rejection rest, Toni, while marking down his hours with the census supervisor, took the supervisor's list and got the girl's number. Toni and his friend then bought a new SIM card and rang the girl. Since Toni and his friend put the phone's setting to 'private number, the girl answered the phone but immediately ended the call – a common way young people respond to anonymous calls. A few minutes after Toni had made this call, Toni's phone rang displaying the girl's number on the screen. Toni answered, but this time it was not the girl it was a boy's voice (her brother). The boy yelled at Toni for acting inappropriately with a girl. Toni laughed as he continued the story. He said that not long afterwards he received a text from the girl's phone asking whether they would send the brother a girl's number for him to text. The brother then sent a text from his own mobile phone requesting the number of a girl (any girl). Toni texted swear words to the brother and told him to 'go and have sex with the census leader' (an older woman). Following this, Toni received a sharp text from the brother's number stating that it was now the mother who was using the phone and how dare he use such language with her children. Toni texted back an apology and said that he had texted the wrong number. Toni then received a laughing text saying it was not the mother who had texted but the girl! A few minutes later the girl texted that she would send Toni some credit so they could keep texting, but the girl did not. Toni was cross. He said afterwards that the girl had made one mistake in their game- she had accidentally revealed her name. Toni said to me: 'one day I will find her. She will forget this thing, but I will never forget it and I know her name!'

We see that Toni's use of credit entertains people and creates stories. Such activities are a favourite way in which young people spend their credit, and many youth when they have credit, do not keep it for long but spend it on interacting with others. For young people the value of the phone credit is the way in which it can be used to create social relationships and build up a greater relationship network.

Photos of Digicel Advertisements have been removed, as the copyright is owned by another organisation.

Private Love

Because the mobile phone allows for privacy in phone calls and sending text messages, they have become a central means through which young people develop their relationships. Young people are using the phone in ways that expand their relationship networks and social spaces beyond the boundaries of previously acceptable norms of social relations. As Ling and Campbell suggest, mobile phones can give rise to new forms of coordination and social networking (2011: 1).

In Freswota, many of the intimate relationships between young people are carried out without the knowledge of parents. Young people say that their parents generally try to forbid their children's intimate relationships until formal agreements about the relationship are made between the boy and girl's families. Young people explained that they hide their intimate relationships from their parents because they are not ready to formally commit to a relationship, and because their parents most likely will disapprove of their selected partner.

The mobile phone, with its capacity for private and concealed communication has been quickly adopted by youth as a useful instrument for facilitating secretive affairs. As the mobile phone is an extension of social relationships, it is not surprising that as they hide their relationships, young people also hide their mobile phones. This was the case with several young women I knew who maintained secret relationships by both activating password functions on their phones, which prevented people from reading messages and from answering their calls (a popular practice in Vanuatu), and by owning second ‘secret’ phones which were always hidden.¹²³

Many of the intimate relationships between youth of the opposite sex are instigated and maintained through mobile phones. The question mentioned at the start of this chapter: ‘do you have a mobile?’ is not just an inquiry into whether a person is willing to be included in their network, but particularly if it is a boy asking a girl without much prior dialogue, it is also interpreted as asking whether the person is interested in an intimate relationship or sexual encounter. If the person gives out their number it is interpreted as: ‘Yes I am interested’.

Analysis of this euphemistic request reveals that youth are using the mobile to extend and create new spaces for opposite sex relationships. Through the mobile, youth instigate new relationships quickly and privately. Mobile phones make it easy to arrange meetings and night time encounters as young people do not need a third party to mediate a meeting, and there is less risk of being observed as with previous practices such as ‘creeping’ (*stap krip*).¹²⁴

Mobile phones also extend the time and space available to young people to socialize with their boyfriends and girlfriends. With mobiles young people can communicate even when they are in their own separate houses and surrounded by their families. As Lisa, a 24 year old, once told me: ‘The mobile is really good because anytime you want you can use it to ring your boyfriend. It is more private than a public phone because you can talk from anywhere’. This is in keeping with what Lipset writes, that mobiles ‘extend instrumental agency in space’ (2011: 7).

¹²³ Answering someone else’s mobile (and reading the text messages on someone else’s mobile) has been a common practice in Vanuatu (although in town this is diminishing). Sometimes people answer other people’s to save them the expense of having to use their own phone credit to return missed phone calls. In some cases this practice could also be informed by past practices of having a public phone in the village that everyone answers.

¹²⁴ Creeping is defined as to ‘go off secretly in search of a sexual partner’ (Crowley: 2011).

I observed how mobiles extend relationships in time and space one day when one of my neighbours kept asking to use my mobile. When I finally asked one of the boy's friends what had happened to the boy's own mobile, the friend told me that the boy was giving his mobiles to girls, whose families did not let them leave their yard, so that he could ring them. The boy's friend told me that the boy had just given away his third mobile to a third girl.

Because the mobile allows for privacy, and the possibility of anonymity when making calls (one just has to change the settings to hide the phone number), a phenomenon of telephoning strangers has developed in town. This is another example of how mobiles are being used to expand relationship networks. Indeed as previously discussed, many ni-Vanuatu are wary of unfamiliar people or 'strangers'. The telephoning of strangers, and the relationships that ensue, are thus a remarkable phenomenon given people's anxiety about people whom they do not know.

I learned about this phenomenon not long after arriving in the field. My adoptive mother's first piece of advice was to turn off my mobile at night. She explained that by leaving my mobile on, I risked answering a call from the 'devil'.¹²⁵ She said that the devil had become wise about newly introduced technologies and was using them to target and strike his marks. 'If you answer his call', she explained, 'you become attracted by his voice so much so that you feel that you must go and see him'.¹²⁶

I heard her advice, yet did not turn my mobile off at night. I forgot all about her warning until I was awoken one night by my ringing phone. I answered and a man's voice said: 'hello, where are you?' Out of curiosity I answered several of these night-time calls and learned that each call followed the same format although they were different callers. The caller identification would always display 'unknown number' or 'private caller', I would answer 'hello', and a man's voice would say 'hello, where are you?' or 'hello do you have a boyfriend?' I would ask who was calling and the caller would repeat the same two questions until I hung up. Often the caller would ring back right away, and when I answered, the same pattern would be repeated. I soon learned to do what youth do in this situation do – to neither hang up, nor speak, but wait, often in silence, until the caller's phone credit runs out which puts an end to the unwanted phone calls.

When I asked people about these calls I learned that they were a common practice of mobile phoning in Vanuatu. Young people told me that the hope of these mostly male

¹²⁵ This is a ni-Vanuatu devil invoked through witchcraft.

¹²⁶ Bell notes that Papua New Guinean's believe sorcerers steal your voice through night calls (2011: 3).

callers was to find a female who would perhaps reveal their location and agree to a meeting, or at the very least would engage them in a fun and maybe flirtatious dialogue. I began to understand the source of my adoptive mother's anxiety, and the reason for her instruction. Anthropologists (Anderson 2011; Bell 2011; Lipset 2011) have referred to a practice in Papua New Guinea known as 'phone friends'. This practice involves young women accepting 'free' phone credit from unknown men. Anderson writes that this is regarded fearfully as a practice that opens young women up to possible relations of indebtedness that could lead to sexual encounters when they meet their phone friend face to face (2011: 12). Anderson argues that many of the women, see such 'risky encounters' as 'a price worth paying for the possibilities of mobile access' (2011: 12).

The situation of the random callers in Vanuatu is somewhat different. Young people I knew in Freswota referred to these anonymous callers as 'dry men' (*drae men*). In Bislama the word 'dry' can mean bored (Crowley 2003), but it is also a slang word that in this context describes a man who 'cannot get a woman'. Young people in Freswota found these phone calls irritating rather than enticing, and I did not come across anyone who had met any of these 'dry men' in person. However, the similarity between the 'dry men' and the 'phone friends' is that both practices of random phone calling reflects peoples' interest in broadening their sociality beyond everyday social boundaries and a hope that new, possibly lucrative relationships might be established.

The anonymous night-time calls made by the 'dry men', and the calls made by Tommy, are non-subtle ways of trying to develop relationships. Another type of random calling, one that seems to lead to greater success, is the spontaneous random call, rather than the more predatory calling of the 'dry men'. During my fieldwork I came across many examples of spontaneous random calls that had turned into intimate relationships and even marriages.¹²⁷

One such example is seen with one of my neighbour's, whose brother, Dyson, married a girl he met after making a random call. John told me the story:

When Digicel launched its network in 2008, I bought Dyson and myself each a mobile phone. At this time Digicel had a special offer, if you paid 400vt and if you spoke for 20 minutes you would get unlimited phone calls for the rest of the day. So Dyson and I phoned each other, talked for 20 minutes and got the special offer. After that we wanted to ring all our friends, but because we had just bought the phones we had no contacts and we didn't know our friends' numbers. But one boy who was with us, a student, he had some contacts in his phone so Dyson picked a number of a girl, and phoned it. The

¹²⁷ Bell also notes that some Papua New Guineans have aims to marry their 'phone friends' (2011: 12).

girl's name was Nina and she was 18 years old and was on the island working as a teacher. Well this girl didn't know this boy, and this boy didn't know this girl, but one thing was they were both single. Dyson and Nina spoke on and on, until their batteries became flat. They recharged their batteries and then they talked again on and on and he promised that she would become his wife. They spoke and texted every day and Nina trusted Dyson and believed him. It was strange because no one in Vila knew her. She was a stranger to all of us. But then Nina sent some food from the island to us on the plane, some pineapple and pork and water taro. When you talk to someone like this every day then you have to send a bit of food. So then in December last year Nina took a ship and came to stay with our family. Dyson and Nina got married in December last year. It was all strange in the beginning because we didn't know her. But when Nina came to live with us we saw that she was kind and we liked her behaviour and then it was okay. I think my brother made a good choice of wife. I see their relationship, and they are strong.

I also knew a woman, who lived in a community adjacent to Freswota, who was 'dating', by means of the mobile phone, a man who had randomly called her from a different island. When I left the field they had still not met in person, but they drank kava 'together' nearly every night.

These examples demonstrate that young people are eager to expand their social networks outside the spatial and social boundaries within which they live. This was true especially in the context of dating where many young people expressed wanting to date someone with whom they had not grown up. Interestingly, I found that in this context young peoples' fear of strangers was superseded by their desire to know people from other places.

Disconnections: Digicel the 'Bigger Better Network'

In this chapter I have thus far discussed ways in which young people are using mobile phone technology to expand their relationship networks. In this section I look at how these relationships are used.

As already mentioned, youth ask their networks not just for mobile credit but also for other items here and there. While sometimes the requests are for money for necessities – such as when one of the girls I knew, who had taken a job working on a cruise ship, asked me to help her pay for a passport, the majority of requests, according to my observations, are for alcohol, food, specific clothes items, or money to purchase these things.

For instance, one afternoon while I was spending time with 22 year-old Lula, a girl Lula knew rang her and asked Lula to buy her a bottle of whisky. This request did not surprise or bother Lula one bit. Indeed in Freswota requests for money and things, as Horst and Miller note for Jamaica, are not experienced as a demonstration of a 'lack of affectivity' of the caller, as it might be experienced in other countries, rather, they are seen as a mutually recognized part of the pragmatism of the people (2006: 100). Horst and Miller explain that seeing relationships as having value that is commensurate with monetary value is expected, and the mobile phone fits well in terms of bringing these two concepts of value – the 'intimate' and the 'measured' together (2006: 119). Lula declined the girl's request, and did so on the justifiable grounds that the girl was six months pregnant.

I discuss the tensions that arise surrounding the modulation of requests and the repercussions of negative responses to requests in Chapter 5. Suffice it to say here, once a relationship is established between youth there is no shame in asking for things. Returning to Alfred's negative response to my asking for his mobile phone number, described at the beginning of this chapter, we see that Alfred's concern with me having his number was that he did not want to have to modulate an additional person and their requests.

Modulating requests from these relationships is not simple and these relationships can be fraught with tensions. Young people seem to be taking Digicel's slogan: 'Digicel: the bigger better network' literally – in that many youth seek out contacts and relationships that offer them something 'bigger' and 'better' than what they have. This is increasingly being instrumentalised through the mobile phone.

Young people's pursuit of relationships that can offer something 'better' is visible in the significant number of young people engaged in multiple concurrent relationships and affairs. Youth engage in multiple relationships with people from whom they can gain more money, items of value, or enjoyable or better social experiences. A story Kingston-4 boy Max recounted about himself illustrates this point:

Walking home one night after drinking kava, Max saw Elwin's girlfriend (and the mother of Elwin's baby), Sabrina, standing on the road. Max sent her a text asking her to buy him a beer. She sent a text back suggested that they go to a club instead. Max explained that as Sabrina works she was able to buy many jugs of beer for them. Max said that even though she is Elwin's girlfriend she likes Max too and they used to have sex often before she and Elwin had their baby. Max told me that sometimes they still have sex and that she wanted to that night. Max said that when she ran out of money she even traded her mobile phone to someone so that she could buy one more jug of beer because Max asked for it.

What we see in this exchange between Max and Sabrina is neither an example of free giving, nor an example of indebtedness created by free giving which could lead to potentially compromising situations (as seen in Anderson's discussion 2011). Rather, this is an agreed upon exchange where both parties are directing what they are giving and receiving. In this case Max, whose own girlfriend was punishing him for his infidelity by not giving him money, followed Sabrina to the club to have a fun social experience, and Sabrina spent her money buying Max beer, because, according to Max, she was attracted more to him – to his 'beauty', than to her boyfriend Elwin.

Young people I knew in Freswota often generalized that men were perpetually after a more beautiful woman, and women were always searching for a man with more money (the inverse of this example). What this episode demonstrates, is that both sexes follow temptations for something 'better' than what they have, when they are offered it, despite their other relationships.

The fear in Papua New Guinea that girls are being coerced into compromising encounters with men from whom they accept free credit or money, noted by Anderson (2011), is not comparable to the Freswota girls' experience. Most young women I knew were savvy when engaging in transactions with men. Indeed while my adoptive mother told me to turn off my mobile at night, I was well aware that many young women in Freswota ensure that their mobiles are on so as not to miss the calls they want. The calls they do not want are just ignored.

Returning to the discussion of the capacity of the mobile phone to create relationships, we see that one of the attractive features of the mobile is that it can facilitate concurrent multiple intimate relationships. It allows people to have relationships that can be partitioned from other relationships. As Miller and Horst also suggest, in Jamaica, phones help relatives, friends and lovers share among their networks, but the inverse is also true in that many of these relationships are 'mediated by subterfuge and plurality that can transform the phone from a device that connects into a device whose importance lies in its capacity to keep multiple strands separate' (2006: 83). In Freswota, young people establish and maintain multiple concurrent affairs by hiding text messages and phone calls from their partners or, more effectively, by owning multiple SIM cards and or, as already mentioned, multiple mobiles with different phone numbers.

