“We Are the Originals”
A STUDY OF VALUE IN FIJI

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To Adi Salote Naitavuni Waqa 1957–2010
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INTRODUCTION

WHY VALUE?

This book is a study of value in Fiji. To be more precise, this is a study of the on-going re-evaluation of a binary opposition that forms the core of traditional Fijian social organisation: that of “land” and “sea”, categories denoting people of land and sea-based hereditary specialist designations, on the one hand, and of foreign and indigenous backgrounds, on the other. Consequently, this is also a study of symbols, mythology, economy, ritual, and political authority in Naloto village in the chiefdom of Verata on the east coast of Viti Levu in Fiji. Over the course of this book I will present a case of cultural change “smuggled in”, as Marshall Sahlins likes to put it, to indigenous Fiji inside categories of particular significance. But being categories associated with the cosmological foundation of Fijian social organisation — denoting core values of traditional indigenous Fiji, that is — this change or value shift can be observed as it emanates through what we usually regard as separate domains of value: “economics”, “semantics”, “morality”, and beyond.

Rather than being a study of the concept of value, however, this is first and foremost a study of Fiji. I utilise the broad sweep of denotations contained in the concept because it organically combines a number of seemingly disparate topics under the rubric of value. While doing so, however, it also adds a general theoretical interest to the discussion: why do some contexts display the coinciding usage of various ideas connoted by “value” — the “sociological”, the “economic” and the “linguistic”, to follow David Graeber’s (2001: 1–2) classification — whilst in other settings they remain disparate and incommensurate? From such a point of view, value is both a knowledge-producing comparative tool — much like Marilyn Strathern’s use of the overlapping senses of “relative” (approximately: connection, kin and contingency; see Strathern 1995, 2005) — but also an ideal focal point for data that consists of materials and practices of ceremonial exchange, mythological accounts for the origins of people and of valuables as well as local understandings of money.

That said, I find myself in agreement with Louis Dumont in that there is also something “uneasy” about the concept. Perhaps it is the fact that some of its overlapping meanings can be so easily traced to their sources, such as the adoption of the notion of linguistic or semantic value in the work of Ferdinand de Saussure, who derives his use of the term from the value invested in money. But then again, as the study of current Fijian mythology clearly teaches us, the fact that we can trace back the authorship
of an idea does not make it any less relevant. But Dumont’s sense of unease with “value” arises from a slightly different cause:

it is no wonder that there is something unpleasant about the term. Being comparative in essence, it seems doomed to emptiness: a matter of values is not a matter of fact. It advertises relativism, as it were, or rather both the centrality of the concept and its elusive quality, to which a considerable literature testifies. It smacks of euphemism or uneasiness […] Yet there is a positive counterpart, modest but not insignificant, for the anthropologist: we have at our disposal a word that allows us to consider all sorts of cultures and the most diverse estimations of the good without imposing on them our own: we can speak of our values and their values while we could not speak of our good and their good. Thus the little word, used far beyond the confines of anthropology, implies an anthropological perspective and invests us, I think, with a responsibility. (Dumont 1992[1986]: 237)

A euphemism for “the good”? I will settle for that, for now, though with certain reservations. Back in 2006 when I began my research, I had very clear ideas about what it was going to be about: the dichotomies of rural and urban, money and tradition or, at the most general level, even commodity and gift economies. I most certainly preferred these subjects over kava drinking, whale teeth, chieftainship, the “stranger king” or the dichotomy of land and sea. In other words, I wanted to write about modern Fiji. And in that modern Fiji that I imagined, such phenomena were strangely peripheral, as they sometimes are in Naloto villagers’ imaginaries, too. However, as Marshall Sahlins has so succinctly pointed out “history begins with a culture already there” (Sahlins 1976: 23) and I have come to accept that it also goes on with a culture already there. The Fiji I write about may, due to shortcomings that are mine alone, sound antiquated and quaint, but it is in fact modern: in possession of local print media since 1868, converted into Protestant Christianity (barring the famous work ethic) roughly at the same time, part of the global economy since the early 19th century, to name but some commonly accepted emblems of modernity.

And so of course I have ended up writing about pretty much the same things that others before me had found essential. Kava drinking turned out to be not only a key symbol for understanding (particularly male) sociality, but also a prime context for data acquisition; the whale teeth turned up at every key event where social relations were at stake, while their use did not correspond to anything I had previously read; the categories of “land” and “sea” turned up constantly in people’s talk, but appeared strangely absent
from their actual lives; the ceremonial displays of chiefly rank were reverently attended to, whilst people were complaining to me that there was something missing from the chieftaincy. All of which is to say that my research interests were significantly altered by the interests of the people I spent my time with. Which is where my reservation to Dumont stems from: “value” is not just a euphemism for “the good”; it is also an interest in the original sense of *interesse* – “to make a difference”, and in Fiji, all the aforementioned are connected through a common interest. I call that interest “value”.

I have managed to keep the kava at an arm’s length, though largely just because one cannot focus on everything. It nevertheless pervades the entire book, much as it pervaded my fieldwork, however much I tried to exempt myself from the mechanisms of peer pressure surrounding the consumption of kava. With the whale teeth, I was nowhere near as successful, dedicating an entire chapter to these valuables. The dichotomy of land and sea may not have been as omnipresent in the everyday discourse of the village, yet it ended up colonising my entire project. The chiefs are so heavily invested with the values of land and sea that they become inseparable from the general topic of my study, just as the whale teeth turned out to be heavily invested with the chiefs.

**FIJI: A LEGACY OF BINARIES**

Previous research on Fiji bears testimony to the significance of the abovementioned categories of land and sea, used in the traditional classification of people – and things, by association – that are central to my argument as well. The dichotomic opposition of “land”, usually thought to denote titular land-ownership, often combined with relative absence of chiefly hierarchy and indigeneity or even autochthony, with “sea”, denoting foreign origin, guest status and nobility or pre-eminence, have occupied a key place in the ethnography of Fiji since the seminal work of A. M. Hocart in the 1920s. Here Hocart’s legacy lies in method as much as the extent of his work: Hocart treated the multiple dichotomies running through Fijian social organisation as parallels rather than intersections, repercussions of what he regarded the underlying principle of duality found in his Indian material as well. The view he took on Fiji as a “stronghold of dualism” (1970 [1936]: 287) with a tendency to reproduce binary oppositions at all levels of socio-cultural organisation has been reproduced through much of the consequent work on Fiji. Unlike his persistent search for the common origins of parallel institutions in remote parts of the world, Hocart’s work
on what he labelled the “dual organisation”\(^1\) has provided a legacy for others to work upon.

Hocart’s particular focus on sacerdotal kings and the Fijian diarchy of power has, as well known, been taken up and much developed in Marshall Sahlins’ work on alterity as the key structuring principle of 19\(^{th}\)-century east Fijian chiefdoms. Sahlins in turn has elaborated the land–sea distinction in the all-encompassing relations between people of the land and sea designations. Sahlins’ leading preoccupation with a particular brand of hierarchy wherein the people of land and sea are all encompassed by chiefs of the sea denomination has, in turn, been supplemented in subsequent studies with models of balanced or mutual encompassment (Christina Toren) and land-centric equalitarianism (Martha Kaplan). Hocart and Sahlins portray the land–sea dichotomy as representative of a dual system where “sea” stands for the authority of foreign, sacred rulers and their genealogies, while “land” represents executive power of the autochthonous king-makers. Christina Toren emphasises a dualism in paramount values: the hierarchy inherent to the “sea” denomination counterbalanced by the equality implied by the “land” denomination in a manner indicative of the inherently hierarchical relations among parallel kin vs. the equal relations between cross-cousins. Martha Kaplan equates “sea” with a top-down hierarchy and “land” with its counterpoint, a “bottom-up” egalitarian ethos.

Yet the binary oppositions articulated along the lines marked by the land–sea opposition are neither exhausted by the work of the abovementioned scholars, nor do they emerge in the literature only once they had been formulated by Hocart. Rather, they are — as Sahlins has amply illustrated — present in the historical documents since the early contact period. The dichotomy also finds expression in studies which, by and large, disregard the symbolicism of land and sea: in the older literature it emerges as one between prior and later arrivals corresponding with Fiji’s position as the “hinge” between the Polynesian and Melanesian culture areas — hence producing a dichotomy of Melanesian inland-dwellers (“hill tribes”) and coastal Polynesian polities. Another parallel discourse uses the concepts of “owner” or “host” (taukei) and “foreigner” or “guest” (vulagi), terms which discard the material referents of the land–sea dichotomy and receive a moral emphasis instead. The guest–host dichotomy, in its turn, may even be applied to gender relations, to the degree that that the system of preferential

\(^1\) Hocart’s use of “dual organisation” deviates slightly from a more widespread use of the concept: Hocart emphasises the institution of “dual kingship” (diarchy) and regards the “dual organisation” as a corresponding division of people. A better-known usage of the concept coincides with “two-section” or moiety systems and has particularly centred upon the question of wife exchange. For the cessation of this brand of dual organisation, see Lévi-Strauss’ “Do Dual Organisations Exist?” (1993 [1963]).
patrilineal descent and patrilocal residence makes women “guests” upon moving in with their husbands’ families (e.g. Nabobo-Baba 2006: 45). But this moral dichotomy is also united with the material symbols of the land–sea dichotomy through, for example, traditional Fijian food exchanges which take place during the marriage formalities, where the fish provided, and the fishing performed, by the bride corresponds to the material prestations of sea people in other ceremonial exchanges, just as the pork provided by the husband’s side identifies them as “land”.

I point this out in order to make it very clear that the “Ho-cartesian” (Sahlins 1985: xv) preoccupation with dualities that runs through this study may be legitimated by previous research on Fiji, but more importantly it also marks much of the data that I collected in Fiji. Hocart, with his reoccurring binary conceptual pairs, may have been “a structuralist before the letter” (ibid.); I, for my part, feel I was transformed into one by Fiji.

The data for this study was collected during thirteen months of fieldwork in the village of Naloto, in the chiefdom of Verata on the east coast of Viti Levu island in the Republic of Fiji from May 2007 to May 2008. Upon two previous visits to the village in 2003, I was staying there as a guest to one of the fishermen living on the north side of the village. During my visits he chose to address me as his son (luvequ) and made others, too, address me as such; I suspect that under other circumstances I might have had more freedom to choose how I wanted to be introduced to the village when I returned there four years later for fieldwork. However, as the gentleman in question, Mr. Seremaia Waqa, had passed away in my absence, the matter was quickly decided on my behalf. I consequently lived with my adopted clan among the sea people of Naloto and the details I present also, undoubtedly, reveal where the majority of my data comes from – just as a previous ethnomusicological study conducted in Naloto in the late 1970s reveals the author’s south-side affiliation (Lee 1984).

Having attained a mode of address in the village’s kinship-based social organisation, I was also requested to use kinship terms for polite effect when addressing people. This – in addition to being an immense relief in the first weeks when I kept on forgetting people’s names – brought home a realisation that I had failed to derive from my kinship classes: that in accordance with the fact that spouses are in Fiji by definition classified as cross-cousins, I could work out my relationship to anyone in the village (and beyond) from the terms used by my friends, following a binary scheme. Hence a cousin’s (tavale: cross-cousin) uncles were my fathers, a brother’s aunts were my aunts too, the sons of my father’s brothers were my brothers, and so forth, while my wife, who arrived in Fiji midway through my fieldwork, could work out the terms appropriate to her by inverting siblings to cousins, mothers to aunts, and so on. (“A classic case of the reproductive
logic of bilateral cross cousin working itself out”, I was later pointed out.)
Furthermore, this binary code seemed to be paralleled over the village’s spatial layout: the two districts on the north side of Naloto, coinciding with a division between “land” and “sea” people, sometimes engaged in joking relations reminiscent of the behaviour appropriate between cross-cousins. But the relations between the two geographical halves of the village, north and south, seemed to uphold a stronger binary division, sometimes expressed in joking terms, sometimes in a more guarded manner. These geographical sides do not coincide with any formal social divisions in Naloto, yet crossing the hill that divides the village always seemed to attract attention and comments, obviously marking another dividing line. And new twosomes just kept on piling up, the two cemeteries, two chiefs, two “kinds” of Christianities (“old” and “new”) and so forth, until I was fairly certain that, indeed, in Fiji “all things go in pairs” as it was once expressed to A. M. Hocart. This was affirmed to me during a funeral held in the village, where a guest from an outer island asked me if I could outline to him the kin groups in the village: having taken him through the two moieties (yavusa) and the sea moiety’s two clans (mataqali), I went on to explain that my adopted clan, Tunidau, only comprises one sub-lineage (tokatoka). “There should be two”, he interrupted me with a serious expression on his face.

Systems of dual classification are a widespread phenomenon throughout the Pacific and not only frequently give shape to social organisation but often the very cosmological foundation of the world as well. Present-day Fijian cosmogony does not require the division of an original unity to make the world inhabitable for humans: there are no myths of, say, an original separation of sky and earth into two separate entities such as recorded widely in Polynesia (e.g. Siikala 1991: 42–63), in this respect, the prevailing biblical creation narrative seems to suffice. However, as evident even from the common seating order in Sunday church, the composition of society is a different matter: the recurring division into land and sea or men’s and women’s sides attests to the principle that “there should be two”. The same is attested at any major ceremonial event, where a spatial division into land and sea sides corresponds with a division into hosts and guests. Whatever is sought and accomplished through ritual action is typically achieved through the interaction and final unification of two sides of a social whole.

However, this is not to say that such dual constructions are pure formalities reproducing themselves over time upon any currently available content. Signification, as Sahlins (1985: 143–151) has pointed out, is a two-way street: by applying a concept to an external object we also put the concept at risk of potential mismatch. For Sahlins, symbolic action becomes “a great gamble played with the empirical realities” – the World, in short, is
under no obligation to conform to our categories and referential acts leave signifiers impressionable to the signified. But this does not concern just individual concepts or categories. Where Lévi-Strauss (1993 [1963]: 159) conjectured that true “dual organisations” might be “institutional forms which one might characterize by a zero value” – that is, floating signifiers with the ability to take on any meaning – I would draw attention to potential permutations within the form itself.

For instance: in 1866 Rev. Joseph Waterhouse wrote about two distinct kinds of Fijians, “aborigines” and “seafarers”. The two groups not only had their separate religious systems, but the “seafarers” even had what Waterhouse conceptualised as “freemasonry” that coincided with the sea denomination. “If any go to a town in which they are perfect strangers, and find a temple dedicated to Daucina [the seafarers’ deity], they enter it, and are treated as fellow-citizens” (Waterhouse 1866: 364). Waterhouse, in short, describes a class of people who maintain their “sea” identity through a multitude of contexts. In the 1920s Hocart, in turn, described the difference in relative terms: “each coast tribe stands to one or more tribes inland of them in the relation of coast and hill […] the ‘hill tribe’ in its turn is ‘coast tribe’ to one further inland, and so it goes on” (Hocart 1924: 186). The difference between the two descriptions is not just a matter of signification or content but of two different institutional forms and can be conceptualised as the difference between “dualism” and “dichotomy”. In dictionary definition “dualism” connotes “the theory that in any domain of reality there are two independent underlying principles” whilst “dichotomy” stands for “a division into two classes, parts, etc., esp. of things that are opposed or entirely different” (Concise Oxford Dictionary). In other words, dualism proper equals two independent ideas whereas dichotomy is a relation of difference established in shared terms. More importantly, a dichotomic opposition remains mutually defining and interdependent.

DICHOTOMY HISTORICISED

The difference between dualism and dichotomy is actually crucial to my understanding of recent studies on Fiji, particularly the work of Martha Kaplan. In her work Kaplan (e.g. 1988, 1995) offers an alternative to the “Polynesianist” understandings of Fijian culture – the viewpoint that concentrates on hereditary chiefs who embody and represent their polities and peoples, a “top down” hierarchical perspective, if you will. Instead, Kaplan concentrates on the “king-makers” or land people who, for much of the 19th and 20th centuries, have been absent from descriptions of Fijian political organisation, or at least have only figured as an unexplored backdrop for the chieftaincy.
Kaplan views this absence largely as the consequence of the colonial-era (1874–1970) misrecognition of Fijian politics: in setting up a system of indirect rule, the British administrators assumed the powerful chiefs of the East Fijian kingdoms to constitute a “class”, a hereditary aristocracy of the British type. Kaplan offsets this image by focusing on the Vatukaloko people, an inland-dwelling “people of the land” (itaukei) – original land owners or autochthones vis-à-vis the coastal polities headed by “stranger-kings” who got their legitimacy from the land people in a system based on complementary opposition rather than a fixed hierarchy. In Kaplan’s analysis, the supremacy of the eastern or coastal type of chiefdoms was imposed on Fiji, on the one hand by the European settler communities who needed institutional authority for their dealings with the native population, on the other hand by the colonial authorities’ need for a model that would serve as a baseline for the islands’ Native Administration. The coastal model, Kaplan shows, was both convenient for the Europeans and regarded as more advanced than that of the “hill tribes”.

There are two aspects in Kaplan’s portrayal of the Vatukaloko that have served as important starting points for the case argued in this book. First of all, though her focus is on the land people of the Nakauvadra range, Kaplan reminds us that the land–sea dichotomy does not constitute classes; it is a relation, as Hocart, too, has shown. But Kaplan, who writes about the “ultimate” land people – there are none further inland – does not need to embrace the full implications of this relationality. Her focus is on a particular group of land people whose “land” status was never recognised by the colonial administrative model that legitimised a “sea-centric” version of Fijian tradition instead. But the failure to recognise the meaning of “land” ultimately affects the meaning of “sea” as well.

The land and sea designations are, as Toren (1994) also points out, mutually defining. When all indigenous Fijians were codified in the Native Laws as “taukei” – a term previously denoting the autochthonous land owners – and made owners of the soil at the same time, it may have been in the coastal chiefs’ interests and disowned the “real” land people’s claims, but ultimately it also means a rejection of the “seaness” of the coastal groups. In this respect, I suspect that the issues discussed in this book are significant for understanding other regional traditions in Fiji, too. Kaplan certainly argues as much in a 2004 article that discusses the political implications of colonial law-making in post-second-to-last-coup Fiji. In the article, Kaplan argues that the “routinization of the link between gods, land, and ethnic-Fijian paramountcy” (2004: 167) equals the creation of an ethnic-Fijian race and a set of corresponding interests. “What is deeper than courts and constitutions is ownership of Fiji”, she writes (op. cit. 183), thus underlining the present-day, politically charged usage of the term taukei which now applies to all
indigenous Fijians as a group. The obvious question here is: if this deprives the original tauei groups of their distinctive legacy, what does it do their counterparts?