I first learned about this practice of multiple SIM cards and phones one night while I was with three girls. We were sitting on wooden benches at the back of a kava bar, where

the girls were drinking beer. So as not to miss any of their calls or texts, the girls had placed their mobile phones on the benches.¹²⁸ I noticed that two of the girls placed not just one but two mobiles on the bench, and one girl had 2 SIM cards, which she kept switching in and out of her phone. I pointed to the mobiles and one responded with the slang phrase: ‘you already know!’ (*yu save finis!*) - which means that an explanation is not needed as the answer is self evident or already known.¹²⁹ Indeed, I already knew that while these three young women all had boyfriends, and two lived with their boyfriends and their children. Additionally they were all involved in relationships with other men. Their multiple mobile phones and multiple SIM cards helped them manage these affairs.¹³⁰

Affairs can be for money, or to access someone with greater ‘beauty’. Sometimes, as was the case with one of these three girls, who was texting and speaking with a man who lived on another island, the affair was a respite from the abusive relationship she was living with everyday. She told me that unlike her boyfriend, who beats her and yells at her, ‘this man’s behaviour is good’ (*fasin blo hem i gud*). Thus, girls in particular are using the mobile to exert and enact their will and desire in the town society. As Joshua Bell writes for mobile usage in Papua New Guinea: ‘mobile phones give woman agency to talk and thus effect action in a way not previously imagined’ (2011: 10).

Evidence

Mobile technology allows for privacy and separation of relationships. It facilitates, as described above, the practice of having multiple concurrent relationships, casual sexual encounters, and forbidden affairs. These practices have become normative in opposite sex relationships among many young people in Freswota.

However, although they have become normative, they are not necessarily positively accepted. A young person who is having his or her own multiple intimate affairs, will react strongly when they find out that their partner is doing the same. Writing about mobiles in Mozambique, Julie Archambault states that ‘the interception of incriminating phone calls and text messages opens up new discursive spaces within which

¹²⁸ Keeping a phone visible, which makes the texts and phone calls one receives also visible, occurs mostly when a person is among friends whom they trust. In other contexts, such as in homes, in residences shared with boyfriends and girlfriends etc. youth often keep their phones in their pockets or hidden in suitcases.

¹²⁹ I also interpret the phrase to mean that an explanation is not required as the practice is so common that everyone has experience and knowledge of it.

¹³⁰ On several occasions I came across people with expensive mobile phones that could accommodate two different SIM cards at the same time.

couples can negotiate the terms of their relationships' (2011: 445). This is also the case in Freswota where the mobile phone plays a central role in the conflicts between couples. Because the technology allows for secretive communication, a particular kind of suspicious punitive relationship, involving the mobile, has become a normative part of intimate relationships among many young people.

Anthropological literature on Vanuatu has demonstrated that when a conflict occurs between people in Vanuatu, a community meeting is often used to achieve resolution. Lamont Lindstrom (1992) describes one such meeting that took place on the island of Tanna. Lindstrom writes that the meeting was a debate where: 'people played with its loose ends and its contradictions in order to win the debate: to add value to what they said; to devalue the talk of their opponents. As some speakers strove to establish the truth of what they said in terms of one local island discourse, others laboured to decontextualize this, revealing its falsity' (1999: 103). Lindstrom argues that the context of the debate is equally important as the words used in it.

When I compare this account to disputes I observed between youth in Freswota, I find that the presence of the mobile phone has changed the nature of the 'debate'. The phone provides tangible material 'evidence' (*evdens*) which cannot be manipulated nor diminished regardless of the 'context'. As Archambault also notes:

Handsets act as a 'repository of personal information' (Ling, 2008: 97) and contain in call logs, inboxes, sent messages and even saved contacts, traces of interactions which often provide material proof of infidelity. A romantic message constitutes more compelling evidence of deceit than hearsays of a neighbour who might have personal interests in spreading this kind of information (cf. Paine, 1967). As a result, it cannot as easily be dismissed as rumours. (2011: 450)

In Freswota the mobile phone is not just a 'repository of personal information', it is a 'repository of evidence' as well. This is illustrated in an account given by Kingston-4 boy Roy after he had been 'thrown out' (*sakem aot*) of his house by his girlfriend:

He explained that although he spent most nights drinking kava with his friends, his girlfriend, Frida, had recently become more suspicious because he had been returning home at night later than usual, and was drunk much more often. He said Frida suspected he was in a relationship with another woman. Roy told me that one night, while he was asleep, Frida took his mobile and read through his text messages and call history log and found one text that looked suspicious. Roy said that Frida confronted him with the text the next day and accused Roy of having an affair. Roy denied having an affair and explained to Frida that the suspicious text had been sent on

behalf of another boy who had lost his phone.¹³¹ Roy told me that their fight was big, but there was nothing Frida could do, as she had no strong ‘evidence’ of an affair. He revealed that he was upset that he had forgotten to delete this particular text message. He continued to say that this was not the end of the issue. Determined to find out the truth, Frida asked a friend of hers who worked in the Digicel Office, to print out an itemized calls and texts list of Roy’s phone. The list confirmed Frida’s mistrust – the suspicious phone number was repeated hundreds of times. With this printout in hand, Frida threw Roy out of the house. This was the unquestionable ‘evidence’ of his affair.

Because affairs are such common practice among youth, many practices have developed both to hide evidence and to try and find it. Other tactics used to seek out evidence of whether one’s partner is cheating include checking a partner’s phone credit balance at the start and end of each day and asking details of calls received and made. Young people will also ring their boyfriends and girlfriends regularly throughout the day with the expectation that their partner answers. If a boyfriend or girlfriend’s phone is switched off, the question asked is: ‘What are they doing?’ (*hemi stap mekem wanem?*).

When a person suspects that his or her partner is having an affair, but there is no hard evidence, young people sometimes try to find out who the lover is and confront them hoping that the affair will be confirmed and or challenged. It seemed that it was young women more than young men who engaged in this particular practice and I observed several cases where women attacked other women with this charge, while I never observed this among men. I also noted that women frequently rang numbers found in their boyfriends’ call history looking for explanations. This happened one evening when one of my adoptive sister’s phone rang. When she answered, a woman asked her: ‘for what reason are you ringing the mobile of my man?’ My sister responded – ‘this isn’t true at all!’ and ended the call.

I became particularly familiar with these practices whenever I had to use the mobile phone as my means of communication with a Kingston-4 boy. I did not know many of the Kingston-4 boys’ girlfriends, but had been made aware that many of them were suspicious about the amount of time I was spending with their men. Occasionally, girlfriends would confront me. For instance, once, when I phoned Robert, his girlfriend Ellen answered. Ellen told me that Robert was not there and that was the end of the call. However, a few hours later I received a text from Ellen:

¹³¹ People lose their mobile phones frequently. They fall out of bags, are left on buses, and are forgotten at kava bars. Some people sometimes wear their phones around their necks attached to a strap, however this makes it harder to keep the texts and phone calls private.

Robert is on the island but if you want to get him then phone him at #####. He wants to come back to Vila. You phone him and then you two arrange his road to come back. I'm not going to pay the road of a salt-meat who fucks all vagina faces all about. Tell him not to try to look me or his baby, I don't need all salt-meat like him. Bye fuck of Robert.

I sent a text back explaining that I did not know what she was talking about. She replied: 'but I don't want to know. Robert has lied to me how many times I can't really believe you or him. But it's fine. Not a problem'.

I analyse this incident in two ways. First that Ellen interpreted my having Robert's phone number and using it, as a sign that Robert and I were having an affair, and secondly, that both my number and my voice were enough evidence to justify confronting me about it.

In trying to limit altercations like this, young people have developed a practice of waiting for a caller to identify himself or herself, before revealing their own identity.¹³² Not speaking until the caller is identified is a tactic young people employ to protect themselves from becoming vulnerable to accusation or attack by suspicious parties. This becomes complicated when both caller and receiver of the call are suspicious and want to protect themselves. I observed instances when neither person spoke; when both caller and receiver remained on the line in silence until one person gave in or the phone credit ran out.

In Freswota, people often talked about the 'problem of the mobile' (*problem blo mobael*). One of the circulated text messages emphasised the popular fear: 'Digicel - Devil Is Getting In Control of Everyone's Life'. Writing about Mozambicans, Archambault argues that Mozambicans blame the mobile for breaking up relationships, that they feel it is 'literally the phone, rather than unfaithfulness, that is understood to generate conflict and break-ups' (2011: 452).

Youth in Freswota also blame the problems of relationships on the mobile phone. Jaksil once explained: 'the problem with the mobile is that the White man did not provide the instruction manual and so ni-Vanuatu have not learned the right way to use the mobile and are using it 'carelessly' (*olbaot*)'. However unlike with the youth of Archambault's (2011) study, I never witnessed any of the youth I knew breaking up 'because of the

¹³² Often when making phone calls people set their phone to hide their phone number. Only 'private caller' or 'unknown caller' is then displayed on the screen of the handset.

phone'.¹³³ Unfaithfulness in Freswota, mediated through the mobile phone technology, has become a part of mundane life.

Youth do morally evaluate their own deceit, and the secrecy and cheating in relationships, and relationships end when one of the parties has had enough and can find a viable way out. Thus it is not the mobile phone that causes the break up but usually the possibilities of entering into a different and better relationship. The mobile phones help to seek out better relationships. Until this happens however, great effort is put into deleting and finding text messages, turning phones on and off, second or third SIM cards, and hiding phones and evidence from suspicious eyes as well as finding other peoples' hidden phones and evidence.

Another reason why mobile phones in Vanuatu are seen not to be 'breaking relationships apart', is that in the same way in which mobile phones are seen to create relationships that are suspicious and tense, the mobile phone is also seen to have the capacity to strengthen relationships despite the tension. The mobile phone, even in times of conflict, is used in a way that ultimately reaffirms the importance of the connection and the relationship, as I will turn to next.

'I Will Just Delete Him From My Inbox!'

When youth experience conflict in their intimate relationships they use the mobile phone as a tool through which to act out their reactions. In this way, the mobile, which 'connects' young people, becomes a tool for manipulating degrees of 'disconnection' as well. A phrase young people use during conflict reflects this point.

For instance, when a young woman I knew was telling me about a fight she was having with her boyfriend, she said half joking and half in anger: 'it's okay, I will just delete him from my heart' (*i stret, bae mi jus dilitim hem lo hart blo mi*). On another occasion, Kingston-4 boy, Toto told me about a friend who had wronged him, he said: 'I will just delete him from my inbox' (*bae mi jus dilitim hem lo inbox blo mi*). Thus even young peoples' language reflects the central role mobile phones have in the management of relationships.

As discussed in Chapter 2, youth depend on their friendships and relationships in the community. As such, youth are savvy about the disruption to everyday living that

¹³³ I note that in 2013 Elwin and Sabrina were living together in Elwin's parents house with their two children and Roy and Frida were living together in their own rent house with their one child.

being ‘disconnected’ from people can cause. In times of conflict, particularly with intimate relationships, the phone is used to force varying degrees of disconnection as a strategy for reconciliation. For example, during the many months in which I knew Lewis, he had at least six different mobiles. The main reason was that every time his girlfriend suspected him of cheating, she broke his phone. As Lewis explained:

The mother of my baby gets cross all the time. Plenty of times she says she is sure I am ‘passing behind her’.¹³⁴ In the times when she is cross she takes my phone and throws it and breaks it. Sometimes just the phone breaks, but sometimes she also takes the SIM card and cuts it or burns it with a cigarette. The problem that happened yesterday was I kept my mobile in my trousers and it was on vibrate. She wanted me to put the ringer on a sound so she could hear if I got texts or calls. I didn’t do this, I just kept it on vibrate. But when I got into bed then she took the phone and she threw it at the wall. It broke into pieces all over the place. So that is why right now I don’t have a phone.

In breaking his phone repeatedly, Lewis’ girlfriend attempts both to control Lewis’ sexual promiscuity and to discipline him by disconnecting his connection to his network of friends and intimate relationships.

Young people are using the phone to punish each other in other ways as well. Indeed, a week after this incident, Lewis and his girlfriend had another fight. Lewis, who had already procured another phone, used the phone to punish her. He told me that after the fight he left their house and spent two full days and two full nights away. He said that during this time he switched off his mobile so that she could not reach him. He said that he did this to ‘teach her a lesson’ (*blo lanem hem*) and to punish her for being suspicious and for always fighting with him. Lewis told me that removing her access to him causes her stress. She worries about his safety and fears that he has left her for another woman. Lewis explained that these feelings always lead to regret and a reaffirmed desire to have a better relationship.

Two additional examples demonstrate the normative nature of this punitive practice. One afternoon Lisa came to my house upset, her boyfriend had found a flirtatious text in her mobile, and being suspicious, had confronted her. She said that when he confronted her she ran out of the house (his parents house where they were living) and turned her phone off because she did not want him finding out where she was and then forcing her back home. When I phoned her several hours later, her phone was on, and she

¹³⁴ ‘Pass behind’ (*pas bihaen*) means ‘cheating’ or ‘having an affair’.

told me that she was back with her boyfriend at home. She said that her boyfriend had told her that he had missed her and had apologised for his suspicion.

Similarly, Irene, a 20 year old, revealed her practice of turning off her mobile during fights with her boyfriend. She told me that she had recently gone to a club without asking permission of her boyfriend, who did not like her going to clubs.¹³⁵ Irene explained that when her boyfriend found out he was so cross he tried to run her over with his taxi and yelled that their relationship was ‘finished’ (*finis*). She said: ‘After this I ran away and turned off my mobile so that when he rang it would go to voicemail. I waited until I knew that his blood had cooled down and then I went and said sorry. He was happy to see me, he said he had worried that I was dead. Now everything is back to normal.’

Many things can be said about the intimate relationships between young people in Freswota from this ethnography.¹³⁶ In keeping with the discussion of mobile phones, these examples illustrate how switching off the mobile phone during disputes creates temporary disconnection that serves to manipulate the other person. The fear of losing the relationship, and the lack of connection, gives them time to reflect on the value of the relationship. By turning the mobile phone off and temporarily severing the attachment connection, youth try to regain the power they have lost at that moment, either due to their own wrongful actions (in the case of Lewis), or possibly because they are vulnerable to the violence of a boyfriend (in the case of Irene and Lisa).

Thus while Archambault (2011) writes that for Mozambicans the mobile phone causes the ‘break-up’ of relationships, for the youth I knew, even when evidence of infidelity exists, it does not often lead to the ending of relationships, since the patterns of secretive and multiple intimate relationships have become a part of their everyday. Rather, mobile phone technology has the capacity to ‘connect’ and ‘disconnect’ and young people in Freswota use this to manipulate the relationships.

¹³⁵ Many people believe it is morally wrong for women to go to clubs and consume alcohol and cigarettes.

¹³⁶ One point I would like to make note of here with regards to the act of running away. While I interpret Lewis’ running away as his grasp of a moment of heightened freedom from not having to report his location to his girlfriend, both Irene and Lisa’s running away is likely the result of wanting to avoid their boyfriends’ anger and possible violence against them. Irene makes clear that she stayed away until her boyfriend’s ‘blood had cooled’.