Table 1: Naloto within the structure of Fijian Administration (iTaukei Administration since 2010). Indigenous Fijians enjoy double representation within the state. Government administration represents all Fijians regardless of ethnic group, whilst the iTaukei administration is reserved only for indigenous Fijians. iTaukei Administration conserves the system of Native Administration created in the colonial era, imitating the pyramid structure of chiefly hierarchy; embodied in executive chiefs (Roko Tui) who govern over the districts, government-appointed “village chiefs” (turaga ni koro) and locally chosen clan chiefs (turaga ni mataqali), the hierarchy runs all the way down to individual household level, where each male head of household is considered a chief (turaga) in his own house.
As already indicated in passing, the discourse on land-centred Fijian ideology brings about something akin to a change of register in ethnographic description. Depictions of coastal and especially eastern outer island Fiji tend to emphasise a social hierarchy based on a rank distinction between hereditary chiefs and people. The ethnographically influential Lau group at the eastern end of the archipelago in particular, but other high chiefly polities as well, tend to agree quite well with general Polynesian theories of rank and power – I am specifically thinking of the hierarchical pyramid model in Sahlins’ “Poor Man, Rich Man, Big-Man, Chief” (1963): “A chain of command subordinating lesser chiefs and groups to greater”; “the pivotal paramount chief as well as the chieftains controlling parts of a chiefdom were true office holders and title holders”; “these Polynesian chiefs did not make their positions in society – they were installed in societal positions”; “Power resided in the office; it was not made by the demonstration of personal superiority” (op. cit.: 294–295). Descriptions of the “land” groups (earlier also known as “hill tribes” or “mountaineers”), on the other hand, have adopted Melanesia as the point of reference. In addition to physiological references, comparisons have been made on linguistic grounds, with reference to the size of political units, degrees of social stratification and depth of genealogical knowledge (e.g. Brewster 1922; Hocart 1915a; Quain 1948). In addition, the oeuvres of Christina Toren and Martha Kaplan – which, despite their differences, have brought very similar issues into focus – have made much use of the notions of equality and egalitarianism, concepts that have received far more analytical attention in Melanesian than Polynesian ethnography.

My particular interest in all this lies in the contrast between two central themes in the ethnographic traditions of Polynesia and Melanesia respectively. Polynesian ethnography has paid particular attention to differentiation as an integral constituent of rank. As Graeber summarises it, “Polynesian societies tended to see the entire universe as structured on a vast genealogy in that everyone is descended from the gods in one way or another. The result was a tendency toward homogenization, in which nobles were constantly trying to set themselves apart by some unique or astounding act” (Graeber 2001: 168–169). In a recent article Marshall Sahlins (2012) has distilled this tradition all the way into a generalised account of the alterity of power itself. Compare this with a mirror view from Melanesian ethnography where a substantial research tradition accounts for the undoing of difference as a particular brand of equality. Antony Forge, for example, has described a number of identical-exchange practices from New Guinea and a rationale that is the exact opposite of the Polynesian described above: “to be equal and stay equal is an extremely onerous task requiring continual vigilance and effort. [...] The principal mechanism by which equality is
maintained is equal exchange of things of the same class or of identical things. Basically all presentations of this type are challenges to prove equality” (Forge 1972: 533–534). He refers to the attempted outcome as “the extreme of equality – identity” (op. cit.: 535).

I evoke the “Melanesian” and “Polynesian” labels here only in the capacity of totemic operators that index a difference in research orientations rather than in the people of Fiji. In historical terms, the application of the culture-area labels may have made sense for the ethnographic study of differences between coastal and inland groups, where the eastern coastal groups have displayed much more frequent contact with and influence from the archipelagos east of Fiji, namely Tonga. But for studying the land–sea dichotomy as a recurring phenomenon that exists as an internal division within the village as well as across village and chiefdom boundaries, it does not. But then again, neither do labels like “CELERITAS” and “GRAVITAS”, concepts coined by Georges Dumézil in reference to “a certain bipartite conception of sovereignty that appears to have been present among the Indo-Europeans” (Dumézil 1988: 17). Dumézil’s terminology has proved an apt reference for conceptualising the “charisma” of political leaders across the Pacific, but as such, it provides a biased view on a dichotomy wherein the chieftainship is thought to be heavily invested with one side of the dichotomy. “Junior–senior” (Fox 1995) would, perhaps, be a particularly suitable conceptualisation with regard to the Verata chiefdom’s position within Fiji (see below), but that, too, puts an unnecessary emphasis on ancestry, which I wish to avoid.

Ultimately this is a study of the two alternate principles used for legitimating the social order in Fiji, but with a focus on incomplete or unarticulated ideals rather than the ideological formulations that people consciously refer to. “The ultimate stakes of politics”, David Graeber (2001: 88) writes in reference to Terence Turner, “is not even the struggle to appropriate value; it is the struggle to establish what value is”. Which is to say that people are not usually consciously able to objectify the value(s) that determine their objectives in life – and hence alluding to them, let alone “changing” them, is hardly a conscious project. “Any such project of constructing meanings necessarily involves imagining totalities (since this is the stuff of meaning), even if no such project can ever be completely translated into reality – reality being, by definition, that which is always more complicated than any construction we can put on it”, as Graeber (ibid.) puts it. The totalities discussed in this study as “land” and “sea” are known throughout indigenous Fiji, though their meanings always appear to be constructed in slightly different ways. Yet the existence of these common themes, the fact that groups and relations are nevertheless imagined in terms of the same motifs, encourages me to think that the analysis presented here
may have relevance for Fiji more generally, even if my knowledge of Fiji comes predominantly from a distinctive place within Fiji.

NALOTO, VERATA, FIJI

As part of the chiefdom of Verata, Naloto village is part of a very particular legacy. On the one hand, Verata is the apex of the coastal chiefly polities: the original home of the senior chiefly lineage among the great chiefdoms of eastern Fiji. Looking at the Naloto landscape, one can see the origin places of other, now more prestigious chiefdoms in Fiji: “over there, by those pine trees, is the original Kabara” (home of the Lau paramount chief); “that is Buisevulu Hill, where Adi Buisevulu [whose offspring founded the Bau lineage] used to live”, I was guided through the Naloto landscape. Indeed, many of these accounts are widely accepted beyond Verata: some years ago, a Lauan party visited Naloto to carasala or clear up the old pathway between their origin place and the present one. More recently a Rewan delegation visited the paramount village for a similar purpose (see Tagivetaua 2010). But this widely admitted seniority conversely also identifies Verata as an “older brother” in yet another analogical dimension of the dichotomy herein discussed: as “gravitas” to the “celeritas” or “blood” (dra) to the “force” (kaukauwa) of the now dominant chiefdom of Bau. In other words, seniority among the “sea” chieftaincies contradictingly also makes Verata their
counterpart. Verata stands for the legitimating power of origin in a way that Kaplan characterises as the “complementary opposition of two sources of power: that of dangerous chiefs (turaga) conceived of as relatively foreign or associated with the sea, and that of gods and itaukei conceived of as autochthonous and associated with the interior” (Kaplan 1995: 26). Even present-day Naloto legends of Verata’s final fall from grace reflect the origin vs. alterity motif: what Naloto villagers like to recall of their wars with Bau that lead to Verata’s downfall is how the Naloto warriors, in the battle following the burning of the chiefly village and the Verata paramount chief’s retreat to Naloto, would have killed the Bauan king’s foreigner-champion Charles Savage, had not Savage’s Chinese bodyguard sacrificed himself and taken the spear blow intended for Savage. In other words, they were twice undone by the cosmopolitan allies of upstart Bau.

Thus Verata – and Naloto as a particular part of it – have singular myths and histories that make them different from any other corresponding parts of Fiji. I emphasise this point because, throughout this study, I use comparative material that is actually not from Naloto but elsewhere in Fiji. To complicate the matter, I also extend the comparison diachronically over time. This is a practical necessity, since there is actually very little previous data to draw on from Verata, let alone Naloto. And to make matters even worse, the particularity of Verata could be further complicated with the equally singular history of Naloto village: originally known by another name, the village is said to have changed its name to Naloto following the arrival of a group of migrants from the inland chiefdom of Naloto. These inland migrants, for their part, represented the chiefly (approximating “sea” – see chapter four) side of the inland polity, but now – according to some – comprise the Naloto village chief’s “land” warriors (bati). The point being that Naloto, like most similar places in Fiji, incorporates a number of structural contradictions. But the contradictions are also regularly expressed and dealt with through a limited repertoire that one finds all over Fiji. Thus what constitutes an original weakness of the study also ultimately provides confirmation for the relevance of its subject matter – that these things truly are of value.

PLAN

CHAPTER TWO: “Naloto village” introduces the main setting of the study: Naloto village on the east coast of Viti Levu island. Like any Fijian village, it is perfect or, as the villagers phrase it, “parataisi” (paradise). There is farm land for everyone, plus supplementary food to be collected from the sea and “the bush”, all human needs are easily satisfied without resorting to money – as long as it is understood that said needs are finite. With the relative ease of
subsistence comes an appreciation of leisure; unnecessary precipitation is regarded symptomatic of the world outside the village. Indeed, among the young men shared leisure becomes the norm and peer pressure is applied on those who seek to get ahead instead. Subsequently, the village is also “the last place”, suitable for those who do not make it in town and those who are already done with urban employment.

CHAPTER THREE: “The land–sea dichotomy” overviews previous work on the land and sea people, providing the comparative, historicised background required for understanding the alterations to the received model that are found in Naloto. The chapter also outlines reasons for the argument that what can be regarded as a local transformation in Naloto may well be relevant to rest of Fiji as well.

CHAPTER FOUR: “Origin” discusses the reversed roles of “land” and “sea” in Naloto through a particular focus on myths of origin. These myths, it is argued, illustrate a shared concern with local origin, one which accounts for an alternate system of dividing the village, as well as an alternate theory of the village chieftaincy.

CHAPTER FIVE: “The value of whale teeth” transposes the analysis of value of origin onto whale teeth (tabua), sometimes also known as “Fijian money”. In many ways parallels to the chiefs of old, it is argued that the idiosyncrasies of people are also the idiosyncrasies of whale teeth. From shared origins, the chapter proceeds to display the usage of these valuables – a pattern that departs significantly from that previously reported for whale teeth. These two threads, which can be analytically treated as the semantic and exchange values of whale teeth, are finally united in the indigenous notion of sau.

CHAPTER SIX: “Ceremonial exchanges” expands the argument to ceremonial exchange more generally. What is being exchanged; do the materials of exchange correspond with the changing pattern of exchange sequences? Through looking at the exchange practices in Naloto rituals, certain general characteristics of Nalotan ceremonial exchange are outlined in anticipation of the following chapter.

CHAPTER SEVEN: “Money” moves from ceremonial exchange to ceremonialised fundraising with the purpose of showing that one can often learn much about a phenomenon by studying its conceptual opposite. By laying out the church and state practices by which money was introduced in Fijian villages, the chapter also foregrounds the moral conditions that affect the valuation of money.
Naloto village is one of the seven villages that make up the traditional chiefdom of Verata, in the province of Tailevu, on Viti Levu, the main island of the Republic of Fiji Islands. Within Fiji, Verata is usually — but not uncontestedly — considered the home of the senior chiefly lineage in the islands, and Naloto villagers take great pride in the fact. “That is our story”, I was told on several occasions when conversation touched upon the well-known myth of the *cici turaga* or chiefly running contest: a story that takes place in the days of the mythical first king of Fiji, Rokomoutu, who held a running contest to choose his successor — a successor who never ruled over Fiji because a whale tooth that represented the old king’s authority was lost. During my fieldwork in 2007–2008, the subject of the missing mythical item came up from time to time and people often expressed the opinion that whoever would find it ought to become *Tui Viti*, king of Fiji. Likewise, as the military coup of December 2006 was routinised into a political commonplace, Naloto villagers became aware of prophecies circulating the islands, stating that the country would only know peace once a true chief would emerge from Verata. During this time I also witnessed a number of occasions when villagers discussed the 19th-century events which lead to the Bau chiefs’ rise to power and the diminishment of Verata’s influence. Naloto village plays a part in that history, having been the place where the Verata paramount retreated in 1850 during the war with Bau, when the high chief’s own village, Ucunivanua, was burnt to the ground. “This is an ancient village”, I was often reminded in Naloto: “it has never been moved”. The chiefdom of Verata stands, in other words, for seniority and — as I will show in chapter four — for firstness or origin; Nalotans take pride in their uninterrupted residence in Verata.

The seven-village chiefdom of Verata is part of a larger polity, *vanua* or “land” of Verata, which comprises other chiefdoms, too: Namalata, Tai, Tai Vugalei and Vugalei, Verata’s honoured allies (*bati*) of old whom the paramount chief may still call for assistance in times of need. The *vanua* of Verata is surrounded by other multi-chiefdom polities: the *vanuas* of Sawakasa to the north, Wainibuka to the north-west, Lomaivuna to the west, and Naitasiri and Bau to the South. The polities labelled as “land” or *vanua* coincide with state-administrative divisions (*tikina*), though while a traditional polity’s number of allies and subjects waxed and waned with its political fortunes, the district boundaries were fixed during the colonial era. The concept of “chiefdom” — sometimes also translated as “tribe” — likewise
coincides with the administrative sub-district (tikina vou), though there are discrepancies, too. Naigani island, for instance, is administratively a part of the Verata sub-district, but not regarded as part of the chiefdom by Veratans themselves, at least those in Naloto. Finally, the polity/district or the chiefdom/sub-district of Verata should not be confused with a village also named Verata, just north of Nausori town, that probably has historical links with the chiefdom but is not part of it.

The chiefdom of Verata comprises the villages of Kumi, Naivuruvuru, Naloto, Navunimono, Sawa, Uluiloli and the chiefly village of Ucunivanua, home of the paramount chief of Verata, Ratu mai Verata, who rules over the six other Veratan villages as well. Naloto, for its part, has the largest resident population among the seven villages of Verata.

MAP 2: Verata villages

But while Ucunivanua village, roughly a kilometre from Naloto, is the seat of the Verata paramountcy and involved in chiefly politics, Naloto is not a chiefly village and the people therein put little emphasis on chiefly decorum. As a matter of fact, they lack so many of the traditional practices pertaining to chieftaincy and obeisant behaviour that several villagers, both young and old, have expressed their worry over a conceived culture loss and consequently even weigh up the possibilities for reintroducing old customs in the village. Chieftaincy occupies a key place in this discourse; it is generally thought that regaining the old ways would first require the reappearance of strong leaders, chiefs who can command. Naloto villagers do, in other words, subscribe to the view of Fijians as chiefly people – but it
is up to the chief to assert himself on his subjects. In the meanwhile, though, Naloto villagers jokingly also pride themselves on their proverbial ability to *solosolo vakaVerata* or “waste time in the Veratan way”, as they translate it. In the absence of unambiguous chains of command, they can put off unpopular commands and obligations by endlessly weighing on proper procedures, competing obligations, or just by getting side-tracked. “They are just doing it to kill the time”, I was explained by a visiting in-law, who also pointed out to me that the Naloto men are exceptionally good at talking bunkum in a skilled and highly amusing way.

Yet the villagers also exhibit a high degree of solidarity for their kin, and waste no time or resources in doing what they deem correct. The ceremonial exertions discussed in subsequent parts of this study represent the most typical form of such action, but it is not just formal or ceremonial relations that I refer to here. Take the relations between men and women, for example: Christina Toren, who has discussed the theme in a number of publications, has pinpointed a structural contradiction contained in Fijian marriage: prior to marriage the spouses are by definition cross-cousins, and therefore equals, but at marriage the relationship becomes one of strict hierarchy. Toren (1994: 208) describes the structural consequence as “the young husband’s almost routine violence towards his wife”. It took me a long time to realise that such violence not only was very rare in Naloto, but that so was the Naloto women’s response to a rare occurrence of domestic violence; joining forces to publicly make fun of the abused woman’s husband until he was forced into apologising. And not just that: once the assault had become public knowledge, at least some of the women also tried to make sure that other men would not join in on the ridicule and thereby risk generating ill will that would outlast the dispute. Other evidence for the comparative absence of ranked relations between groups – such as the Naloto chief’s unwillingness to act like a chief, the sea people’s unwillingness to act as sea people or the scarcity of competitive exchange – will be explored in the subsequent chapters of this book.

This Naloto particularity – a relative absence of hierarchy, particularly in complementary relations – only exists in comparison to other villages in Fiji or in contrast to the existing Fijian ethnography which portrays indigenous Fijians as particularly conscious of hierarchies. Hence Naloto villagers, like the vast majority of indigenous Fijians, drink their *yaqona* (kava) in a hierarchical order that is reflected in the appropriate seating order (see Toren 1988, 1990), are conscious of clan affiliation and seniority in formal decision making and are collectively represented, even encompassed by their chiefs during ritual events. The women in Naloto are

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2 I am grateful to Emilie Nolet (personal correspondence) for pointing out to me the exceptionality of Naloto in this regard.
said to be inferior to the men, a fact also reflected in the seating order adopted in an average eating situation and the distribution of food at meals. Married women, furthermore, are usually “foreigners” in their husbands’ village, and attain full citizenship thereof only gradually over the years. Seniority, ranked relations between lineages, place of origin and various other factors all count: the perceived difference is not absolute but one of degree in relation to what I have observed in Naloto and read of other villages. The difference will be elaborated through the comparisons that I make over the course of this study. Before that, however, it is necessary to provide the reader with the basics of who are the people that I focus on in this study.

The discussion necessarily revolves around land, *vanua* – a word which in Fijian has a wide range of connotations. It means land both as a tangible substance and as a political or geographical unit. It is used in reference to a specific place and, in a wider sense, it refers to traditional Fijian socio-political organisation and the chiefly system. The word *vanua* even covers many aspects of “custom”: thus one can admire a landscape and talk about “this *vanua* here”, or one can talk about the *vanua* of Verata with reference to the traditional polity; one can pinpoint a specific location reserved for a particular purpose or talk about an urban place of residence as a “land of work” (*vanua ni cakacaka*). An often-heard idiom, *cakacaka vakavanua* – “work in the manner of the land” – can refer either to the manner of executing a task at hand, i.e. organising the work force through traditional channels, or it can be used in reference to “customary obligations”. As a case in point, the typical Fiji English expression for any traditional activity is “*vanua* stuff”. In short, the concept of “land” includes the people in and originating from it.