Conclusion: The ‘Digicel Baby-Boom’

Parents, government officials, members of the church etc. speak about the moral decline of young people in town, and often emphasize that the mobile has been one of the main facilitators of this change. According to a nurse speaking on a Radio Talk Back show,¹³⁷ the number of births at the Vila Central Hospital dramatically increased from approximately 5,000 births in 2008, to approximately 6,000 births in 2009. This is widely referred to as the ‘Digicel Baby-Boom’ as it is believed that the introduction of the mobile phone, and its capacity to facilitate intimate encounters and multiple relationships, has been instrumental in the increase in number of births.

The perception that there is a change in the ‘ethos’ of society (Lipset 2011: 10) is widespread through the Pacific. Lipset writes that in Papua New Guinea, people believe that ‘contemporary society suffers from indiscipline as if mobile telephony was a kind of collective lack of sobriety’ (2011: 10). Lipset suggests that urban Papua New Guineans draw a contrast between the morality of the generations where the older generation are virtuous, and the younger libidinous (2011: 11). Lipset concludes that the ways in which youth engage with mobile phone technology is part of an on-going process that preceded the appearance of mobile phones (Lipset 2011: 4). I agree with Lipset, and with Bell who writes that ‘we must be careful of not over-extending the concept of newness thereby unduly exalting the novelty of foreign things’ (2011: 4). Indeed, as this chapter has shown, youth in Freswota are employing this mobile phone technology in ways, which allow them to expand social networks a project that is not dissimilar from that which their predecessors engaged in.

However, I also believe that the practices of relating that youth are developing through their use of the mobile phone technology are part of a developing system of town youth sociality complete with its own rules of connection and disconnection. This is seen, for example, in how the Kingston-4 boys blamed Tommy’s failed attempt to connect with me, to his lack of knowledge about town mobile etiquette. Indeed as trans-generational networks have become eroded in the wider town context, the relationship networks that town young people are embedded in have altered. Use of the mobile phone technology can be seen as one practice that has contributed to this change.

For some young people in Freswota, the mobile is an emergent media that channels and shapes desires, values and subjectivities which are part of the on going creative re-

¹³⁷ Radio FM 107 lunchtime talk back show March 25, 2010.

making of their worlds (Bell 2011: 3). For young women in particular, the mobile phone gives them the private space within which they can speak flirtatiously, even provocatively to their boyfriends – behaviours that would be punished, should the families learn of them.

The mobile phone provides both boys and girls new freedom of expression and the expansion of partner possibilities. It is through the process of extending their relationship networks, and developing phone conventions, that Freswota young people are developing a shared sociality and a shared experience. As such, it has become an important part of their ‘planting roots’ and making place in the Freswota community.

Chapter 5

The Building of Shared Experience: Movements Concerning Cigarettes, Alcohol and ‘Smok’

Introduction

‘It is just talk that’s all’ (*hemia toktok nomo*) was a frequent response from Kingston-4 boy Samuel, when I described something someone had told me. For the boys, ‘just talk’ is an utterance with an unsubstantiated claim. Most residents of Freswota are suspicious about the words people say. ‘Don’t lie to me!’ (*No stap kiaman lo mi!*) is an exclamation often heard, and many stories about individuals who heard and followed unknown voices at night and encountered dangerous spirits at the other end illustrate people’s anxiety surrounding spoken words. I was told often that a good orator used to be respected, however the boys’ perception was that a well-spoken person was not to be trusted. Vigilant of manipulative and expedient friendships, the boys often accused others, sometimes jokingly, sometimes not, of ‘sweet talk’ (*swit tok*) which refers to a verbal technique, prior to making a request, where a person uses specifically chosen words to soften, or make a person feel good. ‘He’s just sweetened you that’s all’ was a common version of this expression, conveying mistrust of the intentions behind what people say. As a ‘mixed island’ (*mix aelan*) community, where non-kin categorise each other as ‘strangers’ (*strenja*), in a national climate of untrustworthy politicians and broken promises, people in Freswota community are vigilant, aware of the ramifications of ‘just talk’ and ‘sweet talk’.

Observation carries more weight for the Kingston-4 boys than words, and from their position on the road they interpret peoples’ movements. Their interest in interpreting peoples’ movements is not surprising, as anthropological literature has demonstrated Melanesian interest in observing the physical movements of others to ‘discern their purpose and relational significance’ (Schneider 2012: 20). As Katharina Schneider argues, the movements of the Pororan of Papua New Guinea ‘reveal persons and relations as entities with particular qualities and value attached to them’ (2012: 20). Schneider writes that the Pororan Islanders ‘decompose’ a movement into the ‘intentions’ and ‘capacities’ of persons, and it is by observing this relational

composition of movements, that movements can be analysed like objects (2012: 20-21). Here Schneider builds on Strathern's theory of objectification, where an assemblage of valuable objects – in Strathern's ethnography a Hagen men's display of shell wealth before it is given away – makes relations between persons visible (1988: 10-11 in Schneider 2012: 20). Drawing from Strathern, Schneider puts forward an analytic framework in which movements are analysed as similarly 'revealing' of relationships (2012: 20).

Motivated by this analytical approach, this chapter examines the Kingston-4 boys' movements in terms of what their movements reveal about their social relationships. In particular this chapter looks at the boys' movements as they 'work hard' (*wok had*) to share with peers and hide from peers the valued items cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol. I argue that cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol embody the boys' social relationships. They modulate with whom they consume the items and thus the items come to embody positively and negatively valued relations. I argue that the boys are concerned with each others' movements because they want to participate in the shared consumption of these items, because it is through their shared consumption, that individuals become transformed from a weaker condition of being, into one of greater strength with a masculine efficacy that is otherwise denied them in the 'confusion zone'.

What the Boys' Movements Reveal

The Kingston-4 boys enjoy smoking cigarettes, marijuana and drinking alcohol.¹³⁸ As Toto, once told me: 'No matter whether it is 7am or midnight, when you have money then you drink and smoke'. The boys explained that drinking and smoking 'relaxes you, and is something fun you can do with friends'. Contrary to public perception, the boys' drinking and smoking occurs, more often than not, in quiet out of the way places where they can swap stories undisturbed, and listen to reggae music played on their mobile phones.

They refer to cigarettes either as a 'cigarette' (*sigaret*), or a 'six-two' (*sikis-tu*) – where the 'six' represents the shape of the mouth when taking a 'puff', and the 'two' the position of the fingers when moving the cigarette up to the lips. Usually the cigarette is a pre-rolled commercially produced Peter Jackson bought from the store. Buying a

¹³⁸ Marijuana is an illegal substance in Vanuatu.

full pack of ‘Peter Jacksons’ is unaffordable so the boys buy their cigarettes one at a time, or sometimes in threes.

The boys like to smoke cigarettes, but they prefer to smoke marijuana. The boys smoke marijuana whenever they can afford it and when it is available, but go through extended periods of not smoking as well.¹³⁹ According to the boys, marijuana was first grown in Vanuatu when people from New Caledonia smuggled seeds into the country by hiding them in their dreadlocks. Now, marijuana is grown (to a greater and lesser extent) throughout the archipelago. Most of the marijuana available in town is the product of larger growing operations on the islands of Malakula, Tanna and Epi.¹⁴⁰ Growing and selling it has become more financially profitable and less labour intensive than producing copra, which is the main agricultural crop in the country.¹⁴¹ The boys refer to marijuana as *maro* or *smok*. Sometimes individual boys or pairs of boys buy marijuana in small packets, but often the boys will, as a group, buy marijuana in bulk. The boys break up the marijuana and roll it into ‘joints’, which they refer to as *stiks*, using torn pieces of paper, or cigarette-rolling papers called *taleos*.¹⁴²

The boys consume alcohol (*alkol*) as well. Their alcohol consumption practices differ depending on the context, the type of alcohol, the number of people drinking, and who is paying. On special occasions such as public holidays, Christmas or the National Independence celebrations, the boys will make their own ‘home brew’ out of yeast, water and sugar – a low cost way for the entire squad to drink, in excess, together. Most of the time, however, the boys drink store-bought alcohol. If the boys have a few coins left following their kava drinking, they *kale* – drink a beer to enhance the effect of the kava before going home. If however, they are relaxing with friends, or girlfriends, they drink one or two bottles of beer or if someone can afford it, a 2 Litre bottle of wine sold at a Freswota store. Bottles of hard liquor such as vodka or whisky, usually referred to

¹³⁹ I did not come across any explicit discourse of addiction, neither among the boys nor generally. The general discourse surrounding marijuana is a negative moral one which speaks of how it is a substance that makes people act in anti-social ways and has damaging psychological impact. For instance, it is believed that marijuana makes people go crazy. Many violent acts are regarded by the public to have been carried out by youth under the influence of marijuana. Yet, as this chapter will show the boys believe that marijuana makes them less violent.

¹⁴⁰ The boys say that you can tell which island the marijuana comes from by the marijuana’s flavour and effect.

¹⁴¹ The boys explained that compared to growing copra, growing marijuana is ‘easy money’ because it is easy to grow and it can be harvested in just 3-5 months. Apparently a village on the island of Malakula has been nicknamed ‘small Jamaica’ as even grandmothers and small children have a role in marijuana production. The myth of the village is that, as one boy told me: ‘it is hard to get to, and not much happens there, but at night it is alive and lit up! It is like being in ‘small Jamaica’ where even the little boys wear their hair in dreadlocks.’

¹⁴² The term *stik* perhaps has its origins from the term *stik tobak* translated as a ‘stick of tobacco’ which was the form loose leaf tobacco grown on the islands used to be found in town.

as ‘duty free’, are drunk less often as they are more expensive and can only be purchased from shops in town. The boys drink hard liquor usually only when one of them has come into enough money for its purchase, when the bottle has been stolen, or if a politician or a local businessman, in exchange for the boys’ support, has given the bottle to them. When a group of boys access hard liquor, they tend to drink it soon and quickly, a reflection both of their modulation of relationships, as will be discussed below, and of their sense of time – because when one has something for consumption one consumes it ‘now’ as the future is a ‘question mark’ where nothing is planned or known.¹⁴³

For the boys, cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana are luxury items, more highly valued than new shoes, clothes and mobile phones. Because the boys do not have access to them every day and enjoy them very much, they frequently trade their t-shirts, shoes and mobile phones for them. Once I wrote in my field notes: ‘The boys will trade everything for marijuana. Most boys right now don’t have more than two t-shirts. As they told me the marijuana is good and so they have traded everything for it even their Christmas presents’.

As I discussed in Chapter 3, the Kingston-4 boys spend most of their time on the roads. They have few individual possessions, usually only one or two changes of clothes, their shoes, and perhaps an Mp3 player or a mobile phone. When they did speak about wanting ‘material items’ it was most often items such as alcohol, marijuana and mobile phones, that can be taken onto the road; items through which they build social relationships with peers.

In his Introduction to the ASAO monograph *Drugs in Western Pacific Societies*, Lamont Lindstrom writes that ‘Pacific Islanders regularly (daily-even hourly) produce, exchange and consume a number of traditional and introduced drugs’ (1987: 1). Lindstrom defines the term ‘drugs’ using Du Toit’s definition of a drug as ‘any chemical substance, natural or artificial, which alters perception, mood or consciousness’ (1987: 5 in Lindstrom 1987: 2). In this chapter I adopt Lindstrom and Du Toit’s usage of ‘drug’ to refer to cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Simone notes that African youth have a sense that ‘everything has to be taken in now, that things don’t last, that there is nothing in the present that will really constitute a platform on which the future can be planned or enacted’ (2005: 529).

¹⁴⁴ The boys relationship with kava is of a different nature which is why it is not included in this analysis. Firstly, kava, unlike cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana, is easier to access. Boys seem to collect or earn enough money each day for one or two bowls, which in conjunction with one or two bowls that they might be able to get by asking people to buy kava for them, means that most boys seem to drink a satisfactory

Lindstrom explains that the monograph on drugs in the Western Pacific examines drugs by dividing Pacific Islanders' experience of drug production and drug consumption into two categories – the social function of drugs as substances of exchange, and the cultural meaning of drugs in Pacific discourse. His discussion suggests that Pacific Islanders' movements surrounding drugs are about using drugs to create social experience. As Lindstrom argues, their production and exchange 'engenders interpersonal relations' (1987: 4), and their cultural meaning is mostly embedded in social rituals, and is consumed according to socially regulated expectations and practices of consumption (1987: 7). Lindstrom writes that in many contexts, drugs serve to establish 'friendly social relations', 'stabilize camaraderie', and also transform personal identities in ways that facilitate group sociability (albeit for a short and limited time) (1987: 9-11).

From reading this volume, it has struck me that the Kingston-4 boys' movements surrounding their own production and consumption of drugs, differs in one particular way from Lindstrom's discussion. While their movements engender the production of social relationships, they also encompass many pressures that serve to block them.

Access to cigarettes, marijuana and alcohol require money, which is in short supply. In rural areas people have easier access tobacco and marijuana and kava, which they can grow in their gardens. As the squad is a large group, and everyone wants to consume enough to achieve the altered mood, a boy in possession of a drug experiences a tension between keeping the item for their own consumption, and sharing it.

Their actions therefore pivot around balancing individual wants with socially expected behaviour. This is in part because the boys have a received understanding that in Vanuatu the sharing of items is socially expected. Indeed, the boys would often refer to the popular notion that ni-Vanuatu *kastom* dictates a 'communal way of living' where the 'spirit of sharing' is 'the very pillar of the existence of people' (Vanuatu Daily Post, 2009). Christian church messages emphasizing the importance of 'sharing' (*serem*) are also prevalent. The Kingston-4 boys' understanding of sharing is informed by these ideas. Manu explained:

amount of kava most nights. The boys often said that getting drunk from kava is a 'normal experience'. This leads to my second point which is that kava consumption, though often done with friends, is increasingly an independent activity as throughout the day, each boy is concerned with making sure that he has enough money or connections for his own kava consumption and often at night goes to kava bars to pay for his own kava. The third and final point is that the boys explicitly explain that kava and marijuana are different, as one boy said: 'when you drink kava you want to sleep, but when you smoke you feel strong'.

When we are born, we are born free. God creates everyone free. Everyone is born naked and without having anything with him. But then one time you see your neighbour, and he has this here and he has that there, so then you too you want these things. So you struggle, you sacrifice yourself to become like him. But suppose you were to follow God's life— then if you have any something you share it with the man who doesn't have. If you are a person who wants a good life on this earth well then it doesn't matter whether you have lots of things or no things – you live life by sharing your heart with people. Life is about sharing your heart with everyone. If you have single bread and you break it, then every man will eat, but if you hide 10vt or 100,000vt from the forehead of any man, well then the place becomes corrupt all about.

As described in Chapter 2, many residents in Freswota-4 live financially insecure lives. Consequently, subscribing to the value system noted by Manu is hard to maintain. It is important to reiterate that despite the economic insecurity experienced by many residents in Freswota, the social pressure to share is strong and sharing is publically conceptualized as part of what creates their social world.

Consequently, in Freswota, an idealised past of communal living is constantly being contrasted with a town present of 'selfishness' (*selfis*) – defined in everyday terms as not giving someone some of what you have. In Freswota, people commented often about other people's selfish ways; gossiped about who had not responded to someone's request, and talked about which neighbours do not contribute to the development of the community. Kingston-4 boy Arthur articulates this tension when he speaks about the transformed 'spirit of sharing' in town:

Sometimes if a man has a luxury he wants to keep it for himself. He doesn't want to know other people because he doesn't want to share with them. Yes this happens towards family members too. Some people in Freswota go out of the house and go straight to work and then back home and then to town and then back home. They can afford it. They can isolate themselves and don't need to socialise. Because they went to school and have a good job they can build a wall around themselves and stay inside their own shell. But this person with this kind of behaviour, well he is not following our style of sharing in Vanuatu. Because of his good education he has adopted a different outlook and a different thinking. He has forgotten that he is a man from Vanuatu and that Vanuatu follows a spirit of sharing. The style of giving and sharing is the style of the rural islands. But people in town they forget about this. They think only about themselves and only defend their own interests. And if they behave like this, well then they will become a target – all the boys will target them. And then if he has a problem one day, well no one will be there to help him. Not even his family.

What is of particular relevance here is Arthur's noting of the importance of sharing to social life; that behaving in ways that isolate oneself from one's community results in

stigmatisation and potential future ostracism. Arthur suggests that acts of ‘not sharing’ lead to a break in the system of reciprocal giving, one important practice through which social relationships in Vanuatu are produced and reproduced (see Chapter 2). Moreover, Arthur points out, albeit implicitly, that while some people can afford to keep their ‘luxury items’ for themselves, and to live in their ‘own shell’, others like the Kingston-4 boys, who are not self sufficient, can not, for they rely on acts of giving and receiving that are part of their social relationships.

We see therefore that the boys’ movements pertaining to cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana reflect a tension between fulfilling individual wants and sharing with the group, a tension between the individual and the social self. This tension is evident in how the boys publicly promote *kastom* and Christian values of sharing (as seen in Manu’s and Arthur’s quotes above) but do not always follow their own preached ideology. Indeed, the boys caught Manu not sharing a bag of marijuana, and Arthur was caught for not sharing a bottle of wine. Thus one way the boys can avoid a reputation of selfish behaviour, escape being targeted, and ensure they will be assisted in times of need, yet also maintain individual control over a valued item, is to conceal it, or engage in evasion tactics in order to modulate who the item is shared with.

Concealing Alcohol and ‘Smoke’: Negating Relationships

One evening, at a ‘fundraising event’ in Freswota-4, I observed Jones instructing Elwin to put what was left of a 2.5 litre bottle of wine into my fridge.¹⁴⁵ It was the Saturday night of the Easter holiday weekend, and the boys’ habit, most long weekends was to drink in excess, usually without sleep, for its duration. Leading up to holiday weekends the boys exert extra effort to press their relationship networks for alcohol and money, with surprising success.

In Elwin’s case he had obtained the wine by trading it with a shop owner for a mobile phone he had found on a bus. That night at the fundraising event, Jones nagged Elwin about the wine, for he claimed part ownership of the bottle because he had been drinking it with Elwin the previous night but had not finished it. It was impossible to miss the tension between Elwin’s reluctance to make the bottle public, and Jones’ insistence that

¹⁴⁵ Fundraising events, often held at kava bars (selling kava and food), are a popular way people in the communities raise money for community projects or individual needs like school fees.

he do. When Elwin agreed, and when I saw the little amount of wine remaining, I realised the conflict.

Elwin, who had a reputation of not sharing, was concerned about sharing such little wine with a big group of boys. As he said to me while we were walking towards my house: ‘We have to let go of these boys’ (*yumi mas lego olgeta*). Jones’ reputation was not better. While Jones earned money through the selling of individually rolled marijuana joints, he never gave anyone marijuana, or used his money to pay for other boys’ kava or alcohol, yet always situated himself to benefit from the sponsorship of others. Jones’ insistence on moving the bottle to my house was a way for him to secure access to the remaining wine, for Jones had positioned himself as my main ‘security guard’ (*sekuriti*) in the community and so could justify his presence at my house and thus access to Elwin’s wine from my fridge.

During our brief walk towards my house, Elwin and I passed the Alick Noel store behind and beside which the Kingston-4 boys regularly gathered. Elwin remarked that we should have walked along a different road to avoid being seen by ‘the boys’. As Elwin predicted, one of the boys, Lewis, approached and asked where we were going. Elwin ignored Lewis’ request for information and kept walking. The boys often spoke badly about Lewis commenting on his general ‘selfish’ behaviour and often remarking that since he lives in Freswota-5 he should spend his time there and not with the Kingston-4 boys. Lewis swore at Elwin, and yelled at me that I should not spend time with people who behave in this way – in ways that exclude others.

Not long after Elwin and I arrived at my house, Jones knocked on my door and came in accompanied by Sargent, Samuel and Benny, as this had been the plan made at the fundraiser. Elwin poured the remaining wine into cups and handed them out. Sargent, who occasionally helps his father deliver duty free alcohol to tourists, contributed a bottle of whisky, which the boys started drinking once the wine was finished. About once an hour Benny, the youngest boy present, would be sent to the store for cigarettes. The boys urged Benny every time to hide their location from boys he might come across on the road. One time Benny returned with cigarettes, but also with Alfred his best friend. This was not a problem because Alfred is well liked, and usually shares marijuana.

This ethnographic vignette illustrates some of the points already set out in the chapter – that the boys experience a tension between individual and shared consumption; that individuals are concerned with modulating with whom valued items are to be shared; and that individuals try hard not to be shamed or excluded from the sharing of these items.

The ethnography also reflects how the boys' movements pertaining to these items are about cultivating smaller groups of relations within the larger group. Elwin and Sargent were modulating with whom they share. Through sharing, boys develop strong friendships with a few boys in the squad. This is important as the boys depend on a few close friends for their security and safety. Sharing helps cultivate these friendships, although as I observed many times, moments of sharing are often conceptualised as bounded experiences, and the positive relationship elicited by them does not always extend once the shared experience is over.

This vignette also shows how the boys respond when a request for participation in the consumption of an item is not fulfilled. By examining Lewis' reaction to Elwin, it becomes clear that non-fulfilment of a request is interpreted as a rejection of the social relationship.¹⁴⁶

I observed that when a youth in Freswota makes a request from a relative or friend, it is because he or she believes, as was the case with Lewis, or knows, as was the case with Jones, that the person to whom they are posing the request has the means to fulfil it. As they are socially obligated to fulfil requests, not doing so is viewed as an insult and as a clear rejection of the relationship.

So as not to be seen as insulting other people, youth are careful to evade requests that they cannot or do not want to fulfil, such as, when asked directly for something, answering with: 'I will think [about the request] first and let you know [my response] later' (*bae mi tingting fastaem afta bae mi jes letem yu save*), which they never do. Through this technique the request is neither accepted, nor rejected; it remains ambiguous, but to a point. Youth interpret this ambiguity as a denial of the request, but without the explicit rejection of the relationship. When the denial is framed in this way, a person is less open to retaliation because there is no evidence of rejection. The explanation often given is that the rejection is the person's own (imagined) thinking – 'this is just your own thinking' (*hemia tingting lo yu wan nomo*) and not a rejection that can be proven with 'evidence'. This is in marked contrast to what happened between Lewis and Elwin, where Elwin, by overtly ignoring Lewis, was unambiguous in his rejection of him.

The consequences, when movements rejecting relationships are discovered, are severe. Indeed, not long after the incident where Elwin (and I) overtly ignored Lewis,

¹⁴⁶ Macintyre writes that among young men in Papua New Guinea, drinking and smoking marijuana with peers 'creates bonds and establishes status in a social network where they are far more likely to be able to dominate than they are in kin networks' (2008: 184).

Lewis called a squad meeting in which, as mentioned in the Introduction to this thesis, he proposed that all my field notebooks be collected and burned. I interpret this request as stemming from Lewis' hurt and angered response to his experience of being rejected from a shared group experience.

A story recounted to me a number of times further illustrates how not sharing something that should be shared is socially unacceptable. According to the story, one of the boys, Hudson, had not joined the squad for several days. As the boys know Hudson's movements well, his absence suggested that something of value was being concealed. The boys concluded that because of the length of his absence, he was hiding a sizeable bag of marijuana and was consuming it alone. Based on these informed assumptions, six or seven boys went to Hudson's house to confront him. When they observed Hudson's shoes outside his house they knocked on the door and did not stop until Hudson appeared. Hudson swore at the boys telling them that he had been sleeping. However, as Hudson's eyes were red from smoking marijuana, the boys knew that this was not true. The story follows that the boys asked Hudson for the marijuana but he denied having any. This went on for sometime until Hudson's younger brother went into the house and found it. In telling the story the boys always laughed when recounting Hudson's shameful face as he was confronted with the marijuana he had denied concealing. The boys said that they punched Hudson several times for having behaved in this selfish way. The boys said that Hudson did not join the squad for several weeks, as he knew he would not be welcome.

That this altercation happened weeks before I started spending time with the boys, yet it continued to be discussed, reflects the boys' preoccupation, and the tensions, surrounding the balance of socially expected behaviour with individual wants. The group's confrontation of Hudson's hiding was a public chastising of Hudson's choice to give primacy to individual wants that neglected the group.

Moreover, Hudson's concealment of marijuana can also be analysed by examining how the different acts of sharing and concealing yield differently valued outcomes. According to Nancy Munn, certain practices have the capacity to 'extend or expand self-other relationships' (1986: 9). Munn argues that different social acts lead to different outcomes, and distinguishes between two types of acts – those that are positively valued and those that are negatively valued. For the Gawa, of Papua New Guinea, the act of giving food to overseas visitors, for instance, leads to the positive outcome of return hospitality, the acquisition of kula shells and renown (1986: 8). Other acts, in contrast, such as witchcraft, are 'self-focused' and work to contract social relationships. Witchcraft

acts are negatively valued as they ‘destroy’ or ‘subvert’ the possibilities to expand relationships beyond the self (1986: 13).

For the Kingston-4 boys, sharing items with peers leads to peers sharing items with them, and also leads to their inclusion in a shared experience through which the boys access a transformed state of being. Acts of individual consumption, on the other hand, have no positive yields other than their own individual enjoyment; they are ‘self-focused’ acts which, as Munn argues, ‘contracts social relationships’ for they ‘destroy’ or ‘subvert’ the possibilities for relationships beyond the self to be formed (1986: 13).

Drawing from Munn’s framework, I suggest that one of the reasons the boys confronted Hudson about his concealment of marijuana was because the boys monitor acts that lead to the subversion of relationships beyond the self. As one of the boys explained: ‘Ni-Vanuatu are meant to follow the principal of sharing. It is through sharing that people become joined together like a rope. When you do not share it is like the rope is cut’. As these words reveal, the boys know that some acts lead to a contraction of relationships.

Additionally, the boys explained that they confronted Hudson because marijuana is not supposed to be smoked alone. Drawing once again from Munn, I suggest that smoking marijuana alone can be likened to Gawan behaviours that attract witchcraft – a dangerous act with the potential of destroying the self from within (Munn 1986: 224). I say this because, according to the boys, when a person smokes marijuana they become inspired with new ideas, and a person must smoke with other people in order to ‘exercise these ideas’ and to ‘set these ideas free’. ‘If you smoke alone’ Samuel explained:

These ideas do not get a chance to come out which can turn a person crazy. Sometimes some of these ideas are bad ideas and if you do not tell your bad ideas to others then there will be no one to correct your thinking. In the end you might believe your own ideas and become crazy, or you might act on the ideas and do something bad to yourself or to others.

As Samuel’s comment reveals, an idea that is not released through conversation with peers can lead to bodily harm, moreover, it is a harm that originates from within.

We can see that the social dynamic in which a person such as Hudson is involved in is somewhat analogous to that of the Gawan witch where the witch is the icon of the ‘inequality created initially by the victim’s possession of something denied to the other’ (Munn 1986: 224). Munn suggests that the witch is the embodied greed of the victim, an icon of the victim’s acts that contract social relationships. Furthermore, as the witch is considered to be a projected icon of the victim himself, harm caused by witchcraft is

conceptualised as destroying the person from within. Returning once more to the example of Hudson, we see that his concealment of marijuana is interpreted by the boys to be an act that puts him at risk of harm due to his own greedy behaviour. By smoking alone, Hudson is perceived to be at risk of his ideas eating him up inside.



Figure 33: Drinking Beer



Figure 34: Smoking Together

Evasive Strategies

Youth in Freswota employ evasive strategies to evade revealing behaviours that might lead to rejection or repercussions. For example, youth ‘go underground’ (*go andagraon*) – a slang phrase meaning ‘to hide’ (*stap haed*). I suggest that ‘going underground’ refers not to moving the valued item underground, but to moving the body. This is also because when the marijuana is smoked, or when the alcohol is drunk, the evidence that remains is the effect of the substance on the physical body – red eyes, or a drunken demeanour. By ‘going underground’ boys are better able to evade others observing that someone has smoked or drunk without their inclusion. Thus evasive strategies are movements that youth engage in to avoid sharing, or to control with whom they share. This is the case especially if the item is in short supply.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁷ Macintyre notes that Papua New Guinea young men will hide in order to avoid sharing their beer thereby ensuring that they will be able to get drunk (2008: 189).

In Freswota, people who frequently make requests for items, but who never reciprocate, are popularly referred to as ‘mosquitos’ (*moskito*) because mosquitos ‘stick your neck’ (*stikem nek*) to suck out your sugar. One of my adoptive fathers explained the idiom to me once:

At the kava bar there are always too many mosquitos, the boys who don’t work and who ask you to buy them kava or give them a cigarette or buy them a beer. Sometimes they sweeten you, they say if you give them a cigarette they will come and do work in your yard tomorrow. But tomorrow comes and the work doesn’t happen. But you have already given them their sugar. These we call the champion mosquitos because they really know what they are doing.

The Kingston-4 boys use the term ‘mosquito’ slightly differently. For them, the idiom additionally refers to people like Lewis, who could, but choose not to reciprocate.

Following the incident where Elwin ignored Lewis, Elwin explained his reluctance to share with Lewis:

Lewis is a true mosquito! He has money and can pay his own way, but he works on getting others to pay for him. When Lewis is in a good place with money then you never see him, he thinks only about himself and not about the group. But when he doesn’t have money, then he comes back to the boys and asks for marijuana and money for kava and alcohol. And this isn’t right.