**THE PEOPLE FROM NALOTO**

Place of origin is crucial for determining who one is in indigenous Fiji. The principal Fijian term used in reference to people (particularly men) is *kai*, which literally means a person from somewhere. I have, for example, met a number of people who have named the islands of Kadavu, Taveuni or the smaller islands of the Lau group as their home places, even though they have never visited these places but have spent their entire lives in the metropolitan

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3 In this usage, *vanua* and the adjectival form *vakavanua* parallel the usage of *vakaviti* – “the Fijian way”; thus “*vanua* stuff” has roughly the same coverage as “*ka vakaviti*” – “Fijian things” – which is the general title for “Fijian tradition” as taught in Fijian schools. The overlap between “Fijian-ness” and *vanua* will become more evident in chapter three. (On the subject of *vanua*, see e.g. Nabobo-Baba 2006: 72–93; Nayacakalou 2001 [1975]: 22–23, 36–38; Ravuvu 2005 [1983]: 70–84; Tomlinson 2009: 22–26; Tuwere 2002.)
area surrounding Suva, the capital of Fiji. Origin places nevertheless define people’s relationships to others; for example, people whose villages of origin are part of the same “confederation” of lands (matanitu) are allowed a degree of familiarity, which for people whose home places are veitabani (have common ancestors) or veitauvu (lit. have common “ancestor-gods”) would be replaced with competitive joking behaviour, and so forth. For Naloto people, a typical example would be relations with kai Bau – people from Verata’s old-time favourite enemy: amongst these two the joking always takes a more boisterous edge and the kava drinking involves a competitive element. As for women who upon marriage move into their husbands’ villages, their earliest acquaintances outside the immediate family are often other women from villages with already-established relationships to their home villages or lands.

But the crucial thing is that for the great majority of indigenous Fijians, land is also a birthright. Owing to decisions made during the colonial era and upheld over the course of the military coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006, 87.9 per cent of Fiji’s land area belongs to indigenous kin groups (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2011). The legislation that made land the collective possession of the indigenous population was, it has been shown, based on inaccurate information ranging from early anthropological theory to a biased, narrow view on Fijian traditions of land ownership (France 1969; Kaplan 1995, 2004; Kelly 2004). Furthermore, the colonial land legislation created a legacy of juxtaposing the landed indigenes with the landless descendants of the South Asian indentured labourers, making land ownership by far the most consequential decision to have been made by the colonial administration in Fiji. Still, the practical outcome remains that most indigenous-Fijian children are registered in the Native Land Register (Vola ni Kawa Bula) administered by a statutory body known as the Native Land Trust Board, which is the formal authority on clan membership and consequent land rights. Most children are entered into these records under their fathers’ clan, following the patrilineal preference in Fijian descent, though it is by no means uncommon to be recorded as member of one’s mother’s clan either. These records affirm people’s rights to their clan lands in their home villages in a way that is indisputable and inalienable. Everyone I interviewed on this subject affirmed that this is a de facto right, even if according to custom such kinship ties require constant maintaining through

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4 Present-day indigenous Fijians have, in consequence, been described as a relatively secure landed middle class, protected from extreme poverty by the existence of a “safety net” of land and kinship solidarity (e.g. Mohanty 2011; Ratuva 2006), but also prevented from accumulating wealth by the demands of solidarity. The point is typically illustrated by comparing indigenous Fijians to the Indo-Fijian population who comprise – or so the folk theory has it – the wealthiest and the poorest social strata.
ceremonial obligations, beginning with presenting the child to his or her relatives in the village and kept up through participation in weddings and funerals as well as village fundraising events. Thus most people would also admit that taking up residence in the village after a long absence accompanied by non-participation in ceremonial activities would be difficult – to say the least – especially in the beginning; one could expect some ill will and disagreements with regard to the particular land one would be allotted with; yet this would apply particularly to villages with relatively easy access to the main urban areas where residential and farming land is scarce; villages unlike Naloto. In the end, everyone I talked with agreed on the inalienable nature of land rights: once registered as a Naloto villager, one could always rely on the fact that the village remains accessible.

The right to use Naloto village lands can be either inherited or acquired through marriage and, in rare instances, by making a formal request to the land-owning group. By far the greatest number of people entitled to use the lands were, in 2008, registered land owners who were not living in the village. Thus in addition to the 309 people considered permanent Naloto residents on January 31st 2008, there were 700 Naloto villagers who were registered in the Native Land Register as Nalotans though not residing in the village. Most of them were living in the urban area surrounding the country’s capital, Suva, and in the Lautoka, Ba and Vatukoula urban areas, while a number of others had married into nearby villages of the Tailevu province. Yet others worked in tourist resorts, most of which are on the western side of Viti Levu. Furthermore, at least 50 Naloto villagers were living overseas during the time of my fieldwork, many of them working as soldiers in the Fiji Armed Forces, the British Army or American private security forces in Iraq and Kuwait; some were working as short-term contract labourers while others had moved to United States, Australia, New Zealand, Samoas or United Kingdom permanently.

The absent villagers are a heterogeneous group. Some have migrated to the urban centres in search of work with an intention to return to the village one day, after fulfilling an economic objective such as the education of children, raising enough money for a house or livestock, or some other project (see Frazer 1986: 10–11). For many, the village thus represents a “retirement home”, as John Overton (1993) puts it, including those who were born away from the village but eventually plan to settle there. The
majority of the villagers who have married out of Naloto are women who have permanently moved into their husbands’ villages and whose children are likely to be registered under their husbands’ kin groups, but there are also entire families that, after residing in other parts of Fiji for generations, are still registered Nalotans, regardless of whether or not they ever actually even visit the village. There are absentee villagers who regularly participate in the village affairs, either through attending village events in person or by sending gifts and money donations. Many take care to introduce their children to the village in order to maintain close relations with the village community, whilst others send gifts or even remittances to their near kin but show no interest in maintaining relations with the village beyond that. What they do have in common, though, is the inalienable right to take up residence in the village.

Generally speaking there are relatively few indigenous Fijians who would say they originate from any of the urban centres – unless members of one of the native clans who are the de facto owners of the land on which the towns were built. There is often a sense of non-place attached to “the town” (tauni) that comes out in conversation; such an attitude was also mirrored in a reply to an inquiry for research on urban Fijian culture that I once made at the Institute of Fijian Language and Custom: “Sorry, but we do not have any material on that urban…stuff – because here we concentrate on Fijian culture”. Yet in recognition of the fact that a continuously growing number of indigenous Fijians live in the urban areas, the Fijian administration went as far as to create the title of Roko Tui Urban – “Urban Paramount Chief” – in the early 2000s. The title, intended to complement the list of paramount chiefs from Fiji’s 14 provinces, ultimately referred to a chieftaincy without people, and has since been abandoned. Though the absent Naloto villagers I have evoked here are not only urban-based but also wives, husbands and children living in other Fijian villages, the contrast between town and village is central to my argument, in that it highlights the home village’s key role in determining not only who people are but also what constitutes legitimate “Fijian culture”, regardless of the fact that the villages are not necessarily where the people are at.

Consequently even the most unattached Naloto villagers, such as urban employed young adults whose families have not lived in the village for generations, tend to possess certain basic knowledge about the village: the clan (mataqali) they are born into; the names and terms of reference for their closest relations in the village; the name of their family’s house site, and which side of the village – north or south – it is on. Another identification

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6 Strictly speaking, “Roko Tui” is an administrative title reserved for the heads of Fiji’s 14 Provincial Councils. In practice the office-holders tend to be paramount chiefs of the regions or members of the chiefly kin groups.
that is important in village terms, membership of a village moiety (yavusa),
appeared to be less important to emigrant Nalotans— at least it was less
frequently given as part of the self-identifications that they initially
provided, and in some cases membership of larger kin groups, chiefdom-
level classifications also called yavusa, were provided instead of the village
moiety names. The difference between the two levels of classification
corresponds to a difference between an official, state-sanctioned system of
reckoning indigenous Fijian kinship and a practical division created within
the village.

Yavusa (“moiety”)

The highest level of social division in the village is the yavusa. The term has
proved quite difficult to translate, the possible translations ranging from
“clan” (Nabobo-Baba 2006; Tomlinson 2009; Tuwere 2002), “tribe”
(Nabobo-Baba 2006), “phratry” (Thompson 1940), “set of clans”
(Miyazaki 2004), “group of related clans” (Toren 1999), “descent line”
(Nayacakalou 2001 [1975]), “moiety” (Quain 1948; Sahlins 1976) and
“stock” (Sahlins 1962) all the way to “[a term implying] common descent
in certain contexts, an egocentric kindred in others” (Sahlins 1962: 170). In
the ideal text-book model of Fijian social organisation drafted by the
colonial administration (see e.g. France 1969: 145; Nayacakalou 2001
[1975]: 2–14), all members of a yavusa trace their origins to a common
male ancestor; a yavusa comprises several mataqali—lineages founded by the
yavusa founder’s sons—which, in turn, branch into several tokatoka. The
official model, in other words, follows the logic of segmentary lineages. In
practical application the term appears much more flexible. As a matter of
fact, the term yavusa can be used in reference to a variety of social groups at
different levels of organisation, both inter-village and intra-village: hence the
most fitting definition for the term might be Capell’s (1941 [2003]) “the
largest kinship and social division in Fijian society”. In Naloto village the
term refers to the primary dividing line between the two sides or moieties in
the village—the land people or Yavusa Rokotakala, and the sea people or
Yavusa Saraviti.

The two yavusa differ from one another in terms of composition, size
and history. The land people’s yavusa, Rokotakala, is indeed a “set” of four
clans (mataqali) headed by the hereditary chief of Naloto village, the Komai
Naloto. By most accounts the constituent clans share no ancestry beyond a
national mythology created during the colonial era, which unites all
indigenous Fijians. The component clans all have their own myths
concerning their arrival in the village, and although a shared origin myth for
the Yavusa Rokotakala clans is documented in a previous study (Lee 1984),
I have never heard it recounted in the village. Neither does the yavusa, strictly speaking, entertain a role in the kinship relations within the village. It plays no part in arranging the marriages or the life-cycle rites of its members: these are agreed upon by the constituent clans themselves, though the marriage rites may often be organised on the yavusa level. Nor is the yavusa an exogamous group: within Rokotakala in particular, marriages amongst the constituent clans take place quite frequently. Finally, Yavusa Rokotakala has, to my knowledge, never owned property in common.

Yavusa Saraviti, the sea moiety, comprises two clans who share common ancestry and are headed by a hereditary chief titled Na Tunidau. Both clans trace their descent from Tunidau, one of the eight classificatory grandsons of Rokomoutu, the mythical paramount chief of Verata and, arguably, first king of Fiji. More specifically, they are a segment among Tunidau's descendants, the offspring of a group who fled the paramount village in early 20th century following a quarrel over a woman. In 2008, they held no property in common, but back in the 1970s, Yavusa Saraviti owned a boat – “Marama ni Buretu” – which they used for fishing and for transport to as far as the island of Ovalau. Yavusa Saraviti are the Naloto “sea people” (kai wai), a category that the villagers often expect to correlate with occupational proficiency: the sea people are regarded as better fishermen than the land people. Like its counterpart, Saraviti is neither an exogamous group, nor are there prescriptive marriage rules between the two yavusa. However, the two marriages of Kalivate Waqa, first sea moiety leader to get married in Naloto, are treated as paradigmatic in the sense that these are constantly recalled by land and sea moiety members alike; provided as evidence of the sea people’s history in Naloto village. Kalivate Waqa’s first marriage with a woman of the Sauturaga clan produced two sons, second with a woman of the Wawa sub-clan produced three sons and a daughter; the current generation of young married adults in the Tunidau clan is the fourth born in Naloto village.

“These sea people, they are clever”, one of the land moiety elders once remarked to me, explaining that the immigrants quickly strengthened their position in the village by marrying a woman of a land clan responsible for installing the Naloto chiefs. “Then there was another grandmother.

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7 Exact year unknown: the elders of the original group from Ucunivanua were Petero Dauniseka and Eremasi Taqai (born 1874 and 1894); by the time the Naloto village lands were surveyed and clan histories recorded on July 10th 1930, they were settled in Naloto and recorded in the official records as a Naloto-based group originating from Ucunivanua.

8 Information attained from the Tunidau clan’s written history (Tagicaki n.d.) and confirmed by two land moiety elders. The official records from the 1930s provide different information, as again do other villagers from other kin groups. There is no definitive version, which is further complicated by a general tendency in the village to merge generations beyond the living ones.
Merewalisi™, he continued to illustrate that the sea moiety chief’s choice of wife was no isolated incident. However, according to the Native Land Register, the marriage of Merewalisi actually took place with a member of another land clan. Indeed, this is a case in point, insofar as the emblematic marriages between immigrant men and Naloto women were actually not only rare but also statistically a minority. Out of the thirteen marriages between land and sea people that took place before the 1950s and were recorded either in the Native Land Register or in family histories, in ten instances the immigrants were actually wife givers rather than wife takers. Furthermore, many of these seem to have preceded the sea chief’s marriages which, for the land people, established the sea people’s place in the village, and for the sea people signify the founding of the local yavusa. As I will show in the next chapter, there are strong assumptions at play regarding the nature of the relationship between immigrant and autochthonous groups. Phrased differently, one could claim that the structural expectations far outweigh the historical facts: Yavusa Saraviti are supposed to be wife takers in relation to Yavusa Rokotakala.

Instead of fusing separate lineages in an idiom of descent, the yavusa apparatus operates as a dual symbolic classification, dividing the village into two sides, land and sea, a classification that is articulated in a set of binary oppositions that underlie not only the ceremonial organisation of the village but also a set of assumptions about who the villagers are and what they do. It is in this capacity that the two yavusa – Rokotakala and Saraviti – act as umbrella categories for Naloto village kin groups. The two yavusa, furthermore, only exist in relation to each other, in a reciprocal relationship wherein a division into two sides and a corresponding duality of interests is the key task of the yavusa (cf. Sahlins 1962: 195–196). I will elaborate this idea once I pick up the symbolic roles of land and sea in the next chapter; for now I just want to point out that the village-level yavusa division would not be created if it were not significant. After all, each of the clans comprising the two yavusa are also members of two higher-order groups, are also called yavusa, that encompass the entire chiefdom of Verata: Yavusa Buretu and Yavusa Qalibure. Of these Buretu is a chiefly group originating from Ucunivanua village while Yavusa Qalibure encompasses the three chiefly titles of Roko Tui Yasa, Roko Tui Colo and Roko Takala of Kumi village, Sawa and Uliloli villages and Naloto village respectively; in the Native Land Register, the two clans comprising Yavusa Saraviti in Naloto are recorded as branches of Yavusa Buretu, just as the groups comprising Yavusa Rokotakala in Naloto are recorded as branches of Yavusa Qalibure along with the clans from Sawa, Uliloli and Kumi villages. From the state’s

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* All villagers’ names used in this study are pseudonyms, excepting historical personages whose identities are common knowledge in the village and beyond.
point of view, the Naloto village division into Rokotakala and Saraviti only exists as a local idiom that the villagers have devised because they deem it useful or necessary.

The village-level *yavusa* is, to sum up, created locally for the purpose of dividing the villagers into two sides or halves, one containing the two kin groups descended from 20th-century immigrants from the neighbouring village, the other containing those groups who comprised the village before the immigrants’ arrival. The division thus also implies a division into foreigners and locals, as well as a symbolic division into sea people and land people. Since the division, furthermore, gets expressed in terms of the sea half having been established through an original union between a Naloto woman and an immigrant male chief, I translate the concept as a “moiety” in reference to the binary logic behind the relations between the two *yavusa*. However, unlike the kinship-derived definitions of a moiety, the *yavusa* in Naloto village are neither strictly unilineal nor exogamous wife-exchanging sides, but closer to what have sometimes been called ceremonial or ritual moieties – reciprocal sides that only exist in relation to the other and whose key significance comes out on ritual occasions. Yet they matter beyond the ritual moments. As Sahlins (1962: e.g. 225, 238) also notes, the *yavusa*-level divisions seem to refer to a different social context than the clans and subclans contained within the *yavusa*. On Moala island, Sahlins (op. cit.: 225) points out, the groups comprising a *yavusa* “are linked to each other primarily because of their respective political and social connections with the chiefly nucleus”. Similarly, one could see the two *yavusa* in Naloto as groupings that are not made up of the constituent kin groups but bind them together around the two chiefs in the village: Komai Naloto and Na Tunidau. From such a point of view, furthermore, the relations between the two moieties are not structured upon the alliances between the constituent groups or their members but on those of the chief, since the chief is the organising principle at the centre of the group. To show how this makes sense, let me now move to the “political and social connections” that these groups bear to their chiefs.

*Mataqali* (“clan”) and *tokatoka* (“subclan”)

The two *yavusa* in Naloto contain six *mataqali*, here translated as “clans”, that further divide into sixteen *tokatoka* or “subclans”. The key difference between a clan and a subclan is this: the clan level of division is frequently used in the allocation of communal labour. On such occasions it is easy to see the benefits of dividing the village into six fairly even-sized groups that, for example, each provide an equal share to a feast for a visiting group, prepare a mat for the village hall or take turns in organising special church
services. Various life-cycle rites and other events whose organisation falls primarily on a hosting clan would also be a practical impossibility for a small clan. Therefore it makes practical sense that small lineages merge to form new ones better suited for clan-level tasks: overseeing weddings, funerals and so forth.

By legislation, the *mataqali* is also the primary land-owning unit in Fiji: the communal ownership of indigenous land has been fixed at the clan level. But while the *mataqali* as defined by the villagers themselves is a flexible, adjustable group that can divide or merge in response to birth rate or political ascendancy, the legislative *mataqali* is a fixed corporate group enshrined in the Native Land Register. Consequently, the practical application of the term varies: in the survey of lands and land-owning groups conducted in Naloto in 1930, twelve groups were defined as clans and the land area surrounding Naloto village was portioned out to these twelve groups. Presently there are six locally defined clans in the village: seven have, since 1930, decreased in size to the degree where they have either merged to form a new clan or joined a larger one. Demoted to a constituent subclan status, they nevertheless remain land-owning groups even though no longer labelled *mataqali* within the village. Nalotans have adopted a casual way of dealing with the mismatch between the state and village models: the land-owning groups now classified as subclans (marked with an asterisk in the table below) are often able to choose whether to act as separate groups or as a composite clan.

Yet the merging into composite clans is not just a matter of convenience. Members also show greater solidarity towards their own kind in times of need. Moreover, just as the word *mataqali* also has the general meaning of a “kind”, “type” or “species” (as in *dua na mataqali ni ika* – “a type of fish”), it also appears the merging of separate groups may have an effect on the “type” of people they are. A brief overview of the Naloto clans will serve to illustrate the point.

The Rokotakala clan comprised a single subclan in the 1930 survey: Draunikau. This is the chiefly lineage within which the title of *Komai Naloto* is inherited. In the group’s origin story their mythical ancestor Rokotakala founded Naloto village; in different versions the other land clans in Naloto were then either invited to join Rokotakala in Naloto, or are the descendants of his younger brothers (see Lee 1984). Rokotakala clan is the largest in the village with 226 registered land owners,\(^\text{10}\) of whom 25 were living in the village at the time of my fieldwork, but the clan owns the smallest area of land – 21 hectares, much of which is actually taken up by the village itself, and hence unavailable for farming. The core lineage of the

\(^{10}\) All the following figures on the numbers of land owners are based on the Native Land Register accounts, checked with clan elders for accuracy.
Rokotakala clan has, however, at some stage taken in the Wawa clan which now forms the second subclan of Rokotakala. Wawa are a small land-owning group with only eleven registered members, of whom only one lived

**Table 2:** Naloto kin group organisation (land-owning subclans marked with *).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Naloto village</th>
<th>1 Yavusa Rokotakala (land moiety)</th>
<th>1.1 Rokotakala</th>
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<td></td>
<td>1.1.1 Draunikau</td>
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<td>1.1.2 Wawa*</td>
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<td>1.2.1 Natlagobokola</td>
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<td>1.2.2 Vuniivi</td>
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<td>1.3 Kai Naloto</td>
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<td></td>
<td>1.3.1 Kakoso*</td>
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<td>1.3.2 Kasakasamia*</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>1.3.3 Nasonini*</td>
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<td>1.3.4 Bona*</td>
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<td>1.3.5 Mataigau*</td>
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<td>1.3.6 Coloivatoa*</td>
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<td>1.4 Vosaratu</td>
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<td>1.4.1 Vunisalato</td>
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<td>1.4.2 Navakalacibi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>2 Yavusa Saraviti (sea moiety)</td>
<td>2.1 Tunidau</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2.1.1 Valelawa</td>
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<td>2.2 Tuvaleni</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>2.2.1 Burelailai</td>
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<td>2.2.2 Burelevu</td>
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in Naloto at the time of my fieldwork. The Wawa clan used to be classified as one of the warrior (bati) clans in Naloto, and Lee (1984: 61) provides an account in which the Wawa clan were brought in by the mythical ancestor Rokotakala to act as “child tenders” and placed to live on the northern side of the village due to the overcrowding of the south. The shift that has occurred since Lee’s study is remarkable: the Wawa were previously classified as bati, a warrior designation implying commoner status also associated with arduous farming, whereas they are now considered a second chiefly line that some even claim should alternate with the Draunikau lineage in holding the office of Komai Naloto.

The bati classification now remains solely within the Kai Naloto clan. Combined of six land-owning groups, many of which have diminished in size to the degree that some suggest there is a curse at work, the Kai Naloto clan had 205 land owners in 2008, 56 of whom lived either in the village or the lands surrounding it. One of the constituent groups, Nakakoso, retains the high-ranking office of matanivanua – spokesman or talking chief – while another, Bona, once were the Naloto chief’s undertakers and body servants. Still another group, Kai Nasonini, are renowned orators though they carry no office in recognition of this. The Coloivatoa subclan is by far the biggest land owner in the village, its 21 members hold 287 hectares of farm land, 33 per cent of the village lands, and have built a separate settlement at the edge of their clan lands. The settlement, known as Namoli, comprises half a dozen households but there are Coloivatoa households in the village proper, too. The Kai Naloto are collectively classified as bati, which identifies them as the group of ultimate land people – a status reflected in their collective land holdings: the Kai Naloto clan owns a total of 71 per cent of the Naloto lands, though each subclan remains in charge of their own lands. The Kai Naloto subclans share a common origin myth in which they were the original inhabitants of the village; it was only through their hospitality towards their guests from the inland chiefdom of Naloto that they got, by mistake, the name Kai Naloto, “people of [or from] Naloto”. Most other villagers claim the Kai Naloto migrated from the chiefdom of Naloto (see

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11 This comparative data on the social organisation in Naloto comes from a previous study conducted in Naloto village – an unpublished ethnomusicology Ph.D. thesis submitted in 1984 with fieldwork conducted in 1976–1977. The study provides an interesting sketch of Naloto village organisation from three decades before my fieldwork which, in the absence of other histories or even genealogies stretching beyond 1930, provides one of the rare glimpses into the recent history of Naloto available to me. This data should be used carefully, though: not only does it openly present the village from the chiefly clan’s viewpoint, it also contains numerous factual errors. Yet it also preserves the views of Lee’s host and key informant, Josateki Waqa of the chiefly Rokotakala group, an employee of the Fiji Museum and an enthusiastic collector of Naloto traditions.
Tuitoga 2004) a long time ago and thereby gave the village its name, though Lee (1984: 60) also cites a myth which represents the Kai Naloto as autochthonous to the village, founded by Rokotakala’s youngest son.

The Vosaratu clan coincides with the land-owning clan defined in 1930, with the exception that it had three rather than two subclans in 1930. There are 102 land owners in the clan, 17 of whom live in the village and they own twelve percent of the Naloto lands. But while Lee (1984: 65–67) designates Vosaratu, too, as bati (and the chief’s ritual coconut pudding makers), in 2007–2008 they were considered representatives of an obsolete pre-Christian class, bete (“priests’), by everyone in the village.12 Though this appears to provide the Vosaratu clan with more elevated origins, it also decreases the clan’s association with the type of land-ownership represented by the warrior designation. Indeed, the “priest” designation is something of an anomaly in the sense that there are no duties or offices associated with it. “Look at Suliasi here, his people are bete, they know magic. They used to go to sea and call for the fish and when they came, tickle them under the stomach to make them jump into the boat. But to do that, they had to live in celibacy for three days.” This was how the bete status was explained to me by a young man of another clan in the presence of his Vosaratu cross-cousin. In mockery, as befits the cross-cousin relationship, but interestingly also in terms of saltwater activities. Members of the clan say they lived on a land tract neighbouring the present-day village lands prior to the arrival of any other group in Naloto, but moved into the Naloto village upon its founding. The general view of other villagers is that they moved in from Ucunivanua, the chiefly village, a long time ago, well before the arrival of the sea moiety. This view may be derived from the fact that there is a Mataqali Vosaratu in Ucunivanua, too, and a kinship connection between the two is assumed on both sides. An alternative account provided by Lee (op. cit.: 61) makes the Vosaratu clan a “gift” from the mythical Verata paramount Rokomoutu to the Naloto ancestor Rokotakala, who settled them on the north side of Naloto village to look after his father. Of all the land clans, Vosaratu is most closely connected with the Yavusa Saraviti clans through numerous marriages.

The fourth land clan, Sauturaga, are by tradition the installers of the Naloto chiefs. “So you want to know who the Sauturaga are? Here, read this”, I was told by the Sauturaga clan chief upon my first visit to his house, whereupon he handed me his copy of Capell’s Fijian Dictionary and pointed at the entry for sauturaga: “secondary chief’s [sic] whose duty is to uphold the laws and customs of the land; they belong to the warrior class (bati)”. The composition or the designation has not changed since 1930, although

12 Lee (1984: 52–53) even discusses the pre-Christian priests and their magic at length, never even implying that was such a group in the land moiety.
one of the Sauturaga subclans – Nailagobokola – has died out from the village, only surviving in a branch that lives on Vanua Levu island. In the clan’s own origin story, they were the original founders and chiefs of the village, but later voluntarily surrendered the chieftainship to the Rokotakala clan. In a version of the chiefly clan’s origin myth (Lee 1984: 60), Sauturaga descend from the younger brother of the ancestor Rokotakala.

The two clans in the sea moiety, Tunidau and Tuivaleni, are both registered land-owning groups each holding three per cent of the total Naloto land area. Both clans are big: Tunidau has 104 land owners, 28 of them residing in the village, and Tuivaleni has 131 land owners, 25 of them in Naloto. As stated above, they share a common origin, being an offshoot of the Ucunivanua-based Yavusa Buretu. The Tunidau clan is the chiefly group of the sea moiety, holder of the title of Na Tunidau, chief of Naloto sea people. Tunidau clan only has one subclan, though there were two in 1930. The Bete (“priest”) subclan comprised two women, the wives of immigrant Tunidau and Tuivaleni elders respectively, and may possibly represent a genealogical shortcut taken by the survey makers. Tuivaleni, the sea chief’s spokesmen, are divided into two subclans, Burelailai and Burelevu, of which the former holds the office of the clan chief (turaga ni mataqali). Lee (1984) lists a third sea moiety clan, “Navasa”, which was inexistent in 2007, not recalled by anyone in the village and absent from the Native Land Register. Navasa is, however, a sea clan in Ucunivanua, and had a member of that clan been living in Naloto in the 1970s, he would have acted as part of Yavusa Saraviti.

In sum: there are twelve land-owning kin groups in the village. In terms of present-day village organisation, the status of several groups has been re-defined: they have merged to form new clans, better suited in size to the distribution of collective responsibilities. However, when the Naloto lands were surveyed in 1930, there were twelve clans in the village, and the land in and around Naloto village has since then been the collective property of these twelve groups. The groups’ respective land areas vary in size from the Coloivatoa group’s 269 hectares to Rokotakala’s 21 hectares (see Table 3: land-owning groups in Naloto), a disparity that becomes even more pronounced when one takes into account the number of people in the kin groups in question. Coloivatoa, the group possessing the largest hereditary land area, had 21 registered land owners in 2008, which means 12.81 hectares of land per owner. Rokotakala, with the smallest lot, had 226 land owners, averaging 0.09 hectares per owner.

Three things are particularly striking here. The first is the chiefly Rokotakala clan’s lack of farm land, especially when keeping in mind that the Rokotakala clan lands contain the actual village itself, which reduces the farming land available to the most populous group in the village by almost
one half. The topic of chiefly land ownership will be taken up in the following chapter. But the situation is almost the same for the sea moiety. While comprising 27 per cent of the village population, they hold but six per cent of the land. This is, furthermore, in stark contrast with the Kai Naloto (groups 1.3.1–1.3.6), who make up 24 per cent of the population but own 71 per cent of the land. Three land-owning groups possess more than five hectares of land per capita, while at the other end there are three clans with less than 0.3 hectares per capita. When one works out the land available per capita in terms of the number of land owners actually living in the village, these three groups are the only ones to remain at less than one hectare per owner. The contrast in the land available to the Naloto clans may have become more pronounced due to the inflexibility of the land tenure system; it is also a lasting reminder of the complementary roles of the groups that make up Naloto village.

THE LAY OF THE LAND

The clan lands are divided into individual households’ farms (teitei). Most clans also maintain communal farms for ceremonial purposes, though the
status and upkeep of communal farms varies greatly. There are also some independent men and young families living on their clans’ lands; these residences vary from provisional farm houses, used for labour-intensive farming periods, to compounds where young families live in order to effectively farm for the urban market a number of years before moving back to the village proper. Finally, there is the Namoli settlement at the western edge of the Coloivatoa subclan’s lands, where the majority of village-based Coloivatoa families practise large-scale farming for the urban market. The Coloivatoa clan has also leased a part of their land to an Indo-Fijian family who raise cattle there. Naloto villagers occasionally buy cattle from them for ritual use, but otherwise the family maintains no connection with the village.\footnote{Besides the one family, Naloto is a mono-ethnic village. An Indo-Fijian man lived in the village for some years in the late 1990s, but was coerced to leave in an atmosphere of growing ethno-nationalist sentiment during the period leading up to the 2000 military coup.}

Looking at the map of Naloto lands one can see how the lands are distributed along the road leading to the village. Notwithstanding two notable exceptions, the lands allotted to the Tunidau and Tuivaleni groups, there is a gradual increase in plot sizes the further one gets from the village proper. This would be a fair reflection of the way one’s ability to utilise land efficiently correlates with distance from the village: people living in close proximity of their farm land are able to grow things that require more work, and attend to their plantations more frequently. From a farmer’s point of view, the most valuable farm land lies close to the village. But as one of the village elders explained to me, the lands can also be regarded as a series of
consecutive zones which reflects the groups’ order of arrival in the village: the first arrivals were, in this model, able to lay claim to the lands closest to the village proper. And as things currently stand, the distribution of farm land forms an east-to-west or coast-to-inland sequence which also coincides with the relative rank of the land moiety clans: the land area encompassing the village proper belongs to the chiefs and the coastal plot adjacent to it is held by the group now subsumed into the chiefly group. The next “zone” of farm land is divided into tracts belonging to the village spokesman’s subclan and the Sauturaga clan responsible for installing the chiefs. This order can be also viewed at the far end from the village; the two immigrant groups have their lands an hour’s walk up the road from the village, though they are not quite the farthest removed from the village proper. The other groups whose lands are furthest from the village are now said to originate from the inland chiefdom of Naloto after the village had already been founded – even though they themselves tell a different story. However, although the spatial sequence seemingly presents a model for rank based on precedence (see Vischer [ed.] 2009), it was never openly discussed or utilised in formal contexts. It is nevertheless worth noting that that the allocation of land in Naloto supports a model of precedence, in which rank correlates with order of arrival.

But there is a competing model, an alternate way to read the land. The groups designated as bati – “tooth” or “border” – should, by definition, be the guardians residing on the edges of the domain. Just as the allied chiefdoms surrounding Verata are its bati balavu (“long border”), so a chief’s local bati lekaleka (“short border”) are expected to guard the edges of his domain. A similar pattern is repeated for example in the lands separating Ucunivanua from Navunimono, where the Batilekaleka clan holds a land area roughly six times bigger than the neighbouring Ucunivanua clans. This pattern of land ownership corresponds with an ideal order of the bati as the ultimate land people, taukei or “owners of the land”, providers of root crops and pork, and the counterpoint of the immigrant sea people who are landless fishermen. Moreover, this model presents itself within the village of Naloto as well.

The village, comprising 80 houses and 300 people,\textsuperscript{14} is built two sides of a hill on a small headland pointing eastwards, roughly towards the island of Ovalau. The geography provides a natural dividing line that splits the village proper into two: the south and the north sides both have their own

\textsuperscript{14} The precise count was 309 on January 31\textsuperscript{st} 2008. The figure, provided by the administrative chief, turaga ni koro, contains the 164 registered land owners living (more or less) permanently on the village lands at the beginning of 2008, as well as the women, children and men who were living in the village as result of marriage, adoption or work (school teachers, Methodist Church pastor).
graveyards and their own entry roads from the gravel road leading into the village. Both sides of the village also have an equal stretch of shoreline. The southern half, known as Draiba, has traditionally been the home of the chiefly clan as well as the chief’s *bati*. The north side is further divided in two. The north-western part is known as Sikitai, home to the chief’s spokesman, the Vosaratu clan, the Wawa subclan and two Mataqali Sauturaga houses that lie on the western edge of the village. The north-eastern part is known as Buretu, home to the sea moiety.

In Draiba, the south side, the houses are arranged so that the house sites of the Kai Naloto clan are grouped in front of the Rokotakala houses; more specifically, they were arranged thus back in the old days to protect the chief from an outside attack, I was told. They are also regarded as the chief’s constabulary in the village, making sure his orders are obeyed and villagers show respect for their chief (though I was also repeatedly told they fail to do this). In this way the household settlement pattern confirms to the model wherein the hereditary designation of one’s clan outweighs order of arrival. At the same time, the settlement pattern geographically groups the Kai Naloto clan together with the Rokotala Draunikau subclan (1.1.1), which the villagers refer to as Rokotakala *baba ceva* or “Rokotakala south side” when they need to specify they are talking about the Draiba group as distinct from Rokotakala *baba vaaliku*, “Rokotakala north side” (1.1.2, Wawa). The clan chief of the installing Sauturaga clan, married to a woman of the chiefly lineage, also lives in Draiba.
The south and north sides are markedly apart. The Naloto Methodist Church is situated on top of the dividing hill, next to the ancient chiefly cemetery (sautabu) that is no longer used, and a recently-constructed village meeting hall. A small dispensary, funded by the Naloto women’s committee, was built next to the meeting hall shortly after my fieldwork, next to a communal water tank funded by Japanese aid money. The western end of the hill is steeper and overgrown, and though there are two houses amidst the trees, it really lies outside the village proper. The sole village-based household of the Mataigau subclan (1.3.5) stands in the middle of the hill by special permission, because the head of the household oversaw the construction of the meeting hall. But otherwise, the hill is really a no man’s land where public facilities are situated and where meetings concerning the entire village take place. Indeed, the residence of the single Kai Naloto subclan up on the hill is an anomaly, to a degree made possible by the family’s history of intermarriage with the Tunidau clan.

The north side is divided into two by a ditch running from the sea up towards the hill. The division into Buretu and Sikitai is not, however, considered as significant as the north–south divide. This I learnt early on in my stay when, having spent the day with my Naloto teacher, I was asked to recite what I had learnt to a group of men gathered around a kava bowl. “Naloto is divided in three parts”, I began, and was immediately interrupted by an elderly man shouting “In two!” I repeated my sentence, this time naming the three divisions: Buretu, Sikitai and Draiba. This he accepted,
waving the issue away in a have-it-your-way manner. But over the course of my stay in Naloto I learnt that that in addition to the division into “north” and “south”, the names of Sikitai and especially Buretu could also be used in reference to all of the north side.

Buretu, the sea people’s part of the village, houses members of both sea moiety clans. At the foot of the steep hillside, the present-day Buretu has been expanded by filling seaside stone enclosures with rubbish and land, and then building consecutive ones in a way that gradually stretches the shoreline seawards. One of the Buretu residents described the process to me as the measure of a man’s accomplishments: “See, during my time I have filled maybe from here to here [indicating a metre or two]. But my father filled all this land [from the foot of the hill]. He was a great man.” Even within the village, it seems, a relative scarcity of land marks out the sea moiety, although they have more recently started building houses on the west side of Sikitai. The new division, Nasova, currently has four houses.

On my arrival to Naloto, I was invited to stay at one of the Buretu houses, which remained my home throughout fieldwork. In the beginning, I was advised I am free to go as I please among the Tunidau clan houses on the north-east end of the village. “We are all family here”, I was told, and soon enough I understood how the Dravidian kinship system, combined with the patrilocal preference in residence, made Buretu coincide with parallel kin. I learnt to address all older Tunidau men as ta, “father”, or more specifically ta levu (“great father”) if my deceased Naloto father had called them older brothers, and “ta so-and-so” or ta lailai (“small father”) if he had called them younger brothers. The only sea moiety man of the previous generation was the sea chief, now deceased, whom everyone addressed as kai, “grandfather”, a term which does not distinguish between cross and parallel relatives (neither does bu or bubu, “grandmother”). My fathers’ wives I addressed as na levu, na lailai or “na so-and-so”, deriving their respective seniority from the terms of reference used for their husbands. Their sons and daughters I addressed as siblings (taciqu), their grandchildren as my children (luvegu); fathers’ sisters as aunts (nei) and the three fathers’ sisters’ children in the Tunidau clan as cross-cousins (tavale).15 Most of the

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15 Naloto terms of reference appear simple compared to those reported elsewhere in Fiji (e.g. Ravuvu1971; Sahlins 1962). As a rule, seniority among people of the same generation is ignored. Though the term of reference used for addressing an older sibling, tutua, is known to most Nalotans, they either assume it is a loan from another dialect or, in some cases, assume it was once in use but has fallen out of use. Terms for siblings and cross-cousins are used irrespective of gender, though female cross-cousins may address each other as daume, too. In addition to the appropriate kinship terms, polite modes of address are “father/mother of so-and-so” (tumai/tinai + name) or “lord/lady of + name of house site” (komai/radini). The use of chiefly titles for senior relatives reported by Sahlins (1962) does not take place in Naloto.
Tuivaleni households in Buretu were also my parallel relatives, but the further I got from the house, the likelier it became that men were addressed as uncles (momo), women as aunts (nei) and people of my own generation as cross-cousins. From my conversations with Naloto women, I have come to the conclusion that the way I expanded my territory over the first weeks of my stay in the village was like an impatient, accelerated version of the way a young wife gradually extends her territory in a new village. Once on the Sikitai side, I learnt to address almost everyone as cross-kin – as I did in the south side, Draiba.