Modulating with whom one shares is a complex task given that the boys spend most of their time on the road where their movements can be observed. Familiarity with each other’s movements makes it easier to discern when someone is concealing something. To negotiate this context, the boys engage in another practice of evasion they call *Plan-B*. While the English usage of the idiom ‘Plan-B’ refers to making secondary or ‘fall-back’ plans, the boys use *Plan-B* to describe evading or avoiding people who might wish to join in the plan. Usually *Plan-B* involves telling a person that you are going home when you have a different plan in mind. The intention is to avoid letting peers know that you are excluding them. Mobile phones have been instrumental in young peoples’ abilities to *Plan-B*, as plans that exclude others can be made through private texts. However, the danger with using mobile phones, as suggested in Chapter 4, is that text messages can, if found, provide strong ‘evidence’ of evasive movements.

Plan-B movements usually involve individuals or pairs leaving the group, taking small back roads, and then re-joining together at an agreed upon place. Described in the example above, Elwin and Jones separated and reconvened to drink Elwin’s wine at my house. Usually the number of boys who re-convene is small and selective because of the

limited supply of marijuana or alcohol. Thus *Plan-B* movements are also very much about selecting which relationships individuals' value most and which relationships will yield a greater return.

Plan-B movements are therefore also used to block boys one does not want joining in a plan or a shared experience. A slang phrase: 'the time for negotiation starts now' (*taem blo negotiation i stat nao*), expressed to me for the first time by Lewis, as he saw two expatriates at a bar, reflects some boys' preoccupation in manipulating and negotiating individuals into paying for their evening intoxicants. *Plan-B* is a strategic attempt to curtail these types of endeavours. It is a way a person incapacitates a person's request to consume what you have. However, as the case of Elwin avoiding Lewis illustrates, movements of *Plan-B* do not always go unobserved, and as Toko explained: 'the person can feel it in their skin when someone *Plan-B*'s on them. They feel it in their skin and it feels bad inside'.

For many young people, being included in other peoples' plans, and sharing an experience, is of great importance. I realised the significance of inclusion one evening when a shared experience was prematurely and abruptly stopped. I had been invited by a neighbour, a man in his mid thirties with a well paying job, to 'follow him' (*folem*) and some friends to have drinks at a bar in town. While the Bislama term *folem* is often defined as 'to follow' or 'hang around with' (Crowley 2003), in certain contexts, such as this one, it has the added meaning of sponsorship or invitation as well.

I accepted my neighbour's invitation and enjoyed my time with him and other friends until a few hours into the evening my neighbour punched one of the men and pushed him into the sea. Apparently he had witnessed the man cursing his girlfriend, who was my neighbour's cousin. In Vanuatu it is considered taboo to insult a woman in front her male relatives. Not wanting to be involved in their altercation I left the bar with another girl. The next day I learned that our leaving had been badly received. My neighbour interpreted our departure as us having 'run away on him' (*ronwe lo hem*). He felt deprived of the benefit of our 'drunken company', for which he had paid.

The reaction to this interrupted moment of sharing reflects a particular attitude towards shared experience. It seemed that the act of sharing might also suggest an owning of the person's company and presence for the duration of the shared time. My neighbour's reaction supports the general argument of this chapter, that although the money spent on the alcohol was important, he was also significantly concerned with the relationship embodied in the alcohol, and the opportunity to build a shared experience with his peers.

According to my observations, most movements of *Plan-B* and ‘going underground’ pertain to modulating the consumption of alcohol and not marijuana. The incident where Hudson concealed marijuana for his own consumption seemed to be an exception, which is likely the reason the boys were still speaking about it weeks later. This is in contrast to the lack of concern for who consumes ‘home brew’, a fermented homemade drink they can make at little cost. Because of the different costs of alcohol, marijuana and cigarettes, they can be regarded as different types of drugs that engender different kinds of social relationships. No one will be prevented from participating in the drinking of home brew, which is not the case for bottles of ‘duty free’. In the next section I will demonstrate that movements pertaining to marijuana and cigarettes usually generate positive relationships. Movements pertaining to alcohol also generate positive relationships yet usually with a smaller number of people at one time. As the next two sections focus on the building of large group-shared experience, it will focus on movements pertaining to cigarettes and marijuana, not alcohol.

Smoking: The Building Of Shared Experience

The reason Manu suggests that *Plan-B* movements ‘feel bad inside’, and the reason my neighbour was cross because we ‘ran away’, is because being excluded from a plan is experienced as an exclusion from participating in the shared experiences through which transformation in a state of being is achieved. This section demonstrates how smoking with the group transforms individuals, albeit temporarily, from an individual state, to a state of heightened shared sociality.

It was a boy who had just arrived in town from the islands who first brought to my attention the importance of smoking to the building of social relationship and shared experience in Freswota. His astute observation stemmed, no doubt, from his recent experience as a newcomer trying to make friends. He said: ‘boys in town use cigarettes to find best friends and to make relationships strong’. When I asked some of the Kingston-4 boys about this observation, about the connection between cigarettes and relationships, one of the boys, Owen, said:

Oh yes. One of the methods we sometimes use when meeting someone new is to hit them. Yes you hit them to take the rank out of someone. Usually when they don’t expect it. You see how they react. And then when you meet them a second time you go and shake their hand, you tell them sorry and you give them your cigarette. We do this to make the friendship. When it is over

then we are friends.

Owen's description of the way boys become friends is in accordance with Samuel's explanation, mentioned earlier, of observing peoples' 'method' in order to best 'know them'.¹⁴⁸ The Kingston-4 boys engage in this physical violence in order to observe the stranger's response and thus learn what to expect from them in the future. More to the point being argued here, however, is that it is through a cigarette that the friendship is extended.

When the boys speak about 'taking a puff' from a cigarette, or a joint, they use the word 'pull' (*pul*). *Pul* is also the root of the verb *pulum fren* – the phrase the boys use when speaking about 'making friends'. This shows a cognizance of the connection between making friends and cigarettes – that offering a 'pull' of a shared cigarette 'pulls' in a person. Moreover, a third meaning of the word *pul*, one which further highlights the link between smoking and the building of social relationship, is that it is the term the boys use to describe the movement two friends make with their hands to show shared agreement. To carry out a 'pull' a person places his or her index finger between the open index fingers of his or her friend, and then with a swift movement the fingers are pulled apart making a loud snap. The Kingston-4 boys' conversations were frequently punctuated by these 'pulls'.

Within the squad, the process of smoking cigarettes is carefully structured. Since most boys cannot afford their own cigarettes, they frequently share single cigarettes between them. It is older boys who generally 'sponsor' (*sponsar*) younger boys' smoking. The act of sharing a cigarette, rather than smoking a full cigarette on one's own is revealing.¹⁴⁹ A Kingston-4 boy will never smoke a full cigarette when sitting in the group, as it is interpreted as an act of rejection or negation of one's social relations. In contrast, sharing cigarettes with the group is a sign of being part of the group and distinguishes the Kingston-4 boys from boys who are of different socio-economic status. Other boys, who study or work, for example, have their own patterns of cigarette smoking, which include smoking full cigarettes themselves. The Kingston-4 boys interpret the act of smoking a full

¹⁴⁸ Similarly, Larson writing about Marijuana usage among the Truk of Micronesia notes that sharing marijuana in a group is a new way to 'test judgments of personal character' (1987: 220).

¹⁴⁹ For discussion on the sharing of single cigarettes see Mac Marshall's analysis of cigarette smoking among the Namoluk of the Marshall Islands where tobacco is seen as 'something to be shared with others as a way to demonstrate generosity and to cement ties of kinship and friendship' (2005: 375). See also Peter Weston Black's work on smoking among the Tobians of Micronesia. Referring to sharing single cigarettes, Black writes that: 'this type of smoking, known to Tobians as *hachuchuh*, in which one cigarette at a time is smoked by a group, is by far the most frequent style of Tobian smoking' (1994: 487).

cigarette as a sign of membership in the ‘high classes’ (*hi klases*), where individuals can afford to reject the sociality that is engendered through the sharing of a second hand cigarette.

When the Kingston-4 boys are together as a group, the older boys always send the younger members of the group to the store to purchase the cigarettes. Upon return, the younger boy will give the purchased cigarettes and the remaining change to the older boy who had sent him. The older boy will then distribute the cigarettes depending on the configuration of the group that day.¹⁵⁰ If many boys are present, the older boy will give one of the cigarettes, unlit, to another of the older boys. If not, the older boy will keep the remaining cigarettes for smoking at a later time. Sometimes he will put one of the cigarettes behind his ear – a display of his magnanimous spending on something that will then be shared with others. The older boys’ sharing earns respect and loyalty from other members of the squad. Indeed, many of the younger boys refer to one of the leaders of the squad as their ‘patron’, since they are aware of his patronage.

Anthropological literature has shown that person’s capacity to distribute items of consumption to others as a ‘way of gaining and retaining followers’ reflects prior patterns of social behaviour in Melanesia (Macintyre 2008: 189). Indeed, it is always the older boys of the group who distribute unlit cigarettes to visitors, or special guests, or who light the cigarettes, smoke them first and then distribute the lit cigarette to others.

A sign of the status among the boys is reflected in being the first to smoke.¹⁵¹ When, on one occasion, I observed a younger boy request that an older boy give him an unlit cigarette, the older boy responded with laughter and said to the younger boy: ‘When one man’s beard has seen the sun before another man’s beard, then the young beard should listen to the older beard. That is just how it goes.’

I suggest that for the boys, the movement of giving an unlit cigarette has come to represent the Vanuatu ideology of ‘respect’ (*respek*) – defined as the showing of honour or behaving deferentially towards a person (Crowley 2003). I often observed Sargent give an unlit cigarette to one of the other older boys to light and share, but I never saw him give an unlit cigarette to one of the younger boys. Through the ordering of who lights and who smokes the cigarette, the hierarchy within the squad is made visible.¹⁵²

¹⁵⁰ This is also the case for some groups of Freswota girls who divide into pairs to smoke their cigarettes.

¹⁵¹ Smoking the first part of a cigarette or joint is seen as less harsh than smoking the last part.

¹⁵² I observed the parallel flow of cigarettes and flow of respect on many occasions outside the squad as well. At a music festival, I realised that other squads of boys also share unlit and lit cigarettes in a manner of respect and relationship building. For example, one evening as I walked with Sargent and another leader of

Usually, the boy who lights a cigarette will smoke a third of it, casually and with good time and then will pass it to another older boy who will smoke the second third in the same manner. The remaining third is passed to one of the younger boys who will take a few quick ‘pulls’ before passing it onto one of his peers. Calculations are always accurate so everyone designated to smoke smokes. If several younger boys are seated together they quickly assign the order in which the remaining third of the cigarette will be smoked between them. They alternate the order with each cigarette, so that everyone eventually has smoked an equal amount. Boys, like Lewis, who rarely contributed to the squad, even though they could, are sometimes excluded from the passing of a cigarette, though doing this is hard. Explicit requests in the form of ‘pssts’ and upward eyebrow raises while looking at the cigarette, done in public, will not be ignored.

It is through these details of the boys’ practices of cigarette smoking that the important point about cigarettes – their efficacy in producing social relations is revealed. Through this description we see that offering a cigarette to another person leads to a more positive yield than keeping a cigarette for oneself. Moreover, as mentioned, we see that cigarettes (as is also the case for alcohol and marijuana) are not just ‘things’ the boys share or conceal, but embody the particular social relationships between particular boys. As the above ethnography has shown, receiving an unlit cigarette, for instance, embodies a different social relationship than receiving a last third or an end.

Adam Reed (2007), writing about the sharing of cigarettes between Papua New Guinean inmates, similarly suggests that sharing cigarettes has an effective role in producing sociality. In the same way in which I have shown that the Kingston-4 boys use cigarettes to incorporate members into the group, to demarcate hierarchy, and to develop loyalty through the act of sharing (younger boys always return the change from their purchasing of the cigarettes for example), Reed demonstrates that for inmates, relationship with other prisoners is ‘laid out’ from the very first shared cigarette (2007: 36-37). Moreover, that the composition of prison gangs and the status of gang members is shaped

the Kingston-4 squad around Port Vila’s annual music festival, I observed them interact with boys from other squads. Each time they encountered another squad of boys the boys would first ‘shake hands’. Shaking hands is an act of greeting in Vanuatu and like with the passing of cigarettes, the order of the handshakes also marks respect. Thus I observed Sargent and the other older boys move around younger boys of both squads to meet the hands of the older boys first. After the handshake, and some small talk, I often observed Sargent pass the cigarette he was smoking to the other squad leader, or if he was not smoking at the time, give the other squad leader an unlit cigarette. Strathern writes that as drugs do not actually alter the identity of people, just alter the sociality between people, it is not surprising that etiquette of drug consumption follow already established lines of rank or stratification (1987: 235). Based on Strathern’s argument, the Kingston-4 boys’ distribution and ordered smoking of cigarettes, as well as their use of cigarettes to show respect, is not surprising as it follows rules of ni-Vanuatu sociality in other contexts.

by their flow. Reed suggests that new or alternative sets of relations develop through the activity of smoking, as smoking partners become a new type of *wantok* or ‘one language’ relationship in the prison. Reed concludes that even though the anthropological literature generally treats smoking as a ‘strange kind of non-activity’, cigarettes are actually full of analytical significance and potentiality (2007: 34).

Like cigarettes, the sharing of marijuana joints also has the capacity to build social relationships.¹⁵³ However, as Larson, has suggested for marijuana smokers in Truk Micronesia, smoking marijuana does not actually build new interpersonal relations, rather it serves to modify relationships that are already existing (1987: 220; cf. Lindstrom 1987: 11; Strathern 1987: 235). I suggest that this is also the case in Freswota because unlike with the extension of cigarettes to strangers, I only observed the giving of marijuana joints to people with whom a relationship already existed.¹⁵⁴



Lindstrom (1987), writing about the production of drugs for the purpose of exchange, suggests that efforts to produce drugs are social. This can be seen to be the case in Freswota, where as discussed in Chapter 2, the Kingston-4 boys operate a ‘marijuana cooperative’ which sells pre-rolled joints to people in Freswota. In their efforts to run the cooperative, the boys pool their money and buy marijuana – the *smok* – in bulk form. The marijuana comes in large buds and so the boys work together to break them into finer pieces and then roll them into joints. I observed that the boys divide the work into tasks

¹⁵³ Some girls also smoke marijuana, usually in pairs or in their own much smaller squads.

¹⁵⁴ The boys said that this is not because people fear being poisoned through marijuana, as is often the case when people insist on drinking kava prepared by people they trust. The boys explained that while poison can be added to kava, a liquid, because marijuana is in smoke form, it cannot be poisoned.

with some boys separating the buds from the small branches and other boys breaking the buds into finer pieces. It is a social task, one usually accompanied by smoking, listening to reggae music, swapping jokes, gossip, and telling stories. Collective agreement is also formed about the quality of a batch of *smok*.¹⁵⁵

Although the circulation of marijuana joints is less structured than the circulation of cigarettes, it is no less effective in engendering particular social relations. However, unlike the ordered consumption of cigarettes, it is the boy who makes the joint, who usually also lights it. Oftentimes, particularly when there is a lot of *smok* available, the boys will have three or four joints circulating the group at one time. This notable difference between the structure of the flow of marijuana joints, and that of cigarettes, is related to the context in which the marijuana is purchased. While cigarettes are usually purchased by one person and then shared, marijuana purchased by the squad in bulk, is equally owned by everyone. The principal of ‘respect’ that the boys play out through their demarcation of the order of smoking is not necessary here.

Only boys who have reached a certain age are permitted to smoke together with the large group. Sometimes boys 13 and 14 years old, often referred to as ‘small boys’ (*smol boe*), hang around at the periphery of the group. However, they do not smoke marijuana with the group. As one of the older boys told me: ‘Small boys cannot smoke [marijuana] it is bad for small boys. It is only something for us older boys’. As I will discuss shortly, the Kingston-4 boys’ prohibition of ‘small boys’ smoking is related to marijuana’s agency in producing men.

Thus far, I have shown that sharing the same cigarette or joint as one’s peers creates shared sociality. However, sociality is not just formed through the circulation of the cigarettes or joints, but also through the act of smoking itself. Similar to Carsten’s assertion that eating and feeding is part of the process of becoming a person and participating fully in social relations (1995: 223), I suggest here that it is through the sharing of breath, during the smoking, that the boys become ‘fully grown’ men.

The language the boys use when speaking about smoking reveals a distinction between smoking cigarettes and smoking marijuana. When speaking about smoking cigarettes the boys refer to the cigarette, such as ‘lets smoke a cigarette’ (*bae yumi smok wan sigaret*) or ‘do you have a six-two’ (*yu gat wan sikis-tu?*). When referring to smoking marijuana, however, the boys usually do not use the term marijuana but just say: ‘lets

¹⁵⁵ While the boys are mostly satisfied with the marijuana, on occasion they complain that the marijuana is not very strong. The boys refer to strong marijuana as ‘oil paint’, and weak marijuana as ‘water paint’.

smoke' (*bae yumi smok*). They also refer to the marijuana itself as 'smoke' (*smok*), as seen in the question 'do you have any smoke?' (*yu gat eni smok?*).

The noted difference here, is that while the boys talk about cigarettes as a noun, they refer to marijuana as a verb. This method of turning nouns into verbs is referred to as 'verbing' and is a technique people use to create language culture in new contexts (Pinker 1994). It is practiced throughout the Pacific, and in this instance, the act of 'verbing' for terms referring to smoking marijuana, highlights the importance of smoking marijuana in their everyday lives.

Perhaps one of the reasons for this subtle difference in consumption between cigarettes and marijuana is once again the differing contexts within which cigarettes and marijuana are purchased and circulated. While cigarettes are often given as gifts and are important objects of circulation in the boys' social life, both within and outside the squad, the purchase and smoking of marijuana is usually more communal. The emphasis, less on the agency of the marijuana as an object of circulation, is more on its efficacy when smoked.

Moreover, that the boys refer to marijuana by the term *smok* and to the act of smoking marijuana also by the term *smok* emphasises the importance, in the act of smoking, of the smoke – the substance that the smoking emits. The greater significance given to smoking marijuana (cigarettes to a lesser extent), for the building of sociality, is the act of sharing the smoke, which occurs through the sharing of breath. Through the act of inhaling and exhaling *smok* they are sharing each other's breath. The boys breathe in each other's life forces and as they become mixed together the boys gain a masculine efficacy that makes them 'strong' (*strong*).¹⁵⁶

I argue this because the boys say that 'when you smoke marijuana you feel strong' (*taem yu smok yu filim strong*). 'Marijuana unites us' one boy told me, 'marijuana makes us strong. When we smoke together we start to build up cooperation, we build one purpose and a shared mentality'. Moreover, when the boys talk about the effect of the marijuana, they often use the phrase 'this is the work of the marijuana' (*hemia wok blo smok*) reflecting a notion that marijuana effects a change on the person smoking.

This describes a perceived transformation of both body and mind. The boys' transformation of mind is seen in the boys' description, discussed in Chapter 2, of the development of the squad through smoking marijuana, that, the *smok* 'opened their eyes'

¹⁵⁶ This analysis is also based on a popular notion that when the witchcraft of different islands is mixed together it makes a kind of magic that is extra strong. It is the mixing that heightens the potency.

(*ai i kam open*), or in other words, the effect of the marijuana attuned them to the violence they were a party to in the community, and to the violence that ‘foreign systems are inflicting on indigenous ways’.¹⁵⁷ It was this ‘changed thinking’, this ‘wisdom from the smoke’ (*wise blo smok*) that the boys frequently explain has turned them into ‘a different kind of person’, a point I will return to shortly.

A transformation of body can be seen in how sharing breath through sharing *smok* transforms the boys’ relationality from a more individual state to a more heightened social state. As the boys’ quote above suggests, smoking together ‘unites’ them under one purpose and under one ‘mentality’.

Indeed Owen, once thoughtfully explained the importance of cohesiveness for attaining strength. He said: ‘One stick in the fire does not make the food in the saucepan cook until it’s done. It’s the same with a broom. If you have just one stick you can’t sweep up the rubbish, you need many sticks’.¹⁵⁸ What Owen implies through the use of this idiom, is that each boy, who otherwise lives a more autonomous life, a condition that the boys see as a weaker condition of living, the result of being in the ‘confusion zone’, is transformed into a condition of greater strength and efficacy through the act of shared smoking.

It is important to point out that the boys’ transformation is a joint transformation where the boys’ bodies and minds are transformed together as they smoke together. Indeed when the boys speak about smoking marijuana they often refer to it as ‘fly fly’ (*flae flae*), because, as they say: ‘it makes us fly’, sometimes even ‘flying us to the moon’. For the boys, the significance of the transformed state is that together as a group they achieve a state of increased efficacy where through their enhanced ‘strength’ they can engage in activities, such as ‘flying to the moon’, which they otherwise would not have the power to do.

Jamon Halvaksz refers to such a cooperative state as ‘communal efficacy’ and suggests that for Papua New Guinea Youth, ‘marijuana’s effects on relations and bodies enact agencies that otherwise would not be available to young men who desire so much more than present options can provide’ (2006: 242). Following Halvaksz, I suggest that it is wanting to be a part of this communal efficacy that is the reason for the Kingston-4

¹⁵⁷ While Reed also writes that Papua New Guinean inmates explain that smoking cigarettes ‘opens their eyes’ (2007: 36) their use of this same idiom is different as they seem to be suggesting that smoking evokes a state of alertness, and also alive-ness, while for the Kingston-4 boys, their reference to having their eyes open is more about the effect of the marijuana in attuning or focusing their awareness thus creating ‘wisdom’.

¹⁵⁸ Many people in Vanuatu use homemade brooms made from binding together dried spines of natangura leaves.

boys' concern with each other's movements relating to sharing and concealing marijuana (as well as the other drugs). Moreover, it is the reason why the boys 'work hard' to be included in shared acts of smoking. It is through participation in these shared experiences that individuals are transformed from a weaker condition of being into one of greater strength and with a masculine efficacy that they otherwise do not possess.

***Smok* and the Growing of Effective Male Bodies**

For the Kingston-4 boys, the ultimate positive value of smoking as a group is that, as mentioned, it is through the sharing of breath that 'effective male bodies' (Halvaksz 2006: 236) are produced. Indeed, as Marilyn Strathern (1987) has also written, 'substances are valued not in terms of use but in terms of their effects' (1987: 252). This section examines the production of a masculine efficacy and how smoking is ultimately a practice of becoming a Kingston-4 squad member.

In 'Rethinking Mana', Roger Keesing (1984) argues for a new definition of *mana* a term used throughout Melanesia to mean strength, power, and efficacy. Keesing criticizes past uses of *mana* as a noun, as something that is manifest in objects, and proposes instead that *mana* be conceptualised as a verb, where 'human enterprises and efforts *are* mana' (1984: 138). Referring specifically to conceptualisations of *mana* in Vanuatu, Jeremy MacClancy, notes that in Vanuatu, *mana* is one of a general class of terms that can be translated into Bislama as 'strong' (*strong*), or 'power' (*paoa*) (1986: 142). Writing about the Big Nambas of north Malakula, MacClancy shows that an Indigenous language term meaning *strong* is frequently used to convey ideas about strength and power and the ability to affect something. MacClancy writes that for the Big Nambas it is important to become as *strong* as possible, and one augments one's 'life-force' in order to do so (1986: 143).

Building on these ideas of *mana* I suggest that because the Kingston-4 boys see smoking marijuana to be a practice that 'makes you feel strong' smoking marijuana can be understood in terms of *mana*. I suggest that for the Kingston-4 boys, it is the act of mingling breaths, during the sharing of *smok*, which activates the *mana*.

Anthropological literature has shown that Melanesian male rituals have often involved the practices of men sharing substances in order to produce greater power and strength (Herdt 1993a, 1993b; Allen 1984). For instance, the ingestion of semen through fellatio or anal intercourse is considered to be 'essential to the growth of boys' (Keesing 1998: 10). In north Vanuatu, ritualized same-sex male practices were also seen to have

causal effects of an ‘ontological kind’ where participants believed this would generate a power that could ‘both physically and spiritually transform themselves, and by extension, others also’ (Allen 1984: 85). Michael Allen writes that the point of ritualised same-sex male practices in north Vanuatu was ‘to make juniors grow into mature men’ (1984: 85).

While semen might have more overt connotations with growth and reproduction, than breath, breath is also an important life force. For the boys, the sharing of breath is attributed with similar connotations of growth as the sharing of semen, and can be viewed as a transformation of earlier practices of sharing semen in north Vanuatu and perhaps elsewhere. Indeed, as previously mentioned, older boys prohibit younger boys from smoking marijuana in the group. Smoking, like ritualised same-sex male practices, starts at a set age. I suggest that the Kingston-4 boys prohibit the ‘small boys’ from smoking because they see the younger boys as being too young to engage in a practice that stimulates strength, and instigates growth and manhood.

For the Kingston-4 boys, a masculine identity is defined by a sense of strength, power, and group efficacy through group cooperation. We see evidence of this notion in the transformed state that the *smok* evokes. This transformed state is made visible when the boys congregate on main roads and public spaces and smoke (and drink) in full view of the public often screaming and yelling loudly.¹⁵⁹ In this transformed state the boys reveal themselves in a way that cannot be ignored.

Moreover, it is through being together in this manner that the boys ‘become strong’. As one boy explained: ‘when we are together like this we become strong where no person or devil can harm us’. The boys say that it is during these moments of group sociality that the boys feel they can do anything, even ‘fly to the moon’.¹⁶⁰ The boys express that in this state they are powerful and invincible, it is only when they are alone ‘one one’ (*wan wan*), that they are vulnerable and ineffective as men.

It is noteworthy to point out that Lewis once told me that he does not like girls who *smok*, because they are a ‘different kind of girl’. Here Lewis seems to liken an increased female assertiveness to increased masculine behaviour. What Lewis appears to refer to

¹⁵⁹ Macintyre writes that in Papua New Guinea alcohol use is constructed as ‘a modern, masculine activity’ (2008: 188). Furthermore, and relevant to the point being made here, she writes that group consumption of drugs leads to a sense of transformed male efficacy, she writes that guns, beer and marijuana have become ‘emblems of resistance against the state in its various manifestations... these were the real ‘weapons of the weak’, providing solace, stimulation, excitement, [and] feelings of empowerment,’ (2008: 182).

¹⁶⁰ Macintyre (2008) writes that some of the violent male youth behaviours in Papua New Guinea are not anti-social but deeply social acts.

when he says he does not like girls who *smok*, is that he does not like this masculine efficacy that girls, like the boys, evoke when they smoke marijuana.



Figure 36: Sharing a Cigarette and Displaying the Sign for 'Kingston-4'



Figure 37: Kingston-4 Boys



Figure 38: Kingston-4 Boys

Simon Harrison writes that in Melanesia: 'men's cults have sometimes been interpreted as functional responses to a situation of chronic war; where they may, for instance, help organizationally to maintain the social integration, size and military strength of a community' (Tuzin 1976, in Harrison 1993: 75). Harrison suggests that the initiation ritual serves 'the psychological function of countering male dependence on women, a necessary part of male psychosocial development in a situation of chronic war' (1993: 75). Strikingly, a number of similarities can be drawn between the Kingston-4 squad and the men's cults described by Harrison, offering us the possibility of looking at the boys' smoking as a continuation of past practices to do with social reproduction, albeit in new contexts.

First, is the notion that the group is one response to emerging dependence on women. As mentioned in Chapter 1, the boys do not earn regular independent incomes. As many more young women than men seem to earn money, the boys often feel disempowered by the economic successes of the women around them. I suggest that one

reason the boys have congregated with their male peers, and built up a male dominated social group, is to mediate their experience of being less socially reproductive beings in contrast to their female counterparts.

The second similarity, and a most revealing one, is Harrison's notion that the boys' group is a functional response to a situation of 'chronic war'. As I argued in Chapter 2, the squad has emerged as a mode through which the boys survive the town context. I also demonstrated in Chapter 1, that the Kingston-4 boys see themselves as battling against the 'System', which, as previously discussed, is experienced as the ruling non-Indigenous systems of governance, the state, capitalism and the police. The squad sometimes refer to themselves as 'freedom fighters' (*mifala ol fridom faeta*), as they are no longer accepting their marginalised condition but are engaging in activities which they explain are intended to help 'lift up the next generation out of the confusion zone' (*leftemap nexis jeneresen aot lo confuzin zone*). Analogous to the men's cults, it is through the squad that the Kingston-4 boys achieve a 'social integration' and 'strength', which they regard as essential to being a grown male capable of social reproduction.

However, the problem they face is that their transformation into 'effective male bodies' through *smok* is not a permanent one. In this way it is dissimilar to the transformation in state of being produced through Melanesian practices such as the ritualised same-sex male practices, and the men's cult discussed above. For the Kingston-4 boys, their transformation occurs for the duration of their shared *smok* experience only. When the shared *smok* experience ends, so does the boys' experience of being effective male bodies. They return to the state of 'youth'; a reversion back to a state of vulnerability, dependence and less effectiveness.

This temporariness of their transformation is not surprising. Strathern points out that drug use, unlike other substances such as food, does not lead to permanent bodily transformation, nor does it lead to a permanent change to social identity (1987: 234-235). Somewhat in contrast to Strathern, it must be noted that the boys' explanation that *smok* makes them 'wise', and that their change of 'mentality' makes them 'different from other people', does, I suggest, connote some sense of permanency to their transformation. Halvaksz has noted the possibility of marijuana effecting permanent transformations for youth in Papua New Guinea as well, exemplified in the term they use to refer to themselves – 'drug bodies' (2006: 239). Halvaksz suggests that Strathern's argument, that drugs do not affect permanent transformation, reflects the limited ethnographic data on Pacific Island marijuana available at the time of her writing (2006: 242).