As stated earlier, these spatial co-ordinates are relevant for urban or emigrant Naloto villagers, too. In the capital city, Suva, I would every so often meet someone whose family is originally from Naloto, even though they themselves had spent very little time in village, maybe only ever visited Naloto during a wedding or funeral. They, too, were always able to tell which side of the village their family’s house site (yavu) stood on, even though many had little knowledge of other village affairs. This was certainly the case for Nalotans whose families originated from Draiba, the south side, which in addition to their clan affiliation was usually the first information provided about their connection to the village. The Yavusa Saraviti members were equally keen to identify with their corner of the village; the Tunidau clan members in Lautoka – on the other side of Viti Levu island – even hold monthly, small-scale fundraiser-kava sessions that they call “Club Buretu”. Another Lautoka-based Naloto villager jokingly instructed me upon our first encounter: “Don’t call me na, that means I’m from Draiba! You call me nei, I am from Buretu!” As I was classified according to my family in the Tunidau clan, she was telling me to address her as classificatory father’s sister rather than the wife of a man from the Mataigau subclan, whom the Tunidau men of my generation addressed as ta Peceli. Sikitai, as evident from her comment, too, provided a less utilised point of reference, particularly to those who did not live in the village, whilst villagers living in the Draiba side often glossed the whole northern half either “Buretu” or “Sikitai”.

But while at least women would occasionally engage in good-natured banter that upheld the Buretu–Sikitai divide, it was equally likely that the tripartite division to be replaced by a simple division into “north side” and “south side”. This division, unlike the tripartite system, ignores the moiety division and the chieftaincies corresponding with it. As already stated, the

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16 For example, there was a particularly riotous roqoroqo gifting ceremony organised by the women’s committee, where Buretu and Sikitai women ended up challenging each other with large cups of kava and drenching each other in talcum powder and small gifts (fakawela), all the while calling each other “rats” (kalavu) from Buretu and Sikitai respectively.
division into two sides emerges naturally from the village geography, but it was foregrounded by a reduplication of facilities that at times gave the north and south sides the appearance of two attached villages. Both have their own cemeteries which follow the geographic rather than moiety or clan logic of division; both have their own roads; both accommodate a Christian minority – an “old” Roman Catholic congregation on the south side and a “new” All Nations Christian Fellowship Pentecostal congregation on the north side. Until recently, both even had their separate shops, though the shop (or kiosk) on the south side stood empty in 2007–2008.

While the tripartite division of the village remains tied to the clan and moiety organisation and the two chiefs in Naloto, the spatial dualism is more likely to be applied in the context of fundraisers, communal labour and other activities which, in the village, would be glossed vakakoro – administrative matters (lit. “way of the village”) – rather than vakavanua or “traditional” (“way of the land”). The distinction appears to be losing some of its salience, however: the village is increasingly viewed as comprising two equivalent halves rather than two asymmetrical moieties. This becomes particularly pronounced during large-scale fundraising ceremonies, which rely heavily on the contributions of emigrant villagers. Take “Naloto Day”, for example, a major fundraiser scheduled for October 2013, targeting 300 Fiji Dollars per village-based household. Such sums would have been a practical impossibility for most village households at the time of my fieldwork, were it not for the urban or otherwise employed family members’ assistance. But in addition to familial assistance, absentee villagers are increasingly participating as individual donors or even as a separate group of their own. This is evident in the announcement for Naloto Day 2013, sent out via Facebook in January 2013, which ends with the request: “Village members abroad – British Army, USA, Canada, Aust, NZ etc are urged to participate.”

The villagers are predominantly Methodists. The Roman Catholic congregation had ten members who held their services in a south side house named Roma. The All Nations Christian Fellowship Pentecostal congregation had approximately 30 members who took turns in hosting the group’s services. Naloto also has an Assemblies of God Pentecostal congregation (50–60 members) that has its own church outside the village proper, and a small Seventh-Day Adventist congregation that holds its gatherings close to the sea people’s farm lands further up the road.

Importantly, there has been a change in the mode of organising the events that corresponds with their naming. Lee (1984: 23) writes about the Adi Rokotakala festivals held during the Christmas holidays in the seventies, stating that they were organised on a clan basis. People still remember these beauty pageant/fundraiser events in the village, and in 2008 were thinking of reviving the custom. The “Naloto Day” concept is probably the outcome of these plans.
What needs to be pointed out here is that it is the non-local villagers who largely maintain the traditional lifestyle held up in the village. Traditionally each household has its own farm (teitei) situated in the clan's collective lands and usually transferred from one generation to the next within the household, so long as there is someone to look after the land in the village (these individual household lands are not formally inherited). The villagers uphold an ideal of self-sufficiency based on the abundance of farmland in the village, even if this abundance is due to the fact that over 80 per cent of the Naloto land owners live away from the village, thereby leaving more farm land for those who remain in the village. Furthermore, while the village is affluent in land and farm produce, it lacks other necessities of life — necessities which usually need to be bought with money from outside the village. In the village, I have even heard this paradox addressed in the claim that it is the duty of the first-born son to remain in the village looking after the family house site, farm and other family interests in the village, while his younger siblings are obliged to provide assistance — money — to him. This model, however, is hardly in line with the actual migratory patterns of Nalotans, and few in the village would agree with it. Indeed, I have also heard a contradictory view, according to which those who can move away from the village do so and those who cannot will just have to stay.

THE AFFLUENCE

There is no need for money in the village. Everything is already here. You can get taro and cassava from the farm, fish from the sea and fruit from the trees. If you do not have something, all you have to do is ask.

This is how Naloto villagers wanted to explain the Fijian way of life to me, time and again: as self-sufficient. I heard the same phrases from old people — mostly men — who had settled back into the village upon retirement from working life in town, from young men who were at the same time seeking employment outside the village, from villagers who were living in the village as farmers, from adolescents who went to boarding schools outside the village and from people who were employed in the urban centres in order to pay for their children’s education. I also heard the same explanation in the neighbouring villages in both the Verata and Vugalei chiefdoms; as a matter of fact, I was so sick of hearing the same phrases over and over again that, for the first six months of my fieldwork, I completely missed the significance of what people were trying to tell me: the definition of proper Fijian lifestyle
is not just associated with the village, but with living off the land, on the one hand, and generalised reciprocity, on the other.

As an ideal construction, this model of Fijian village life corresponds with the “kind of material plenty” envisioned by Marshall Sahlins in his essay on The Original Affluent Society (1972: 1–39). Limited needs – consisting of sustenance, housing and ceremonial obligations – are by and large quite easily met with the resources available for every villager. Every household in the village has its own plantations, and though unevenly distributed, the Naloto clans are the collective owners of 1997 acres of farmlands19 divided by mataqali and mostly looked after as individual farms (teitei) by each household. The common staple is cassava, which is relatively easy to grow and requires little from the soil. The village lies by the sea, and the two bays both sides of the village provide villagers with shellfish as well as small fish (rabbitfish [nuqa], trevally [saqa] etc.) and crabs – the better-quality fishes and crabs being reserved for the urban market. In addition, a normal diet would include coconuts, breadfruit (subject to seasonal availability), taro leaves, bele leaves (abelmoschus manihot) and ota, an edible fern (athyrium esculentum) – all of which grow prolific in the village surroundings, many of them uncultivated in former farm lands currently looked after by no-one. Firewood is abundant in the forest and mangrove swamps surrounding the village, as are traditional house building materials: bamboo and reeds. Most households also grow pandanus for weaving mats, and kava for recreational, economic and ceremonial uses. Hence when the villagers compare life in Fiji to “Paradise”, they reach this conclusion by resorting to what Sahlins calls the “Zen road to affluence”, which is to say by:

departing from premises somewhat different from our own: that human material wants are finite and few, and technical means unchanging but on the whole adequate. Adopting the Zen strategy, a people can enjoy an unparalleled material plenty – with a low standard of living. (Sahlins 1972: 2)

As a matter of fact, the villagers who told me that “all the things are already here” usually also proceeded to the list: taro, cassava, fish and fruit – every now and then someone might add that obviously one needs a bit of tea,

19 The soil is heavy with clay and the terrain consists of steep slopes, making most of the land suitable for cultivating cassava (tavioka), with better plots and those rested for a sufficient number of years being reserved for the more demanding taro (dalo) and kava (yaqona). The average annual rainfall is 250 cm with practically no dry season, which makes cropping possible throughout the year. (Leslie 1997; Twyford & Wright 1965.) The terrain is mostly unsuited for the use of farming machines.
sugar and flour, but those can be easily procured from town. This, then, is “the way the world should be”, as a (pre-coups) Fiji tourism brochure stated it – simple, unembellished and unaffected by the world outside the village. But the similarities with Sahlin’s portrayal of affluence actually extend beyond a mere question of wants and means. The prevailing cultural model also favours the redistribution of surplus produce or accumulated goods: “If you do not have something, all you have to do is ask”. The phrase refers to an ideology of reciprocity on request, often exemplified by the slightly more formal practise of kerekere (from kere – “to ask for”), a “request that cannot be refused” as it is often translated in the anthropological literature. A brief description of kerekere is that it is a need-based request which one should not turn down if one has no immediate use for the thing requested. A typical request would involve raw food items collected in abundance while the requester has not had the time to visit his or her farm, but things ranging from cigarettes to electricity (via extension cable) may likewise be requested. Often one does not even have to verbalise the request: the person in possession of a thing required recognises the other’s need and acts accordingly. In short, the institution is commonly associated with a mode of distribution based on need and immediate use rather than accumulation or saving up. What one does not immediately need is distributed, particularly amongst close kin, under the expectation that one also receives assistance in return from people one has helped when they have things in excess to their needs. The logic of generalised reciprocity is, in short, the logic of an affluence of limited needs: with only the immediate needs to cater for, accumulation is unnecessary.

The same principle is witnessed as a relative abundance of leisure in the village, with intermittent spells of concerted effort required mainly for ceremonial obligations – the production of necessities from affluent means in itself does not require constant hard work. In what can be considered converse to Adam’s punishment – “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground” – Sahlin’s (1972) argues that “the original affluent society” can be re-achieved through the “Zen strategy” of wanting less. He shows, furthermore, that lesser needs are inversely proportional to leisure. No wonder then, that so many Fijians are very fond of the notion – probably appropriated from tourist brochures – of Fiji as “Paradise”: the Fijian adaptation of Protestant ethic can bring an essential part of paradise to this world, or more specifically, to the Fijian village.

I have heard people complaining their dissatisfaction with life outside the village by comparing it to the ease of village life: “in town, you have to work all day, every day”, “you can’t be your own boss working in a resort”, and so forth. More importantly, though, the pace of everyday life in the village speaks for itself: the approximate daily time spent on work by an
adult Naloto man is roughly 5 hours — inestimably more for women, as women’s work (mainly domestic) does not easily divide into measurable “working” and “non-working” time. The figures in themselves say but little, however, so allow me to illustrate the matter with an exemplary five-hour working day in October 2007, one during which I kept notes on the use of work time:

After breakfast we rested a while with Mosese and then set out for Naisigasiga (matagali Tunidau’s collective lands) at 9.30. Jone joined us on the road. After a 45-minute walk we reached Naisigasiga and took a break by Luke’s bush house. After a half-hour break other men of the matagali arrived, and we rested with them for another while. After that, the three of us took word of an upcoming event to three households all within a stone’s throw. Exchanging news and resting a while took another half an hour. After relaying the messages, we decided to move indoors to Luke’s bush house, where we rested another half an hour or so. Finally, when Mosese, Luke, Siti, Jone and Jiutasa thought it was about noon, they told me we should get started: we walked some ten minutes into the bush until we reached the plot, where the younger men pulled up the cassava while the older sat by. This took another half an hour; we did not plant new ones to replace the old as is customary, that would be done “maybe next week”. We then sat down for a while and enjoyed a couple of green drinking coconuts before carrying the sacks back to the road where someone suggested another break. Instead of rest, however, everyone embarked on the busiest spell of the day: climbing breadfruit from the trees, collecting ota, searching for vines to tie up bundles, and so on. 1.5 hours later the village lorry picked us up and we reached the village proper at three o’clock; bringing the day’s working time to 5.5 hours.

This was not an isolated instance, I should add: sometimes we watched movies after walking to the farms, and occasionally someone would remark how people back in the village will think we have been keeping busy. Nor was all the resting done for my sake, for though I was often considered the
soft occidental who needs to be protected from the harder parts of village life, I also gained a reputation as an impatient type who does not know how to pace the day properly. Days when I would accompany someone to a farm without the company of other men were comparatively busier, but resting (vakacegu, from cegu “to breathe”, “to rest”) was always part of work nevertheless – and that applies to housewives, too, even though their tasks are greater in number.

Vakacegu – “rest”, “relaxing” – is really a virtue rather than something frowned upon. As such, it fits perfectly with the idea of the village as “Paradise”; even the notion of the village as a “retirement home” (Overton 1993) conforms to the notion, since “retirement”, too, is glossed as vakacegu (e.g. qasenivuli vakacegu or ovisa vakacegu are the correctly respectful terms of reference for a retired teacher and police officer respectively). The term even carries religious connotations: whilst in North European Protestantism, one “rests in peace” only in the afterlife (and toils hard in the present one), Fijian Protestantism seeks to assert the value of vakacegu in this world, too. Hence the Christian notion of serenity is also covered by “vakacegu” (e.g. “vakacegu na yaloqu”, soul’s rest), which appears in the Naloto Methodist Church sermons in frequent contrast with rapid change or development, whilst both the Methodist Hymnbook and even Pentecostal gospel groups’ repertoires abound with references to rest and resting.

My point here is that whilst the famous (North European) Protestant Work Ethic posits rest beyond this world – or gives it an “outworldly” existence as Dumont (1992 [1982]: 23–59) might put it – the Fijian notion of vakacegu requires obeisance in this world. An obvious example of this would be the on-going debate on “the Sunday ban” – a debate concerning the degree to which people should observe the Sunday Sabbath. The debate became central in Fijian politics during the 1987 coup, when the Sunday Observance Decree became one of the first political actions taken by the coup leader Colonel Sitiveni Rabuka. Henry Rutz and Erol Balkan (1992: 67) claim that “the content of the decree is that it bans capitalist rhythms of work and leisure”, and indeed still in 2007, when the topic was once again taken up by the Methodist Church, the debate centred on the subject of shops’ opening hours – whether or not shopkeepers should be allowed to do business on the siga tabu, holy day. Even the small “canteens” (kenitini, a “shop” operating at someone’s home, selling a limited range of products) as well as the ice lolly, kava, cigarette and sweets “businesses” were closed for Sunday in Naloto village for a couple of weeks following the Methodist Church national conference’s general appeal for more stringency in observing the tabu day. In addition to this “anti-capitalist” ethos, the national implications of the Sunday Observance Decree and similar motions have also
served as attempts to define the Republic of the Fiji Islands as a Christian and hence predominantly indigenous-Fijian state (e.g. Tomlinson 2009: 166–168). But in a village such as Naloto, the main emphasis of the Sunday ban is on rest and the (“inworldly”) community of believers.

THE NON-AFFLUENCE

And yet the ideal affluent society also appears at odds with the everyday reality in Naloto village. Even though the village is not inflicted with the countless needs made available by the market-industrial system, just the countable needs that are part of everyday life in the village are enough to foil the ideal described above. Obviously everyone needs tea and sugar, to start off with, and these easily affordable products were often even listed in the affluence discourse: “sometimes you need a little tea, sugar, like that, but that only costs a few dollars”. True; but in order to get to town to buy these commodities one needs F$ 6 for the lorry rides to Nausori town and back. One also needs to go to town every now and then just to pay for electricity, which is used for entertainment electronics – CD and DVD players, radios, TVs and the like. Which, for their part, require new CDs and DVD movies; not a particularly high expenditure either, since a pirated disc costs only a dollar or two. But with the addition of certain food items that are an everyday necessity in the village – instant noodles, corned beef, canned tuna, flour, cooking oil, onions, potatoes, breakfast crackers and bread – it all adds up to sums that are actually hard to come by within the village. And then there are necessities that one does not need to invest in regularly, but that are an expense nevertheless: spades, cane knives, pots, kerosene stoves, clothes, the list goes on. Not to mention bringing up children: disposable diapers, milk formula or powder for the infants, school fees, uniforms and books for the older. Besides which there are the expensive investments that people would like to save for, but many never actually manage to with all the running costs listed above. Housing, for example: only a few of Naloto’s houses are really made of traditional materials; the majority are built with corrugated iron, wood and breeze blocks. A house built on stilts or a concrete foundation is healthier, more comfortable and more prestigious than one with an earth floor; a “stone” (breeze block) house is more prestigious than one made of wood, though the latter still outranks corrugated iron. But whichever one can afford, the building budget will still also have to cover the transport expenses to the village as well, which is a insignificant part of the overall costs. Then, with the housing out of the way, there are yet other expensive investments such as boats, outboard engines, freezers and TVs, for example, all of which can only be afforded in instalments. The latest trend in this direction is furniture, sofas and chairs,
which people do not actually use that much but which add an air of prestige to a house.

All of this is reflected in the leisure available for villagers: while early week days are more in tune with the ideal, the working days become longer towards the weekend, until on Thursdays and Fridays – the days preceding the principal market days – the working hours climb up to an average of 8 hours per capita. And while on Mondays a great number of people can afford to cegu the entire day away, the size of the Naloto active work force increases as the week progresses, indicating not only the simple equation wherein increased needs equal increased work, but also the point that an unwillingness to labour for wage remuneration does not equate with an unwillingness to work at all. Gounis and Rutz (1986: 62) have described a revealing statistical oddity derived from a 1976 Census, where economic activity was measured on the basis of whether or not people aged 15 or more had “worked” before the week of Census. “Work” was defined in the census as “an activity concerned with providing the necessities of life for the person or his family or his household”, including “unpaid family workers” but excluding “unpaid home duties” with a result that portrayed virtually all males aged 15 years or older as “economically active” while showing inordinate differences in male and female “economic activity”. Gounis and Rutz also acknowledge the differing patterns of work and leisure typical of indigenous Fijian “work” (cakacaka) – a concept that does not differentiate between “labour” and other “work”, covering “virtually an aspect of all activities except “rest” (cegu)” (op. cit.: 73) – where work-intense periods alternate with resting.