Despite taking into account Halvaksz argument, I suggest that for the Kingston-4 boys, the transformation of body and mind is only a temporary transformation effected only during the group consumption of the drugs (the boys, for instance, do not have an equivalent term to drug bodies). This is demonstrated in their continued status in the community as ‘youth’, not ‘men’. Moreover, this explains the need for practices that modulate the sharing of the consumption of the drugs, for they constantly seek out the shared *smok* experience, which engenders the feeling of masculine strength and efficacy. When the boys *smok* they are ‘wise’, when they are not, they are aware of the ‘wise’, but can not access it.

Indeed, I observed that the boys would explain acts of violence they were involved in as having occurred because they did not have *smok*. They believe that *smok* effects a positive change on their behaviour, a change they cannot access when they do not smoke. This was made clear to me once, after leaving the field, when one of the boys, in a phone conversation explained that he was in trouble because he had stabbed a man. When I asked him how this incident had happened, he explained that it was because he had not ‘smoked’.

Thus for the boys, having *smok* and being able to access this transformed state is one of their greatest priorities. As Benny once explained to me: ‘boys think about two things, sex and *smok*.¹⁶¹ This is why, as mentioned previously in this chapter, the boys will sell and trade nearly everything they own for *smok*. When the boys do not have *smok*, violence, aggression and tensions between them escalate. When there is an abundance of *smok*, the boys share it in a moment of heightened sociality, and through their sharing they access a transformation of body and mind.

Conclusion: Drugs as a Subject of Analytical Significance

This chapter has tried to understand why the Kingston-4 boys are concerned with each other’s movements. Moreover, why they modulate the sharing and concealing of the valued items alcohol, cigarettes and *smok*. Throughout I have suggested that it is the positive or negative relationships that are embodied in the items that is what they are concerned with sharing and concealing. I argued that the boys’ concern with each others’ movements reveals their wanting to be included, not excluded, from the shared experiences through which they achieve a transformed state of being – one in which they become

¹⁶¹ Returning to the discussion of semen as effecting strength, this statement reflects the boys’ notion that *smok* has a power that is of equal rank as the power of semen.

transformed (albeit only temporarily) from a weaker condition of being into one of greater strength and masculine efficacy.

Since the Kingston-4 boys do not have many material possessions, and are in a social condition out of which they can not easily (or permanently) transition, it is by means of cigarettes, alcohol and marijuana, items that they do have access to, and items that they can take with them onto the roads, that their sociality is acted out as they try to create a meaningful existence for themselves. Reed notes that while cigarettes might appear to be a 'strange kind of non-activity' (2007: 34), they, as I suggest is also the case with marijuana and alcohol, are actually full of great analytical significance and potential.

Epilogue

Roots Men

Anthropological literature has demonstrated the importance of being rooted in a home island place to ni-Vanuatu sense of being. The words of the Kingston-4 boys throughout this thesis echo this point. As I have argued, the Kingston-4 boys, like their predecessors, view rootedness in the land of a place as important for locating a person in spatial and social relationships and in ordering their social world. I cite Benson's exclamation quoted in Chapter 1, that having access to the land of one's place is 'everything'.

Throughout this thesis I have suggested that the Kingston-4 boys – young men who were born and have grown up in town – are uncertain about their roots in home island places and most admit that they cannot trace roots that would lead them back there. I have argued that the boys experience this condition as one of being 'unplaced'. This condition, I have explained, entails two elements.

First, they are displaced from the social structure and kinship systems of home island places within which their parents and grandparents previously ordered their lives, and from which they have drawn their social identity and sense of being. The boys refer to this displacement as 'floating' - a condition without purposeful mobility, or the opportunity for social reproduction. Second, the boys experience themselves as marginalised in town. They often exclaim 'we have been left at a half road', powerless, ineffectual and uncertain about how to transition from youth into adulthood. They find themselves without opportunity for secondary level education and formal employment, and because of this, they envisage a future in which both productive and reproductive realisation has been blocked.

I have suggested that their experience is not about living in the tension between two competing value systems – the social systems of the home island places and the wider social systems of town – but is about being outside both of these value systems. The boys refer to this nexus as the 'confusion zone', and it has created an existential problem. Their self-reference as 'half-man' and 'second class' reflects this existential problem. Being in the confusion zone has hindered their development into 'fully grown' ni-Vanuatu persons.

To help frame our understanding of the boys' response to this experienced disruption, I have drawn on Michael Scott's (2005, 2007a, 2007b) analysis of Arosi place making on the island of Makira in Solomon Islands. Scott suggests that Arosi believe their

progenitors gave rise to true humans through the process of transforming their place from an area of imagined pre-order, 'utopic place', into a condition of continuing ordering and re-ordering of the socialised place. He explains that Arosi view this pre-social 'utopic land' as one of spatial vacuity, a 'potential place', a 'not-place' since it was not yet shaped by social meaning (2005: 198-205; 2007b: 28). First inhabitants were different types of beings, such as animate rocks, or snakes. These were not 'true people' as they were pre-social and did not yet engage in productive relations with one another (2005: 205). Scott argues that Arosi see this pre-social, vacuous land as 'chaos', and view themselves – Arosi humans, and their land – a socialised place, as having become shaped through specific place making activities (2005: 206).

In this thesis, I have suggested that the Kingston-4 boys' articulation of Freswota in its pre-ordered years, in its 'confusion zone', is in some respects analogous to the Arosi notion of primordial 'utopic place'. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, the boys (as well as residents of the community in general) emptied the land of its prior meaning as a prelude to forming it. Freswota residents view the area in these pre-ordered days as having been a 'wild place' - a virtual 'no-place', a 'pre-ordered' place of 'confusion'. It was neither the 'organised' nor 'cooperative' community it is becoming today.

Drawing from Scott, I have argued that it is by means of their place making activities in this pre-ordered land, that the Kingston-4 boys are transforming the land from this virtual 'no-place' into 'some place'. This includes their creation of their own shared history, naming roads, building topogeny, developing their own community social structure, social order, mode of organisation and ways of interacting. Moreover, akin to Arosi progenitors, it is through this process, that the Kingston-4 boys are becoming transformed from 'unplaced' persons into emplaced 'Freswota men'.

The boys refer to their place making activities as 'planting roots', and to themselves as 'Roots Men'. In the Introduction to the thesis, I suggested that as their way of transforming place can be likened to that of Arosi progenitors, as well as ni-Vanuatu's first ancestors, we can view the boys as similarly the first 'ancestors' of the Freswota place. They are the 'roots' and the starting point of their own genealogy of people mutually constituted by and in the Freswota land. This is the boys' creative response to being 'unplaced' and living in 'confusion'.

Rootedness: A Way of Being

Throughout this thesis, I have demonstrated that the ‘work of the Roots Man’ (*wok blo ol Roots Man*) is to plant roots. I have argued that being a Roots Man cannot be reduced to definitions of indulgent consumption of marijuana and alcohol, uncontrolled mobility, unproductive time spent on roads, and ‘anti-social’ behaviour. Rather, being a Roots Man entails a way of being that is creative, productive, and deeply social.

As Roots Men, the boys are figuratively rooting themselves into the ground. They are the roots, and rooting themselves is their task. Thus the most significant point for the discussion here is that being a Roots Man entails being an emplaced person. Joel Bonnemaïson, writing about Tannese Islanders, referred to this as ‘identity through place’ and wrote that in Melanesia, cultural identity is a:

Geographical identity that flows from the memories and values attached to places. Membership in a clan or social group, individual or collective identity, is inherited through a network of places, the sum total of which constitutes a territory’. Each local group is thus a kind of ‘geographic society’ defined in relation to the space within which it resides, or a ‘territorial society’, deriving its identity not only through appropriation of a common territory but also from identification with that homeland. (1985a: 30-31)

The boys’ planting roots or place making activities in Freswota can be viewed through this lens, as their becoming not just people rooted in place, but a geographical society’ or ‘mini-territory’ (Bonnemaïson 1985a: 58).

Indeed, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, young people in Freswota are developing their own normative ways of being. They are developing their own hierarchies of relationships, exchange systems, social order, kinship relationships, as well as a socially significant landscape. They are also creating a sense of the spatial boundaries through which they move in motivated and controlled ways.

I have suggested that these social practices are informed by previous practices of ordering social, political and economic worlds around identification with a ‘foundation place’ or ‘root place’. Accordingly, I have proposed that the Alick Noel store – the boys’ main ghetto in Freswota-4 is the boys’ ‘root place’. As demonstrated, the Kingston-4 boys engage with other people in Freswota, and in other communities of town, as people specifically identified with this ‘root place’. They interact with other people through their identification as ‘persons in or of the Freswota place’ (*man Freswota*), as ‘the boys in or of Freswota’ (*ol boe blong Freswota*), and more specifically as ‘the boys in or of Freswota-4’ (*ol boe blong Freswota-4*).

Being Roots Men and planting roots can be conceptualised as a way of being. Being Roots Men involves resituating themselves within a ni-Vanuatu cultural framework of place-based identification. Concomitantly, it is also about reclaiming their engagement in the complementary relationship between rootedness and mobility, which has been documented in the literature.

Although it is clear that for the boys, being Roots Men involves ‘re-rooting’ themselves within a ni-Vanuatu cultural framework of place-based identification, one that involves planting new roots in a new place. The boys’ sense of being Roots Men is not only about rootedness in the physical land, but involves a sense of a rootedness in Vanuatu culture as well.

While generally, the boys express uncertainty about their own roots to specific home island places, they do have a strong sense that as Roots Men they encompass a life energy, or a ‘spirit’ contained within ni-Vanuatu roots. This is not dissimilar to Bonnemaïson’s observation about ‘Root Men’, discussed in the Introduction to this thesis, where ‘Root Men’ are the ‘keepers’ of the powers of their root places (1985a: 41). I suggest that although the boys may not be rooted to any specific home island place, they view themselves as containing within them a spirit of ni-Vanuatu roots. It is a spirit that becomes activated, that grows, as they plant themselves into the ground. The words of Toto, a Kingston-4 boy, reflect this notion. While preparing fresh kava for the boys’ consumption, he said:

We prepare something here following our *kastom*. All our grandfathers in the past, all our ancient men who have lived up until today, we hold tight their culture here. If we lose this well then, we will be eating rubbish from the road. We don’t want to lose this spirit. This spirit is about maintaining a mentality that they have given to us, a mentality that makes us roots people.

I suggest that the spirit Toto refers to here is an energy or mentality deeply embedded in ni-Vanuatu roots. It is a ‘spirit’ of a way of being ni-Vanuatu.

Toto’s description of Roots Men here also reflects their specific notions of what it is to be a ni-Vanuatu man. Toto defines their kava consumption to be akin to the practices of their grandfathers and male ancestors, a point I will return to below. Toto’s words suggest that by keeping the power and the spirit of the way of being ni-Vanuatu alive, they will not fall into a life of poverty signified by the eating of rubbish from the road. Toto makes clear that being Roots Men involves maintaining a connection with the spirits of ni-Vanuatu ancestors and a specific way of being ni-Vanuatu from which they are descended.

Although their use of mobile phones, consumption of marijuana and alcohol, and their engagement with ideas and information from abroad have all contributed to the emergence of new practices of place in the town context, their forms of making place, being persons of a place, and being the roots they are planting in a place, are carried out in a spirit of being ni-Vanuatu.

Furthermore, as demonstrated throughout the thesis, the boys' identification as roots men draws not only from the past, but from messages learned by listening (and playing) roots reggae – a form of reggae music that emerged from and speaks to lives lived in ghettos. Recurrent themes in the lyrics of roots reggae are poverty, marginalisation, racial oppression, displacement, exile, and what is particularly relevant here a return to roots, usually meaning the homeland out of which one has been exiled (Chevannes 1995: 1).

The boys draw from the lyrics of roots reggae music to help articulate and express their own experiences of marginalisation, displacement, and their focus on a return to a more rooted way of being. One of the boys, whose ideas and words are seen throughout this thesis, the lead singer in one of the popular reggae bands 'Black Ghetto', wrote lyrics that speak to this point. The song is titled 'Bonga Jammin' and reflects the Kingston-4 boys' struggle as Roots men in town:

Walk about in the concrete jungle
 Culture man walk about in the concrete jungle
 Preacher man walk about in the concrete jungle
 Roots man walk about in the concrete jungle
 Am me right or wrong about some politicians?
 Am me right or wrong about some new decisions?
 Am me right or wrong about some political parties?
 But me just want society be far from all poverties.
 Well well well...
 We just want all societies be far from all poverties
 Man I'm going to shout out again and say
 The political crisis, everyman must rise,
 To fight against a system of all poverties in this peaceful nation.

These lyrics help us to understand that being a Roots Man is a creative combination of ni-Vanuatu concepts of being rooted in a place, with roots reggae expressions that point to a more complex project that is not just about emplacement, but is also about reformulating a society of greater equality.

In this way we see that being a Roots Man involves renewing themselves as rooted people and about maintaining the spirit contained in Vanuatu roots. The boys believe that

they are Roots Men who should be rooted in the ground, and are re-rooting themselves in the aftermath of Colonial and post-colonial disruptions.

‘Man Freswota’

In this thesis I have been suggesting that the story of the Kingston-4 boys is not just about the transformation of Freswota as a place, but is also about the transformation of the boys as persons too.

Not being able to trace their roots to a home island place is experienced as an existential problem. The boys view themselves, in their unplaced condition of being, as metaphorically ‘half-man’ and ‘second class’. In chapter 1, I suggested that these terms reflect the boys’ sense that not being rooted creates a deficiency in their identity as ‘fully grown’ persons. As previously discussed, in Vanuatu, to be ‘rootless’ is to be debased as a person (Jolly 1982: 340). It is to be disconnected from that source which confers upon a person an ‘energy’ (Rio 2002: 48) and a ‘power’ that makes a person a *man ples* – a person in or of a place – which is also a ‘true man’ (‘really man’ in Bislama) – a person who has retained their full identity (Bonnemaizon: 1985a: 40).

How young men respond to this experienced existential crisis, has been one of the broader issues this thesis has been trying to address. In doing so, I have shown that the Kingston-4 boys reject both the idea that they are migrants who should frame their social world in terms of a home island place, and the implication that without roots in a home island, they are deficient ‘unplaced’ beings. The boys reject being evaluated by these past standards, as they are disempowering to them in their present context.

As such, the boys’ experience of being unplaced has involved an ontological shift, where it is now the Freswota community, rather than their parents’ home island places that is emerging as the source both of their sense of self and their social identification. In this way they are finding a resolution for their experienced existential problem.

Drawing from Scott, I have suggested that the Kingston-4 boys are rejecting the context within which their participation as relational beings has been undermined, and are developing a new sense of place where they too can be engaged in productive relations with one another. Through planting roots in town, with the intent that they will grow, they are growing themselves as emplaced and thus more ‘fully grown’ people. This process has led to the emergence of a new phenomenon: primary town emplacement, where person and town place are becoming merged.

It is important to emphasise that for the boys, being a ‘person in or of the Freswota place’ also involves a significant concern with themselves as not only persons *of* Freswota, but as Freswota men as well. As previously discussed, the Kingston-4 boys are planting themselves in the Freswota ground, as they understand that a relationship with ground and rootedness constitutes the ni-Vanuatu man with strength, energy and power.