The unkind ratio between the ample resources and limited needs in the village, on the one hand, and goods unavailable in the village, on the other, provides a different perspective on village life. Roughly a one-and-a-half-hour lorry ride north from Nausori town, or two from the capital, Naloto village lies just outside what is known as the Suva-Nausori corridor, Fiji’s main metropolitan area. Though the distance is short enough to permit frequent visits to town, without regular transport or a properly maintained road everyday work or even daily visits from the village to the urban centres are a practical impossibility. Particularly as the time spent on transport is easily tripled by that spent in transit: waiting for the village lorry in town, sitting at the back of the vehicle and waiting for it to depart back to the village, waiting in the village for the driver to wake up, and so forth. And then there are the transport expenses: a lorry ride to Suva – where most of the farmers sell their produce – costs F$ 4 per capita, one way, and some more for the produce: $2 for a bag of fish, $1–2 for a sack of vegetables, $50 for a dozen coconuts, $50 for a basket of cassava, and so forth. Furthermore, as there is only one lorry in the village, the villagers will have
to be back before the driver heads home from Nausori town: this often 
forces the villagers to sell their produce cheaper than people from other 
villages with easier transport arrangements in order to sell everything in time, 
or otherwise pay a taxi to the village (20–30 FJD, depending on the 
condition of the road). Thus in 2007–2008, a 40 FJD profit from a 
biweekly market expedition would have been considered an acceptable 
average.21

I could list yet other mismatches between the village ideology and 
reality. For example, the affluent villagers usually do not eat fruits – mangos, 
bananas, plantains, papayas – but rather take them to town for sale. 
Likewise, most of the highly valued taro is reserved for the market or for 
ceremonial use. People also reserve all the large crabs for the market, eating 
only the ones that are too small for selling. The same applies for fish too: 
only small and inferior-quality catches are commonly eaten in the village, 
everything else is frozen and taken to town. Even village-grown chickens 
often are sold in town, though people may bring back (cheaper) frozen 
chicken in exchange. Even the amounts of cassava, coconuts, clams and so 
forth that are taken to the Suva and Nausori markets every week is much 
greater than what people actually collect for subsistence purposes – and so is 
the time spent on their preparation.

Actually, it is quite typical for young men and young families to move 
out of the village proper in order to reach the level of income required for 
independent living or the upkeep of children. I do not refer to just urban 
employment, but the common practise of building a house nearby one’s farm 
land, on the clan lands rather than within the village proper. Particularly for 
clans whose lands are further away from the village this allows for more 
intensive working hours: getting up at sunrise, working hard in the cool 
morning hours before breakfast, not wasting time on getting to one’s farm. 
Living outside the village also means avoiding requests from neighbours. 
Some villagers also construct a second house, a “farming house” (vale ni 
teitei) or “bush house” (vale ni veikau) by their farms for more intensive 
farming periods, and others maintain their old houses for similar purpose 
after moving back into the village proper following a number of years out in 
“the bush”.

But even though people living out in the “bush” as well as people 
maintaining a separate farm house or those without one all acknowledge the 
increased amount of working time offered by a move beyond the village 
proper, the most commonly stated advantage of staying out “in the bush” is 
that one thereby avoids excessive yaqona drinking. Yaqona (kava, piper

21 In May–July 2007 villagers were further reporting diminishing returns for market 
produce, particularly crabs and fish sold to restaurants. In the absence of tourists and other 
overseas visitors, the prices were almost halved from their pre-coup level. Or so I was told.
methysticum) is, in addition to being arguably the most popular pastime in the village, also a mild sedative: references to yaqona drinking can thus be understood as an allusion to the unenterprising after-effects of the drink – the yaqona hangover. In short, though one does not get sick after drinking yaqona, the plant has a calming effect; it induces a sluggishness that often remains even after a good night’s sleep. Furthermore, the yaqona sessions – known as talanoa: “yarning”, “storytelling” – are an unhurried, social pastime, and therefore may easily lead well into the night. In this sense, kava consumption does have a labour-costly effect. But the generally acknowledged inability to avoid kava – the assumption that within the village, one will drink yaqona in excess – requires further explaining. In other words, the simple physiological or time-consumption-focused accounts fail to explain why people would have to move out in order to avoid kava (if indeed they do). The short answer here would be “peer pressure”, but pressure for what? Answering that forces me to make one final detour in this general introduction to life in Naloto village.

“SPOILING”

“Some people dream about a good job in town; others dream of getting respect by drinking yaqona” I was told by Akuila, a man in his early thirties, while we were discussing the dreams and career aspirations of Naloto villagers. As I understood it, he was not talking about the hierarchical arrangement that characterises the drinking event (see Toren 1988, 1990), even though the co-ordinates that indicate rank amongst the drinkers are by no means insignificant. Yet social hierarchy is, or is considered to be, a given: gender, seniority and ranked relations between clans are the key constituents of stratified relations in the village, even if there are other factors, too, that account for the seating order in the yaqona ring. Hence as an indicator of hierarchy, the yaqona drinking event relies on ascribed rank that is mainly external to the event itself; the seating order – wherein the senior men of chiefly clans sit at the “upper” end of the assembly and receive the first cups – cannot be affected by an individual’s efforts to any great degree (unless growing old counts). “Getting respect”, however, is a different matter.

The degree of formality in a yaqona session varies from ceremonial to mundane; the former is exemplified by funerals and welcoming ceremonies (sevusevu) for esteemed visitors, the latter by a session set up around a TV screen or an evening of “yarning” after a long day at the market place. As a matter of fact, one can find a group of men drinking yaqona in Naloto practically on any day of the week, on an average evening there are several coinciding small gatherings in a number of Naloto houses. These are low-
key affairs where news and gossip gets exchanged, or in the absence of any, old stories re-told to pass the time. Likewise, people enjoy the joking that goes on particularly between cross-cousins (veitavaleni); the stereotypical joke is acted out several times a night, wherein someone mentions the totemic animal or plant symbol of another’s clan, which counts as a reference to the genitalia of members of said clan, and hence calls for “punishment” – a large cup of yaqona filled to the brim. The sessions go on until the serving bowl (tanoa) is empty and no-one demands that more be mixed. Often the final hour or two of a yaqona session takes place in almost complete silence; everyone getting too drowsy for talking or having nothing to say, except maybe “please tell a story” (takanoa mada) directed at no-one in particular. People close their eyes and lean against the walls, some fall asleep, but most nevertheless remain in the circle facing each other until the drink is finished. And even after finally finishing off the yaqona, it is surprisingly common that men who have had nothing to say for the last hour or two decide to go and start another session in another house rather than go to sleep.

I have seen a lot of these sessions. Particularly in the early months of my fieldwork, it was not only considered the proper thing for me to do, but also the best way to get to know people, let others get to know me, learn the stories and conversations of the village, and get immersed in the language. In time I also developed a “repertoire” of stories that I was often requested to retell, and learnt the appropriate jokes, at least to a degree. After getting familiar with the standard schedule, I also learnt to politely ask for permission to leave (tatau) from the assembly by the time the conversation died down: permission to leave, or “release” as most villagers would translate it, is part of the formal etiquette of yaqona drinking. Not asking for release (stepping out and never returning) is considered “fleeing” (dro) and makes the fleer fair game for jokes afterwards. Finally, I also learnt about the peer pressure involved in drinking. After six months of fieldwork, upon my wife’s arrival in the village, I (further) cut down my participation in the mundane yaqona sessions, thereby causing a number of young(ish) men to tell both me and my wife that I used to be good company and hang out with the guys, but that her arrival made me abandon my mates.

For village-born men, particularly youths (cauravou), the pressure is much stronger. Take, for example, Akuila, a 33-year-old father of a six-month old baby, who was preparing his goods for the market when a group of young men walked up to his house demanding to buy yaqona from him. Knowing where this would lead, he tried to tell them that he had none, but failed because they had seen him drying yaqona roots previously. So the men produced 12 FJD and demanded to buy 12 bags, making Akuila pestle the entire amount for them. Once the task was finished, they told him to
produce a mixing bowl (tanoa) for a session: Akuila still tried to refuse, whereupon they told him they would drink their yaqona in his house anyway. As this was not acceptable to the owner of the house, he had no option but to host the group as demanded until the small hours.

Such coercion is quite common, and though particularly emphasised among young men, it occurs among women and old men as well: I have seen even a seventy-year-old clan chief (turaga ni mataqali), aching with fever, being pressured into the yaqona ring by his peers. But whereas “asking for release” is the polite way to exit a session – excepting the cases where “release” is not granted – for seniors, young men only rarely ask, and rather flee into the night (they are also more likely to not be allowed to leave). But even this is relatively rare for, as already stated, usually the session ends by common agreement and everyone leave together. Undoubtedly the main reason behind the prolonged yaqona sessions is enjoying the company; yet reputations also play a part – fear of being ridiculed for an early departure and, as some comments have led me to believe, a fear of being the object of gossiping behind one’s back.

Indeed, there is an undercurrent of jealousy or envy (qati) and rivalry (veiqati) in the village that is rarely mentioned but surfaces under particular circumstances. In this respect, as many villagers pointed out to me, yaqona is a particularly dangerous substance. Though the classic manifestation of witchcraft (vakadraunikau) in Fiji is drinking yaqona alone, several people pointed out that witchcraft is practised in groups as well. Sometimes, I was told, one can join a group drinking yaqona without knowing that they are practising witchcraft, and thereby become a part of the group – “we can only see what people show on the outside, we can never see what they hold on the inside”, as one of the younger men summed it up for me. For witchcraft is not only something a sorcerer does on purpose, it also arises from people’s envious thoughts and bad words: ancient villages like Naloto are said to contain old, pre-Christian spirits (tevoro) that are apt to seize the malignant words spoken by envious people. Yaqona, despite the high-frequency consumption in the village, maintains a very special status as a potent (mana) substance that is particularly associated with chiefly power (sau) and with the installation of chiefs in the past. There are a number of prohibitions which reflect this status; one should not, for example, drink yaqona in the dark or throw out the dregs after downing a cup – both are said to attract supernatural attention. Even the most casual of yaqona sessions, furthermore, observes a ceremonial protocol in which the session is opened

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22 Villagers’ attitudes to the tevoro are ambiguous. Most say that speaking of evil spirits or witchcraft is foolish and that no such things exist, but also that they have no proof of the non-existence of such phenomena either. Most villagers act as though they ought not to believe in such things, portraying such beliefs as backward and somewhat embarrassing.
and closed with formulaic utterances and motions; likewise, even the minimal protocol observed at these events contains a number of requirements that cannot be dropped even if they can be satisfied with lesser solemnity than at larger ceremonies (e.g. the cobo, hand clapping performed with cupped hands held crosswise, required every time before receiving a cup of yaqona\textsuperscript{23} cannot be dropped even among a handful of half-sleeping drinkers well past midnight, but can be abbreviated into clapping one’s thigh with one hand while accepting the drink with the other hand).

Instead of the supernatural aspects of kava drinking, however, I want to emphasise the necessity of participation that, particularly for the younger men, outweighs the generally-acknowledged ill effects of the drink — laziness, loss money, inability to perform one’s marital duties, and so forth.\textsuperscript{24} The emphasis on avoiding yaqona that was so pronounced among the reasons for moving out of the village proper thus refers to a concrete way of safeguarding against the effects of yaqona consumption. But there is more to it than that. The prolonged sessions where men sit facing each other in a circle well past the point where the conversation ends are also analogous to the levelling practised in the village. Thus even though the seating order of any yaqona event expresses the hierarchical model of Fijian social organisation, the event also concurrently enacts a situation where each participant can keep an eye on the others, make sure that everyone remains on a par.

I have already discussed patterns of time use in the village, so I content myself with highlighting the parallel here: just as collective trips to the farming lands tend to be more leisurely than trips conducted by oneself, everyone being more sensitive to others’ calls for relaxing, so the yaqona sessions also exert a pressure to prioritise communal sentiment over efficiency in time use. The talanoa is an apt symbol for the type of sociability preferred in the village. Not only does kava drinking combine the co-existing (or “mutually encompassing”, to borrow Toren’s [1994] analytical tools) ordering principles of hierarchy (expressed through the seating order on the horizontal axis) and equality (expressed through a prohibition to rise above the others on the vertical axis); they also depict the village sociability as particularly slow. Contrasting the yaqona drinking with Geertz’ (1964 [1960]: 12–15) description of the Javanese slametan

\textsuperscript{23} In some parts of Fiji it is often the custom for chiefs not to cobo before receiving their yaqona in Naloto they usually do.

\textsuperscript{24} There is a common Fijian custom of imposing a temporary prohibition on yaqona and cigarettes in native villages. During my fieldwork, a two-week veivakasavataki or purification period (includes more intensive praying, even vigils) was held in Ucunivanua village in Sept. 2007. Naloto held a four-week veivakasavataki in the previous year. Meanwhile some Christian denominations – in Naloto, namely the Pentecostal congregations – solve the problem by banning yaqona altogether.
highlights the difference: what the Javanese prayer and food event accomplishes over the course of minutes rather than hours—“nobody feels any different from anyone else and so they don’t want to split up”, as Geertz’ informant puts it (op.cit. 14) – the Fijians accomplish over a course of several hours; the Javanese use the earliest opportunity to request permission to leave whilst the Fijians, in the main, do not utilise the possibility at all, and so forth. And of course the key contrast: in the Javanese slametan, the spirits join in and partake in the food that is offered in the hope of keeping the spirits from upsetting people; in the Fijian yaqona events the spirits are drawn in by the drink but instead of partaking in it, they partake in people’s rivalries.

“They are envious of some things we get, some progress… Of getting ahead [toso i caka, lit. “moving up”]”, one of my Tunidau brothers explained to me the relationship between evil spirits (tevoro) and rivalry (veiqati). As he explained me, there is envy in the village, “bad competition” that makes people resort to witchcraft in order to “pull down” those who “move up”. This movement is not about hierarchy but prosperity, he assured me. I heard similar expressions from other younger men, too. Simione, a man in his late twenties, warned about his fellow villagers soon after my arrival in Naloto: “as soon as somebody accomplishes something in the village, the others try to pull you down […] if you are doing well, other people will try to bring you down”. Josefa, in his late thirties, first explained to me the village slang term “spoiling” in similar spatial terms:25

Do you know the meaning of “spoiling”? Do you know what we Fijians mean when we talk about spoiling? […] For example, if there’s a school of fish in the sea, we all run out there, but instead of trying to catch the fish, we make sure that someone else doesn’t catch them. If someone is about to catch some fish, all the others spoil him so he doesn’t catch anything… The same with girls: if there’s a girl in the village and one of the young men is about to get that girl, the others will spoil him […] whenever someone is about to accomplish something, the others will do everything they can to pull that one down to their level.

The Fiji-English concept of “spoiling” (sometimes translated as spoil-taka in Fijian) is, in other words, parallel in orientation to the English notion of levelling. It includes both the ideas of equalising and of evening out on the horizontal plane, and is thus consistent with the way hierarchy is

25 I had been wondering about the expression, particularly over the Christmas period, when a number of men were constantly joking about a Nausori shop’s advert: “spoil your wife this Christmas”.
conceptualised in Fiji: as a social differentiation expressed on the up (i cakε) – down (i ra) axis (see Toren 1990).

In a sense this chapter has proceeded a full circle from a relative absence of hierarchy to a relative absence of hierarchy. I have tried to show how the issue connects with the ideal village-based lifestyle: the land-based self-sufficiency that allows everyone the same basic necessities and the connected abundance of leisure that, like a proper Durkheimian social fact, turns out to have coercive power even over the visiting North European.

A piece of Naloto history that probably dates back to the nineties recounts an enterprising villager who, instead of settling for what he had acquired through fishing with an outboard engine, went on to expand his operations until he had obtained the right to use a land area from another clan and acquired livestock to the degree where he could no longer manage it all by himself, and so he brought in some relatives to work for him. These hired hands were happy for a while, but soon the villagers started making fun of them: “Are you slaves? Why are you sweating out for someone else?” And so they quit the job and the village, though apparently they had later expressed some regrets over having let go of a good deal.

What the story highlights is a phenomenon that one could deduce even just from the headings of academic articles on Fiji: “You can only do that ‘outside the village’” (Sloan 2005); “Farms, Suburbs or Retirement Homes? The Transformation of Village Fiji” (Overton 1993), and so forth. I find Overton’s notion of “retirement home” particularly appealing, as in Fijian retirement is glossed under “resting”. It also reflects the lifecycle pattern of residence in Fiji: it is particularly typical for young men to seek employment outside the village while the elderly are more likely to retire into the village after a career elsewhere; circumstances allowing, their by-then urban employed children would try to see to it that they do not have to work for their livelihoods by sending money and/or other necessities. But for the younger men who, for one reason or another, do not manage to leave the paradise that is the village, it may become a lot less ideal. As it was phrased to me by Mosese, who had returned to the village some years ago after a short, unsuccessful career in the capital: “this is the last place for us, the last place”.

THE SLEEPING VILLAGE

Ultimately Naloto village could even be regarded as a slow, motionless centre around which the movement and activity of absentee villagers revolves. Being a focal point not just for the 300 more or less permanent inhabitants of the village but also for the 700 Naloto villagers living outside the village, the village embodies something of the gravitas traditionally
pertaining to seniority in the Fijian social order. But it goes further than that: “the village sleeps”, I was told in critical tones by villagers living in the urban areas of Suva and Lautoka. The equalitarian “time wasting” at the village has progressed to a degree of levelling where no-one wants to stand apart from the village community; to lead, to initiate “developments”, to command or oversee others. The village is also “the last place” where strong levelling practises not only keep the acquisition of esteem and wealth in check but also safeguard against other types of deviation.

I will exemplify the last claim with a phenomenon the urbanites were most concerned about when they expressed their comments about the village being “asleep”: village development. “Development” (veivakatorotorotaki, or “moving up a level” as it was translated to me; people commonly use the English word “development” as well), in the village discourse, refers to communal projects such as village transport, water pump, sea wall, community hall and so forth – any common good the accomplishment of which requires a concerted effort from the extended village community. But “development” also means change. As one of the village seniors explained to me (in English) after an unsatisfactory village school committee meeting in September 2007: “with those people there’s no development, no progress. There should be some change.” And he meant this quite literally: a proper committee ought to bring about some tangible change, just as he had done in his time as the head of the committee. This is what “progress” means in Naloto – accomplishment. Although villagers commonly preferred the English word “progress”, the sometimes adopted Fijian equivalent is gugumatua which was once explained to me as: “working hard to lift your standard – if people do not work hard, there is no progress”. (The closest equivalent in Capell’s Fijian Dictionary is gumatua: “energetic, strenuous, in earnest”.) Progress thus appears to agree with the speed and verve that is predominantly found outside the village.