Their notion of what it is to be a ni-Vanuatu man is informed by previous understandings of ni-Vanuatu men as akin to banyan trees – powerfully rooted in place, in contrast to women who have been likened to birds who (mostly due to exogamous marriage practices) fly and settle in new places (Bonnemaïson 1994). I have suggested that their planting roots in the ground is a resolution of their experience as ‘floating men’.

Margaret Jolly (1999) has argued that in Vanuatu different kinds of movements are differently valued. Wandering and floating, mostly the domain of women, are deplored and devalued, while strategic and motivated movements, mostly the domain of men are highly valued (1999: 284). I suggest that the boys’ planting roots thus also encompasses a sense of resistance to their condition of floating. They are reconstituting themselves as emplaced men whose movements, when territorialised, are viewed as motivated and more highly valued. An important part of the boys’ planting themselves in the Freswota land, is that being rooted in place is seen to engender them as stronger men.

Writing about masculinities in the Pacific, Jolly suggests that ‘male potency emerges in relation – and sometimes in resistance – to the hegemonic forces of colonialism’ (2008: 1). She writes that ‘Oceanic masculinities are [thus] best studied relationally and historically, between pasts, presents, and futures. Indigenous masculinities have been formed in relation to, as much as resistance against, hegemonic foreign models’ (2008: 2). Conceptualising the boys fashioning themselves as men can be viewed through this notion of masculinity in relation, and as resistance, to foreign models.

Indeed, due to the growing service and hospitality industry, which seems to employ more women than men, and a decline in jobs for untrained workers, the Kingston-4 boys experience themselves as increasingly dependent on the income of girlfriends, sisters and female friends. Accordingly, the boys often spoke about how the ‘power of women is coming up’ (*powa blo woman i stap kam antap*); which they feel has created ‘subordinated masculinities’ (Taylor 2008b: 128).

The Kingston-4 boys fashioning themselves as members of an organised group, as leaders in their community, as strong, powerful and invincible male bodies (when they harness the effects of alcohol and marijuana consumption), reflects their sense of a

masculinity defined by social productiveness and effectiveness. This is in response to their everyday experience as marginalised, unplaced, and devalued persons in their households and communities. We can see therefore that being Roots Men, developing the community, and making Freswota their place, involves transforming themselves from ineffectual, dependent, unproductive ‘boys’ into emplaced, effectual and socially productive Freswota men.

However, in the same way that the roots the boys are planting are new and not yet fully grown, the boys’ transformation from boys left at the ‘half-road’ has also not yet been reached. As discussed in Chapter 5, their achievement of a sense of their masculine strength is achieved only intermittently in moments of heightened sociality. Most of their everyday is still a struggle, seeking out the respect of the wider community and building up a sense of their own dignity.

Planting Roots for a Better Future

‘Your roots trace where you come from, and where you belong. But they also lead you to where you are going.’ These words, uttered by Samuel, succinctly and eloquently summarize the boys’ sense of roots, the value of being rooted, and the reason they are planting roots in Freswota.

I have argued that planting roots is the Kingston-4 boys’ creative response to their experienced condition of being unplaced; that through coming into relationship with the Freswota land, they are resolving their existential crisis. I also suggest that the shifting of self-identification from their parents’ home island places, to the town communities – essentially broadening the cultural understanding of where ni-Vanuatu people can be emplaced – is part of a wider social movement. Building roots in the town places involves young people shifting established meanings of town as a way of empowering themselves within it.

Although this thesis has explored the lives of the Kingston-4 boys, thousands of young people in the residential communities dotted around town are experiencing life in similar ways. Many, like the Kingston-4 boys, have not had the opportunity to access formal education to secure formal employment. Many also experience being displaced from home island places as they are also unable to afford to send remittances and to give gifts in important kinship ceremonies that maintain kinship relationships and through which land use rights are inherited. Growing up in communities where they are not

sufficiently learning the Indigenous languages, cultural knowledge and *kastom* of home island places also means that many are losing an experiential connection to people and to home island place.

While other research in town has demonstrated that people in town communities are maintaining their affiliation to home island places, as they either have recreated the community of their home village in town, and or conceptualise their town community as an extension of their home island place. I would suggest that even for these youth, the framing of their home island as the source of their sense of being is to a greater or lesser extent, shifting.

I base this claim on the following observation. Young people born and raised in town, who have never been to their home island places and do not speak its Indigenous languages also demonstrate a locative identity that is town based when meeting other young people. As the Kingston-4 boys often explained to me, and as I observed myself, many of the young people who have lived in town from birth identify with a parent's home island place when prompted to give a home island place answer. This may occur, for instance, when town youth answer the question 'Where are you from?' Many young people say however, that such identification with a parent's home island place is just in name only. Accordingly, I observed that this once ubiquitous question was asked more frequently by older generations who still identify with their islands, than by younger generations in town. Instead, youth in town ask each other 'where did you grow up?' I make this assertion in spite of the fact that the most recent National Census (2009) requested that people identify themselves by a home island place.

This thesis argues that young people are increasingly articulating the notion that a primary home island identification no longer reflects who they are and how they spatially locate themselves. It has demonstrated that young people in town are actively and explicitly redefining attitudes towards town, and the social and spatial relationship a ni-Vanuatu person can have with town. I have suggested that this is the young people's reaction to the difficulties they face in town, and to the commonly heard call that unproductive youth should be sent back to the islands.

I suggest that the development of primary town emplacement is part of a wider youth movement. The intention of this movement is to influence the government to pay greater attention to the growing permanent town population, rather than understanding that 'children in town' still have a place on their home islands to which they can return.

The Kingston-4 boys are active in this movement for the improvement of young people's lives not just in Freswota, but also throughout the town and the developing nation. In 2006, along with youth from squads in other residential areas, they formed an association they appropriately named 'Vanuatu Roots'. Their stated aim was to 'create change for the future'. As Kingston-4 boy Owen, who was active in Vanuatu Roots explained:

Many of us young people in town see that Vanuatu is following a wrong road. We see that this is because of bad decision making by the government. The government always talks about the future, but it is their future not our future. They say that us youth today are the future of the nation, but when you throw out the future of the nation in class-six then what do you expect? So we formed Vanuatu Roots because we know that we must move to do something. We must bring forth our ideas, bring out our life, find an alternative way of living and work it.

The boys told me that every Sunday afternoon youth from all the communities gathered together at the Saralana Feld, outside the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, to discuss issues effecting them and how best to improve their lives. A boy from a squad in Numburu Community was the President of the Association, and one of the Kingston-4 boys, whose words and voice can be heard throughout this thesis, was the vice-president. As Manu once told me: 'At each meeting the Saralana field would become black. Black everywhere. Fat people, skinny people, dreadlocks, no dreadlocks, girls, boys. You did not know where they all came from, but it did not matter, because everyone was in cooperation together'. The boys said at the time they were hopeful that the government would hear their voices. Apparently, citing that Vanuatu Roots was an association advocating the consumption of marijuana the government shut the association down.¹⁶²

However, the spirit of Vanuatu Roots continues and young people in the communities are increasingly engaged in building up a social life in their communities and in town that reflects their needs.¹⁶³ Indeed, in 2013, Kingston-4 boy Sargent, as well as Yalu the leader of all of Freswota youth, were standing for election to Port Vila's municipal council.

¹⁶² I heard many versions of why they were shut down. One explained that the government hired some men to bribe a few of the boys to burn down the courthouse. After these boys set fire to the courthouse the government blamed the association stating they were a group of delinquents. The boys believe the government did this out of fear that youth were starting to point out the 'truths' about the corruption, inequality and poverty in town.

¹⁶³ Among many other youth initiatives, the work of the Vanuatu National Youth Council must be noted. They have developed a national 'youth strategy' to improve the lives of ni-Vanuatu youth.

It is important to mention here that young women are also part of the Roots movement. Toto's quote above refers to 'Roots People' generally, and as Manu noted, members of Vanuatu Roots were diverse and of both genders. This thesis focuses on one group of Roots Men, but this does not exclude the fact that young women are also involved in building up their communities, and their town emplacement in their own ways. The experiences of girls' planting roots and place making activities, together with that of other people in the Freswota community has been outside the scope of this thesis.

Annelin Eriksen (2009a; 2009b) has also noted the dissatisfaction of many people living in Port Vila town. She writes that one of the reasons for the emergence of new Pentecostal churches is because people are looking for new ways of coping with new challenges, new orders and new values (2009a: 79). She suggests that the mass movement of people into new Pentecostal churches 'represents a desire to transform society in a radical way' (2009b: 177). Eriksen notes that people in Port Vila are focused on 'lifting up Vanuatu' (2009a: 74).

Indeed, how to 'lift up Vanuatu' (*leftemap Vanuatu*), translated as 'to develop, or improve' (Crowley 2011), was a theme the Kingston-4 boys often discussed. Moreover, I observed that improving the nation was becoming a national discourse. As Eriksen also notes, the idea of 'lifting up' Vanuatu involves dissatisfaction with the government, and a push for increased 'independence' (*independens*) of the nation. By independence, the boys specifically refer to an increased economic independence and for the government to act in the best interest of the ni-Vanuatu people, rather than being subject to influence by individual government members', other governments', or foreign organisations' motives and agendas. As Alfred explained:

We are an independent country, but this is in name only. In reality our living is not really independent. This is because the government is making decisions to benefit the 'White Man' and not to benefit us 'Black Man'. The decisions are eating us. In the long run they are eating us up to much. So this is why the independence we have is not a real independence. It is a political independence but not an economical independence at all. But to live a proper life you must live life as an independent man! For life in town to change the government must change. Leadership must change. This is why today we stop at a crossroads. This is a time now where the right decisions need to start being made. The government must work now to stop their corruption. The government should try and take back the spirit that our grandfathers had in 1970 before we gained political independence. If the government got back this spirit then we will have a real independence for tomorrow.

Alfred's notions of a more 'independent' nation encompass the sense that a change in a wider scale will lead to a better life for its citizens.

In the same way in which I have suggested that planting roots in the community can be viewed as a social movement through which the boys are trying to build a greater sense of order, place and strength. Striving for a 'real' independence of the nation is the same social movement yet on a wider scale. In both cases people are critiquing and resisting many of the current values of the Vanuatu government and the social systems in town. In particular, the boys are also criticising past values that no longer suit the social context in which they are living today.

By planting roots and being Roots Men, this group of boys, in the face of significant disruption, are building new values and new roads they hope will lead into a more productive and sustainable future.

Appendix 1: Percentage of population of youth formally educated

	Vanuatu	Urban	Rural
Education (%)			
School enrolment rates of 6–13 year-olds	85.9	90.8	84.8
Males	85.7	90.8	84.6
Females	86.2	90.7	85.2
Proportion of population aged 15 and older with:			
no education (never been to school)	17.2	5.0	21.7
Males	15.4	4.7	19.5
Females	19.0	5.3	23.9
primary education	51.5	38.8	56.2
Males	51.3	37.6	56.7
Females	51.6	40.1	55.7
secondary education	26.4	46.5	18.9
Males	27.5	46.7	20.0
Females	25.4	46.2	17.9
tertiary education	3.8	7.7	2.3
Males	4.3	8.7	2.7
Females	3.2	6.8	1.9

(Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009b: iv)

Of the urban population aged 15 and older:

5% have had no formal education (4.7% males / 5.3% females).

39% have had some primary school education (37.6% males / 40.1% females).

46.5% have completed primary school and some secondary school (47% males / 46% females).

7.7% have completed both primary and secondary school and have some tertiary education (8.7% males / 6.8% females).

Appendix 2: Percentage of Population of Youth Formally Employed

Table 7.1 Population 15 years and older in private households and labour force status, by province and urban-rural residence

Place of residence	Total	Labour force status during the week before the Census					Labour force participation rate*
		Total labour force	Work	Job but not at work	Unemployed and available to work	Not in the labour force	
VANUATU	139,642	98,978	89,908	4,552	4,518	40,664	70.9
URBAN	38,268	23,549	19,195	1,557	2,797	14,719	61.5
Port Vila	30,017	18,608	15,196	1,251	2,161	11,409	62.0
Luganville	8,251	4,941	3,999	306	636	3,310	59.9
RURAL	101,374	75,429	70,713	2,995	1,721	25,945	74.4

Table 7.12: Population 15 years and older in private households by sex who did not work during the week before the Census and did not have a job, and whether actively looking for work, by province and urban-rural residence

Place of residence	Person actively looked for work								
	Total			Yes			No		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
VANUATU	45,182	15,948	29,234	5,457	2,742	2,715	39,725	13,206	26,519
URBAN	17,516	7,170	10,346	3,450	1,680	1,770	14,066	5,490	8,576
Port Vila	13,570	5,748	7,822	2,729	1,319	1,410	10,841	4,429	6,412
Luganville	3,946	1,422	2,524	721	361	360	3,225	1,061	2,164
RURAL	27,666	8,778	18,888	2,007	1,062	945	25,659	7,716	17,943

(Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009: iv)

31% Port Vila residents 15 years and over are not engaged in formal employment.

6% of Port Vila residents 15 years and over are actively seeking formal employment.

25% of Port Vila residents 15 years and over are not actively seeking formal employment

Appendix 3: Total Youth Population (Rural and Urban)

Table 2.1: Total population by 5-year age groups and by province and urban-rural residence

Place of residence	Total	0 - 4	5 - 9	10 - 14	15 - 19	20 - 24	25 - 29
VANUATU	234,023	33,367	29,685	27,921	23,882	21,541	18,415
URBAN	57,195	7,224	5,591	5,250	6,460	7,186	5,542
<i>Port Vila</i>	<i>44,039</i>	<i>5,590</i>	<i>4,183</i>	<i>3,711</i>	<i>4,849</i>	<i>5,894</i>	<i>4,408</i>
<i>Luganville</i>	<i>13,156</i>	<i>1,634</i>	<i>1,408</i>	<i>1,539</i>	<i>1,611</i>	<i>1,292</i>	<i>1,134</i>
RURAL	176,828	26,143	24,094	22,671	17,422	14,355	12,873

(Vanuatu National Statistics Office. 2009. Census Basic Tables Report: 15)

Total Vanuatu Population under 30 years of age: 154,811 or (66% of total population)

Total Vanuatu Population under 25 years of age: 136,396 or (58% of total population)

Total Urban Population¹⁶⁴ under 30 years of age: 37,253 or (65% of total urban population)

Total Urban Population under 25 years of age: 31,711 or (55% % of total urban population)

Total Port Vila Population under 30 years of age: 28,635 or (65% of Vila population)

Total Port Vila Population under 25 years of age: 24,227 or (55% of Vila population)

Total Urban population 15-29 years of age: 19,188 or (33 % of urban population)

Total Port Vila Population 15-29 years of age: 15,151 or (34% of Vila population)

¹⁶⁴ Urban population refers to the combined populations of Port Vila and Luganville (Santo Town).

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