Such was, at least, the gist of a number of sermons delivered in the Naloto Methodist church over the course of my fieldwork. On New Year’s Eve 2007, for example, the core message was that though the year may change, in truth there are no new things (ka vou), everything already exists as it was given to us by God. On that occasion, one of the speakers chose to concentrate specifically on developments: too much development leads to

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26 In Naloto village the Methodist Church and the traditional social organisation (vanua) are definitely complementary rather than competing institutions – unlike for example in Kadavu (see Tomlinson 2009). Hence the Methodist sermons (vanua: lit. “to admonish”, “harangue” [Capell]) can be considered as expressions of the same dominant discourse that occurs more freely over the yagona sessions, too. Villagers consider the Roman Catholic Church as part of the traditional order, too, whereas what they designate as “the new churches” – namely Pentecostals and Adventists – are regarded in contrast to tradition.
rapid change and people forget spiritual matters – as has already happened in many foreign countries. Development must come gradually, little by little, for spiritual matters are always more important. Likewise, the preachers at the first Sunday Service of the new year continued on the same subject: “We are living in fast times”, the first speaker stated, “boats, letters and the rest have been replaced with mobile phones, aeroplanes and other machines […].” In these hard times people easily forget their Christianity and spiritual matters [ka vakayalo] – kinship and affection – when development and engines speed up our lives. […] Quick development leaves a man empty (lala); we should remember that in reality, there are no new things.” (The next preacher, a visiting urbanite, continued on development, but with a different emphasis: like St. Peter, whose faith was not enough for walking on water, so is it with developments – many developments fail because their executors lack conviction.) At the Easter Service, a retired spokesman of the Naloto Methodist Church took a more general approach, stating that “everything has already been done”, “all things are ancient” and that “there are no more new things in the world” but also that nothing needs to be feared, because the death of Christ has “slowed down” (or “softened” – malumutaka) everything, while the following sermon took the idea to its logical conclusion: “this service is old, it is given again every year.” This, then, is how the previously-discussed value of rest or inertia mounts pressure on its counterpart – speed, hard work, progress or development: the juxtaposition is illustrated in a plea made by one of the former school committee heads at a school board meeting: “please do not wait like we did last year, do not slow down [or ‘soften’] our advance [or ‘rise up’]” (“kua ni vakamalumutaka na noda toso”).

Compare this with the aspirations of the urban Nalotans. For example Adru, a man in his early forties working in a management-level position, bluntly stated that the difference between the village and town is that in the village people drink yaqona every day and consequently cannot work like those in town. Adru’s plan was to one day rent land from the village and raise livestock for commercial use. Similarly Peni, who had worked in Suva for a couple of years but lacked the qualifications that would allow him a promotion, explained his plans: “I will look for three more years. If by then, I have not moved ahead [toso i cake], I will move back to the village, rent some land and raise livestock for business.” Both of the two openly admitted planning the type of individual achievements that, according to the speaker quoted previously, single one out for envy and witchcraft: “They are envious of some things we get, some progress… Of getting ahead.” But then, both of the quoted urbanites were permanently living in town; in the village I have never heard anyone admitting such dreams or aspirations.
However, the collectively beneficial and collectively accomplished developments that take the entire community “up a level” are also always someone’s accomplishments, which is to say that they are always ascribed to someone. For example, the chief in a neighbouring village was much admired in Naloto for aspiring to get flushing toilets for his entire village in the foreseeable future. In Naloto, the school committee appeared to be where some of the most notable developments have been won, though at the cost of increasing rivalries. For example Mesake, a clan chief and former priest, boasted a fine run at the school committee, having accomplished a generator, copying machine, dining hall and repairs to the teachers’ accommodations, in addition to other developments such as repairs to the Methodist church roof and new water tanks. However, he said that he had quit the committees because his accomplishments had brought people’s envy down on him.

During the year I spent in Naloto, there was recurrent talk about potential developments in the village. Typically, though, this talk was not spurred by urgent need as much as a general willingness to attain development – any development: “there should be some change”. The discussion following the official part of a village meeting in March 2008, for example, covered the subjects of getting a bus service to the village, buying a truck for the village community, buying a spare pump for the borehole, building a sea wall round the village, building a village dispensary, repairing the teachers’ quarters by the school, repairing the Methodist pastor’s house, and many, many others. The villagers were “testing” the feasibility of various developments, or so it appeared to me. As with other similar discussions before, the notion I got from the meeting was that there was no particular urgency attached to any single one of these projects, nor did they try to prioritise the developments: rather, any one would have sufficed to keep the village “going forward” (toso i cake) if one would have emerged as more easily accomplishable than the others. Attaining development is, in other words, more important than the nature of the particular project that gets undertaken – or maybe the village is in need of so many things that one does not rise above another, if you want to look at it that way.

But why do the developments go unrealised? Lack of funds is the obvious answer; after all, “there is no money in the village” as everybody knows. Yet there is money without. For example Marika, a Naloto villager working for a top-end hotel on the west coast of Viti Levu, considers his village obligations a positive thing – it is good that the village “remembers” its emigrant citizens whenever there is a fundraiser. He says the kinship relations are always “heavier” than relations between neighbours or colleagues, and that giving for the village is the proper thing to do because “we earn a lot, they earn little”. That is to say, in town everybody earns money – “we are similar”, in Marika’s words – whilst villagers do not earn
money, they are different. In return for providing money, I was explained by a number of urban Naloto villagers, the urban villagers get the chiefly protection or “blessing” (taqomaka).

NALOTO VILLAGE: DEVELOPING THE GENERAL ARGUMENT

The description above contains the set of issues that I will explore in the subsequent chapters. To briefly summarise: the village lands provide a livelihood for everyone, and the bare-necessities lifestyle that is available for everyone is regarded as the ideal way to live – living off the land and eating what the ancestors supposedly also ate is even compared to Paradise. But this ideal also sets a standard from which it is not easy to diverge. Not only are everyone’s needs considered the same, so are also the means available. In this respect, every villager is truly on equal footing with the others, “equal” here referring to a particular brand of equality which Bryan Turner (cited in Robbins 1994: 33–37) labels “equality of condition”. In other words, the equality practised in Naloto is rooted in the idea that everyone starts from the same conditions, has equal means at his (or her) disposal. But as Robbins (1994: 34) points out, equality of condition cannot be fully distinguished from the “equality of outcome”, which is to say “the equality of levelling, of making people actually equal in concrete terms [is] the type of equality that most forcefully flies in the face of individualist ideals of liberty as the right to differ” (op. cit. 33). In the article Robbins sets out to portray the way in which these facets of equality have been severely downplayed in western individualist discourse, and in order to prove the point he provides comparative examples of Melanesian equality from Papua New Guinea, where the emphasis on equality has led to configurations wherein social hierarchy becomes a negative phenomenon: ultimately power turns socially unacceptable, bad.

This, however, is where the New Guinea articulations of power differ significantly from the Fijian ones, for in spite of all my evidence for the contrary, Naloto village, too, remains a chiefly society in the sense that hierarchy – as an abstract idea – is highly approved of and high status considered a virtue possessed by the chiefs. Even though public criticism of chieftaincy appears to have increased in Fijian media over the years, respect and gratefulness for the chiefs remains one of the cornerstones of established Fijian tradition. This is also how things stand in Naloto village, where people stressed to me the importance of chieftaincy – “human rights don’t belong in the village where you are supposed to act reverently [rokovi] instead”, as it was put to me by Semisi, a 56-year old Mataqali Kai Naloto man. In a similar vein, people were quick to condemn “democracy”, too, because it does not agree with chiefly rule and is therefore not in tune with
the *itovotovo vakavanua* – traditional customs. But more importantly, villagers were proud and happy when one of the ranking seniors would come and preside over a ceremony, even a minor one.\(^{27}\) In other words, it is not the chieftaincy in itself that is brought into question; rather, it is finding an incumbent who is sufficiently above his peers to invoke reverence, on the hand, or an incumbent who is willing to act the chief – preside, that is – on the other. (And there is even an easy solution for the latter problem: whenever an incumbent – the *Komai Naloto* or *Na Tunidau* – does not take the chief’s place, one of his brothers or peers acts as his stand-in, assuming the title, the position of rank, and drinking the first cup. A ceremonial stand-in does not, however, require the chiefly respect an established chief is due outside the ceremonial events, too.)

Rank, in a sense, becomes a question of distinction. Not, however, distinction of the often-cited Bourdieuan type, wherein reputations are made by subtleties in the realms of taste. Rather, what is required is the assignment of a differentiating attribute, something that has the ability to set some apart from the village community at large. The two valid registers of differentiation that come to mind are seniority and gender: the first a gradual difference, the second (practically) a binary one, but what these two have in common is that both apply to all. (The hierarchies they mark are also, in comparison to ethnographic data from other part of Fiji, weak in Naloto.) But I have also touched upon two other relevant sets in this chapter, both of which take the form of complementary dichotomies. The urban–rural dichotomy – “we are similar”, “they are different” in Marika’s words (above) – will be further discussed towards the end of this book. The other – the division into “land” and “sea” people – has, in terms of rank and authority, a more direct bearing on the discussion at hand.

Though now predominantly regarded as a “professional” differentiation into fishermen and farmers, the land–sea dichotomy also incorporates the division into land-owning firstcomers or even autochthones, on the one hand, and latecomers or landless foreigners, on the other. As such, it corresponds to a well-document pattern in Fijian political organisation, according to which the chiefs, too, “came from overseas: it is so in all countries in Fiji”, as one of A. M. Hocart’s informants from the Lau group put it (Hocart 1929: 27). Though perhaps not quite as universal as once presumed in the Lau islands, the prevalence of foreign origin among

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\(^{27}\) The simplest form of adding a chiefly air to an event is simply turning up to show support to an enterprise such as house building. As Tevita, a 68-year-old clan chief, put it, “It is our custom. Whenever someone in the village is building a new house, especially some important person, we should go over there to sit and watch them build the house and say ‘*vinaka, vinaka*’ [thank you, thank you] to show our support.” More often, the chiefs preside over a bowl of *yaqona* while junior men work.
Fijian chiefs was noted, for example, by the administrator-ethnographer A. B. Brewster’s (aka A. B. Joske) as well, and later put forth as the organising principle of Fijian politics by Marshall Sahlins (Brewster 1922; Sahlins 1976, 1985, 1994a, 2004). To wield the kind of power ascribed to the Fijian high chiefs, so his general argument goes, one has to be radically different from those ruled over; hence foreign origin becomes – like in so many other parts of Oceania – a symbol of prestige and authority (Sahlins 1994).

In Naloto, however, the village paramount is one of the autochthones and a land owner, just as the Naloto fishermen are land owners and “original” settlers of the area. This, as I will argue over the following chapters, portrays a move away from complementary relations between dissimilar people, towards a state of similarity or, to borrow Petra Autio’s (2010) terminology, “undifferentiation”. Autio uses the term to emphasise the fact that, just like equality is a social construct, so the absence of social differentiation should not be taken for a naturally occurring phenomenon but rather a construct people make themselves (see also Forge 1972). It does not even have to be a conscious choice: Naloto villagers, for example, are committed to the chieftaincy as the ultimate expression of following “the way of the land”. In many ways, the line of inquiry adopted here goes against the received opinions of the villagers themselves, and in order to argue the case, I will have to extend my focus all the way from the value expressed in symbols to that of the value used in exchange practises, to finally justify my claim of a cosmology of value that at surface differs both from the expressed opinions of the people I have been working with and the received constructions of Fijian ethnography. In order to foreground the “register” within which this shift becomes so meaningful, I start with the latter.
THE LAND–SEA DICHTOMY

The nature therefore of relation consists in the referring or comparing two things one to another; from which comparison one of both comes to be denominated. And if either of those things be removed, or cease to be, the relation ceases, and the denomination consequent to it (John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, Volume I, XXV: 5).

INTRODUCTION: THE ORIGINALS

“We have always been here, we were the first! The originals [laughs], the originals”, I was told by Josefa, a 35-year-old married man of the sea moiety in an English-language discussion that took place soon after I had arrived in the village. Josefa was drunk on rum and insisted on entertaining a company of young men gathered around a bowl of yaqona by explaining village matters to the newly-arrived foreigner. “What about the people on the other side [of the village], where do they come from?” I asked. “Everyone was always here”, he explained and continued: “We are the originals, we have always been here, and we’ll be here till we… Sa! [an exclamation expressing disapproval or disgust]”. He was not, it should be made clear, trying to assert his own kin group’s firstness vis-à-vis the others: he was talking about the Verata chiefdom in general and portraying the Veratans as the first-comers regardless of land or sea designations. The assertion about originality was made with reference to a well-known myth accounting for the origin of all Fijians, according to which the chiefdom of Verata was Fiji’s first kingdom, founded by the original settlers of the Fiji group. The division into “land people” (*kai vanua*) and “sea people” (*kai wai*) was already there amongst the group of first-comers, as a specialisation into sailors and passengers that was eternalised by a pact between the first king of Fiji, Rokomoutu, and his classificatory older brother, chief of the sea people, Ramasi:

when they arrived at Verata, Rokomoutu asked Ramasi if they could have a bowl of *yaqona* to thank him for sailing them safely through the rough oceans. So they prepared the *yaqona*, but there was no cup. So Rokomoutu asked Ramasi: ‘you drink first, because you’re older than me’. Ramasi replied: ‘No, I cannot drink it, you drink the *yaqona* first.’ But Rokomoutu insisted: ‘Oh, this is just to express our thanks to you for protecting us from the high seas.’
They kept on arguing like that, until finally Ramasi bent over to drink the \textit{yaqona} inside the \textit{tanoa} (serving bowl) without using a cup. While he was doing that, Rokomoutu knew our land, Verata, will be lead and looked after by these \textit{kai wai} people. ‘This is not good’, he thought, and so he pressed Ramasi’s head right in to the \textit{tanoa}.

Ramasi cleaned his face with his hand and said: ‘What have you done? This is shameful, you shouldn’t have done this. You asked me, I told you to drink first but you told me to drink first. But when I was drinking, you pressed my head down. Why?’ Rokomoutu didn’t say anything. He was ashamed. And so Ramasi told Rokomoutu: ‘From now on, we’ll share this \textit{tanoa}. Inside it’s water; outside it’s land. I will look after the sea, you look after the land. Whatever is found in the sea is mine; islands and everything out of the sea, out of Verata is mine. Yours will be the land round here.’

So he left Verata then, that chief. All areas around Fiji where he settled, the chiefs were named Ramasi. They call them Ramasi, \textit{kai wai}, \textit{tui wai}, \textit{tunidau}. That was the story. (Abbreviated from an English-language narration by a sea moiety clan elder recorded in July 2007)

The story contains many details worth noting: first, of course, that in this narration the Verata paramount is a landsman to begin with, relinquishing all claims to the marine realm to the sea people. Secondly, that in this account, the leader of the sea people is senior to the high chief and in addition to that, allowed the first cup of kava, thereby symbolically also assuming the paramountcy – though this has no bearing on Naloto village, where the sea people are in no competition with the paramount chief. Thirdly, paying attention to detail, the metaphorical use of the kava bowl, \textit{tanoa}, turns the roles of the land and the sea around: the sea is the centre and on the inside while land is peripheral and on the outside. Not just that, though; the land is here portrayed as encompassing the sea rather than vice versa.

More importantly, though, the story lays out the common understanding of the sea people’s shared origin with the land people while justifying the prevalent view of the \textit{kai wai} as fishermen and marines, in contrast to the land people as farmers and warriors. Furthermore, the sea people all over Fiji are, according to this rendition, led by the descendants of Ramasi, hence known as \textit{kai wai} (“people from the sea”), \textit{tui wai} (“king of the sea”) or \textit{tunidau} (“title of honour in mataqali turaga […] chief of clan of fishermen” [Capell 2003, entry for \textit{tū} 2]). The last one is also both the name of the chiefly clan in Naloto’s sea moiety and the title born by the
chief of the Naloto sea people. In other words, the sea people all over Fiji are, according to the Naloto myth, descendants of a common stock who arrived in Fiji together with the chiefs and people of the land – both groups are equally “original” to the place.

The Naloto sea people express this distinction in their traditional role as the Verata paramount’s ceremonial fishermen, whom the high chief sends for when he requires fish, and who work together with Qoma islanders should the high chief require turtle. The paramount, however, has not called upon his fishermen is such a long time that only one old man from the sea moiety actually remembers an occasion from his childhood when the Naloto fishermen took fish to the paramount village. Moreover, turtle fishing is now prohibited, and the Verata paramount upholds the prohibition. The sea people are less keen to uphold the corresponding role within Naloto village: members of the Kai Naloto clan in particular have made it clear that the sea people’s duty is to provide them with fish, which the landsmen would be willing to reciprocate in the traditional manner with a prestigious whale tooth. The matter is also the subject of occasional joking between the two groups, always phrased as a request for fish from the land people and never reciprocated with demands for pork, the land people’s ceremonial food. “If we don’t get fish, then you don’t get women!”, a group of land moiety men once jokingly admonished men of the sea moiety after a village meeting, but the joke contained a reminder: they make the demands, they hold the upper hand.

The difference between the groups is typically expressed in terms of specialisation: during my fieldwork, the land people were very unsatisfied by the fact that the sea people preferred farming over fishing. Usually this complaint was addressed to me during conversations where no sea people were present, but occasionally the criticism was directed to the sea moiety members face to face, such as a village meeting held after the Komai Naloto had vetoed the Verata paramount’s plan to place a temporary ban on fishing in the Naloto waters. On that occasion, the message was clear: why should the land people bother maintaining the reef for fishermen who hardly ever fish there any more. These accusations, too, were always one-sided: the sea people never complained about land people making frequent use of the marine resources. The sea people were considered proficient fishermen in the general opinion – their own and that of the land clans – which was typically expressed through praising some sea moiety member’s fishing skills, even when the person in question was neither a practicing fisherman nor in possession of a boat. But even these sentiments were more typically expressed in stories utilising the past tense, thereby highlighting the discourse of decline that characterises allusions to land–sea relations in the village: “the father of so-and-so was truly a great fisherman”, or in the
recollection of a forty year-old Kai Naloto man: “when Petero was still alive, I requested some fish from him for a funeral in Vugalei, and you should have seen the catch he brought; they [the land-dwelling bati] were astonished, they had never seen such fish”.

The emphasis on a timeless division of labour founded on shared origin is in contrast with earlier Fiji ethnography, especially with regard to the eastern chiefdoms of Fiji – Verata among these – where hierarchy has been discussed mainly as the consequence of a fundamental difference between two kinds of people, a difference that goes well beyond specialisation. In the established view on the dichotomy, the “land” side stands for local or even autochthonous origin so that history does not begin at the arrival of a group of settlers. The land people are indigenous to a place whilst the sea people, particularly chiefs, are regarded latecomers and foreigners whose alterity makes them special, in pre-colonial times arguably even divine. Hence even though the division into “land” and “sea” is practised in present-day Naloto, too, its significance differs remarkably from that reported for other times and places in Fiji. The semantic categories of “land” and “sea” appear re-valued in comparison to the general view emerging from an ethnographic tradition exemplified, in different yet related ways, in the work of A.M. Hocart (1924, 1929, 1970 [1936]), Martha Kaplan (1988, 1995, 2004), Marshall Sahlins (1976, 1985, 1994a, 2004) and Christina Toren (1988, 1990, 1994).

Then again Naloto is unique and has a history that differs from any point of comparison. Crucially, the sea people’s history in the village is relatively short, dating back no more than a hundred years in contrast to places where the dichotomy extends beyond known history into mythical accounts. Historically, Nalotans also have a point to make by emphasising their indigeneity to the place: Naloto was the stronghold of the Verata chiefdom in the 19th century when, unlike the paramount village, it withstood the Bauan army led by Cakobau – Naloto village is, as its citizens like to point out, “an ancient village”, even more so than their chiefly neighbours. Yet the Verata paramount’s retreat into Naloto in 1850, when the chiefly village was burnt to the ground, was a humiliation to all Veratans, including Nalotans. Indeed, they still take the blame for their failure to defend the chiefly house of Sanokonoko, and some even assume the sea people were brought into Naloto because back in 1850, the village lacked people who could fight out at sea. To draw another lesson from 1850, the humiliation of Verata was caused by the junior lineage from Bau, and Nalotans often express a sense of decline that is attributed to their defeat in the 19th-century wars. “Imagine how easy life would be if Korovou was still ours”, I once heard villagers wistfully thinking about a world that could have been, implying that the inaccessible urban wealth would be
within reach if the small town of Korovou was encompassed by Verata. Indeed, there is a discourse of loss and decline in Naloto that corresponds to that described in Kadavu by Tomlinson (2009): people are diminishing in size, chiefs are diminishing in stature, tradition is getting corrupted and life becoming harder. But one does not experience the sense of juxtaposition between past traditions and Christianity reported in Kadavu. In Nalotan discourse, the decline is attributed to inferior food, overindulgence of kava and most of all, money. Christianity’s detrimental effect to the mana of Fijian chiefs obviously applies to Naloto chiefs as well, yet the juxtaposition is downplayed in Naloto, where Methodism and Roman Catholicism are regarded as cornerstones of a tradition encroached upon by the “new” Christian denominations (Pentecostalism, Adventism, New Methodism). As a matter of fact, while the decline of Verata is today attributed to the 19th-century exploits of Cakobau, his champion Charles Savage and the rest of the Bauan army, it is also a known fact that without the Methodist missionary James Calvert, who pleaded to Cakobau on the Veratans’ behalf, the Bauans would have added injury to insult instead of sparing Naloto.

“Verata, Fijians say, is a ‘kingdom of [the] blood’ (matanitū ni dra), by invidious contrast to Bau, the notorious ‘kingdom of force’ (matanitū ni kaukauwa). [...] The Bau kingship is the inverted image of Fijian royal legitimacy, a lineage of dubious and inferior descent that usurps the daughters of the ancient Fijian nobility”, as Marshall Sahlins (2004: 67–68) sums up the difference between the Bau and Verata chieftaincies. From such a point of view, an emphasis on “originality” among Naloto Veratans can be regarded as the counterpart to the alterity of foreign origin. However, in most renditions of the pre-colonial dynasties of central-eastern Fiji, Verata was also represented as the seat of the senior lineage among the foreign-affiliated chiefly houses: the one that Bau needed to humiliate, repeatedly, to establish the “upstart” kingdom’s superiority. This theme survives in Verata, where the deposed elder is a recurring trope.28

But even central and eastern Fiji provide a very partial generalisation of Fiji. Up until the latter half of the 19th century, the eastern parts of the archipelago were in particularly frequent contact with Tongans, whose influence waned only after the British consul made Ma’afu, the highest-ranking Tongan chief in Fiji, waive all Tongan claims in Fiji in anticipation of the Deed of Cession (Derrick 2001 [1949: 143; Seemann 1862: 250–251]). But while the supply of these strangers diminished in east Fiji, the British colonial administration brought in a new set of strangers: South

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28 It would, furthermore, be interesting to trace the trope beyond Fiji – is there, for example, a connection between Verata and the warrior of Vaerotā that the Ma'u'ke culture hero overcomes and whose wife he marries in order to establish himself in the Cook Islands (Siikala 1991: 64–69)?
Asian indentured labourers, the majority of whose descendants now live in the western coastal areas of Viti Levu and Vanua Levu islands, the areas also know as Fiji’s Sugar Belt. While the situation in western Fiji may be very different, in the mono-ethnic village community of Naloto, it is the Indo-Fijian population who often act as the referential “strangers” vis-à-vis the indigenous population.

Of course, many of the Naloto singularities outlined above could also be explained on more conventional grounds. The unpractised division into indigenes and foreigners could just as well be explained with the local strangers becoming unstrange over time simply by living together as neighbours. The two immigrant sea clans have intermarried regularly with the other Naloto clans and consequently it makes more sense to emphasise the groups “occupational” rather than migratory distinctiveness? And perhaps there simply is not enough fish in the Naloto waters to keep fishing sustainable anymore, as many of the younger men claim. Or maybe, as others insist, it is not the fishing that is the problem but the means: Nalotan fishermen lack the money for fiberglass boats and outboard engines, which they say are crucial for reaching their traditional reef where the fish are more abundant. Finally, it could also be the case that while the fish that Nalotans – verifiably – catch is put into freezers to wait for the next market day, the traditional reciprocities in perishable goods are no longer appealing to the fishermen? But then why assume these models ought to have existed in Naloto in the first place?

Indeed, it looks as though parallel changes have been occurring elsewhere in Fiji as well, and for quite some time. Sahlins’ comparative testimony from 1950s Moala – before he turned his attention to historical sources – is revealing: Sahlins (1962: 298–300) states that the customary practices corresponding with the land and sea classifications were not actually followed, which leaves him treating the opposition as “an ideological remnant of an ancient moiety division” that “has few functions at present” (Sahlins 1962: 298–300). Christina Toren (1994) for her part expresses some doubts over whether the people of Gau island ever actually lived up to the prescribed models of land and sea as far as chiefly installations are concerned. But she has also documented an observable “push for equality” or diminishment of structural hierarchies that affects entire age groups (e.g. Toren 1993: 151–154), as well as coinciding decrease in traditional reciprocities (Toren 2007a) that are indicative of wider changes in progress.

Within the general argument presented in this study, the aim of this chapter is consequently twofold: to offer a necessary overview of the research tradition that underlies my own work, but also to provide the comparative material against which the Naloto divergence becomes significant over the
following chapters. This chapter consequently also sets out to show that the use of certain key motifs and their analogical dimensions extends throughout Fiji, even though the practical sociocultural configurations in which they figure vary a great deal within the island group. There is no “typical Fijian village” as such, and I do not wish to treat Naloto as such either. Indeed, from a Lau islands perspective the Naloto practices discussed over the following chapters would even appear “un-Fijian”. All in all, the various contradictions embodied by the village make Naloto a unique case: Naloto not only combines the tropes of seniority and indigenous legitimacy with that of foreign chiefs as part of the Verata chiefdom, the same pattern is inscribed on the map of Naloto, too, where the chief comes from the land moiety whilst the small amount of land held by his kin group stands for a model where chiefs are landless strangers. The land people want the sea people to act like sea people but the sea people are reluctant to do so. The village is affluent in land but lacks other necessities of life, and so on. But all these particularities do not rule out the possibility that the Nalotan conjuncture is exceptionally well-suited for highlighting a value shift “smuggled in”, as it were, within widely-recognised cultural categories. This does not necessarily imply that this shift would take an identical shape elsewhere in Fiji, particularly as the categories themselves deviate a great deal throughout the island group, as they have always done.

PEOPLE OF THE SEA: THE DICHOTOMY IN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Whether or not “Fijian culture” was objectified into a “custom” before European discovery of the islands (Sahlins 1993; Thomas 1992, 1993), it appears that the relations between Fijians and people from the neighbouring island groups did follow a structural pattern that at least recognised the separate island groups – rather than their constituent chiefdoms – as existing entities prior to European contact. As Adrienne Kaeppler (1978) has shown, the island groups of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa formed a triangle within which people and things were exchanged following an established pattern: Fiji and Samoa, in Kaeppler’s model, were “spouse givers” to Tonga in a system where goods (fine mats, hardwood, red feathers, whale teeth etc.) were also exchanged through a similar “Tonga-centric” pattern (see also Derrick 2001 [1946]: 120; Beaglehole 1974: 548, 352n, 540n). The existence of such a system was also attested by Reverend Williams in Fiji in the mid-19th century:

For nearly one hundred years past the Friendly Islanders have traded with Fiji. The scarlet feathers of a beautiful paroquet were a leading

29 Simonne Pauwels, personal communication.
attraction. These birds abounded in one part of Taviuni, where they were caught by nets, and purchased by the Tongans, who traded with them in exchange for the fine mats of the Samoans. [...] The inhabitants of the Friendly Islands still depend on Fiji for their canoes, spars, sail-mats, pottery, and mosquito curtains. They also consume large quantities of Fijian sinnet and food, bringing in exchange whales’ teeth, the same made into necklaces, inlaid clubs, small white cowries, Tonga cloth, axes, and muskets, together with the loan of their canoes and crews, and, too often, their services in war. (Williams 1985 [1858]: 94)

Williams, in short, describes the entry of foreign prestige items, paraphernalia and allies into Fijian circulation. Yet by viewing the Tongans in Fiji merely as sailors and mercenaries, Williams failed to see a more fundamental significance in the inter-island relationships. If one looks at the role of Fijians, Samoans, Rotumans or Tokelauans (or the descendants of the aforementioned) in Tonga, where they served a function of “marking chieflyness proxemically, through an exotic intimacy with the king” (Biersack 1990: 84; see also Kaeppler 1978: 247), or at the Tongan practise of sending young men of chiefly families with their retinues to Fiji for a number of years before assuming their place among Tongan nobility (Spurway 2002: 17), one should be able to appreciate the political value of inter-island connections that goes beyond just military activity. A similar pattern is apparent for Fiji, too, in the use of foreigners as “proxemical” markers of chiefly taboos, exemplified by the custom of using Tongans for handling chiefly bodies in funerals (Williams 1985: 197), the “manila man” and Tahitians in the service of Cokanauto of Rewa (Erskine 1967: 461), the “six or seven Manila men” serving as bodyguards to visiting Bau chiefs witnessed by William Cary (n.d. 32–33), the Hawaiian “Oahu Sam” serving Vedovi of Rewa (Wilkes 1985) and, of course, the numerous Europeans and Americans who entered the Fijian chiefs’ sevice (e.g. Erskine 1967: 273), often as personal attendants to the tabooed chiefs. A. M. Hocart, in the 1930s, went far enough to state that even specialisation in crafts is due to the same principle.

All men do the same manual work. Here and there, it is true, among the bigger tribes, are to be found clans which look like specialists in some manual accomplishment: there are clans of carpenters, clans of fishermen, clans of navigators. But, in the first place, they are not an integral part of Fijian society; they do not belong to the original scheme of things, never being natives of the tribe, but foreigners attached to it. They have always come from elsewhere, it may be as
As Marshall Sahlins has shown, the principle whereby foreigners were attached to the chiefs, applied to objects, too. “The great chiefs of Eastern Fiji have for a long time cloaked themselves in Tongan guises, which is also to say in cosmic forms of prestige.” (Sahlins 1994a: 76) Sahlins goes to show that not only were foreign-origin items considered so prestigious that the chiefs surrounded themselves with Tongan things; the connection was so strong that the things surrounding the chiefs were also considered to be of foreign origin even in cases where the parentage cannot be proved (such as the whale teeth discussed in detail in chapter five). Indeed, as Sahlins has pointed out (ibid., see also 1983), the chiefs, too, were considered to be of foreign origin – whether from Tonga or from the sky, their power was legitimised through the fact that they were fundamentally different from the people they ruled over: “a different kind of people” (*kai tani* – the expression also translates as “people from elsewhere”).

The pairing of chiefly power with foreign origin is evident in the origin myths of numerous chiefly lineages. Take the colonial administrator-ethnographer A. B. Brewster’s (aka A. B. Joske) testimony, for example: “By the year 1895 I had collected the genealogies of most of the leading hill tribes of Viti Levu. In almost every one of them the then occupant of the chieftaincy was the ninth in descent from the first known ancestor, who in every case was a light-coloured stranger.” (Brewster 1922: 79) Brewster’s account of the origin of the Noikoro chiefs in Navosa, interior Viti Levu is a prime example:

A handsome, fair-skinned stranger, victim of an accident at sea, is befriended by a shark who carries him ashore on the south coast of Viti Levu. The stranger wanders into the interior where he is taken in by a local chieftain, whose daughter he eventually marries. From this union springs the line of Noikoro ruling chiefs (A. B. Brewster, “The chronicles of the Noikoro tribe”, quoted in Sahlins 1985: 79).

As Sahlins has summed it up on numerous occasions (e.g. 1983, 1985: 73–103, 2004: 227–230), the chiefly dynasties appear to have been founded through the union of a stranger-prince and the daughter of the indigenous ruler (see also Toren 1988: 710–712, cf. Toren 1994). The chiefs “came

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30 Even the contested issue of cannibalism reflects this idea of power as an “inhumane” outsider. The 19th-century Fijians sometimes said the practise of cannibalism had been taught to them by the Tongans, whereas the Tongans stated it had originated with the Fijians (e.g. Brewster 1922: 73; see also Mariner 1979 [1827]).
from overseas: it is so in all countries in Fiji”, A. M. Hocart (1929: 27) sums up the issue. Indeed, following Hocart’s reasoning, foreign origin was closely linked not only with political authority, but with notions of divinity, too. Hence his translation of the Fijian word for “guest” — *vulagi* — as “heavenly god” (from *vu*: “origin”, “root” or “ancestor-god”, and *lagi*: “heaven”) exemplifies a more general Polynesian cosmology which connects the foreign and unprecedented with the impressive, superior and potent (see Sahlins 1985: 30–31; 1994b: 75–80).

The by now “classic” model of Fijian chieftaincy is, in other words, based on the domestication of foreign *mana*: the voyaging stranger becomes the founder of an indigenous lineage, but one that remains “foreign” vis-à-vis the autochthonous people following him. Compare the Fijian model with the Tongan one, for example: in Tonga, the highest titles originate — celestial parentage notwithstanding — from Tonga. That is, in order to be eligible for a particular title, one must be of a “pure” indigenous lineage. This makes it possible to systematically “marry off” the (hierarchically superior) older sisters of Tongan chiefs to “outsiders” — Fijians — in order to avoid a situation where a chief’s paternal cross-cousins outrank the leader:

A male chief’s children would be outranked by his sister’s children, and although this does not matter at most levels, it does matter at the top of the scale. This was remedied by marriage of the highest chief’s sister (Tu’i Tonga Fefine) to a Fijian. Because of the patrilineal emphasis (within the essentially bilateral Tongan system), the children of the Tu’i Tonga Fefine and her Fijian husband would belong to a Fijian line and therefore would not have to be taken into account in the power structure of the purely Tongan lines (although these children were of higher rank individually to the Tu’i Tonga himself). This system was institutionalized in that the Fale Fisi, or Fijian ‘house’ that derived from these marriages, became a recognised part of the Tongan societal structure. (Kaeppler 1978: 247)

It might seem that I have just gone a full circle from Aletta Biersack’s Fijians whose role it was to “mark chiefliness proxemically” in Tonga (Biersack 1990: 84, quoted above) to Kaeppler’s Fale Fisi, who are described as a structural vent; an exit option of sorts from the politics of chiefly succession. But consider for a while the two variations on a theme: foreigners (Tongans) in Fiji and foreigners (Fijians) in Tonga. What emerges from both models is foreign origin as a value, only one which is employed differently. In Tonga, these foreigners were “exempt from the tapu which separate a Tongan chief and his purely Tongan relatives” (Gifford, *Tongan Society* [1929], quoted in Biersack 1990: 84), thereby emphasising the chiefs’ difference from those
they ruled over – but maintaining the foreigners as a distinct class apart from the ruling chiefs. The metonymic reference for the relationship between the two groups is that of sister’s child, *fahu*, due to the preferred choice of spouse for ladies of chiefly rank from Fiji. Indeed, the term “*fahu*” can today be used as a synonym for the ceremonial role – rather than a sister’s son – occupied by foreigners: for the Tongan royalty, for example, the *fahu* is a Fijian (Douaire-Marsaudon 2010).

In Fiji, on the other hand, it is the chief who is regarded as *vasu* or sister’s son. That is to say, the chiefs were related to the people on the mother’s side, through the apical ancestress married by the voyaging stranger-prince typically found at the root of Fijian dynasties. As structural strangers, then, the chiefs were not subject to the same social norms as (ordinary) people: their use of power could be immoral and ruthless, their *tabus* dangerous to their subjects and, as sister’s sons (*vasu*) to the autochthonous rulers, they had the right to appropriate their subjects’ belongings (on the *vasu’s* right, see Hocart 1915b; Sahlins 2004). The importance of the kinship logic for politics was also noted by Rev. Williams of the Methodist Mission in the mid-19th century:

> Most prominent among the public notorities of Fiji is the *Vasu*. The word means a nephew or niece, but becomes a title of office in the case of the male, who, in some localities, has the extraordinary privilege of appropriating whatever he chooses belonging to his uncle, or those under his uncle’s power. […] *Vasus* cannot be considered apart from the civil polity of the group, forming as they do one of its integral parts, and supplying the high-pressure power of Fijian despotism. (Williams 1985 [1858]: 34)

This “predatory” aspect of the *vasu* relationship has been discussed thoroughly in the literature, from Hocart’s “Chieftainship and the sister’s son in the pacific” (1915b) to Sahlins’ “The Culture of an Assassination” (2004: particularly pp. 221–244). I will, therefore, not dwell on the *vasu’s* right, but rather return to the structural relation in itself. Whilst in Tonga the *fahu* is to the T’ui Tonga as the foreigner to the indigenous, in Fiji the stranger-king was the *vasu*. But the real question is *vasu* – that is, nephew – to whom?

Since the chiefs are, in terms of origin, related to the land-owning autochthones through the maternal line, as sister’s sons (or cousins) rather than as sons (or brothers), this also makes them “guests” to the land-owners in a system where titles and land rights are transmitted predominantly through the patrilineal clan. The Lauan nobles, according to Hocart’s informants, “had no land but what they got from other clans through their
mothers”; “had no land; they had only the authority (lewa); “[t]hey could not take land; only the sister’s son could bring land to the nobles” who had to “beg a bit of land to plant in” (Hocart 1929: 97–98). Hence the dualism, much emphasised by Hocart, Sahlins and Kaplan alike, that divides Fijians into two general classes of people: the land people, glossed as the “land owners” (taukei – in present-day usage, the term could also be translated as “host”), and the sea people, or “guests” (vulagi).

The long and short of it, then, is that the sea people are structurally like the foreign-origin chiefs: they are the autochthones’ guests, defined by their position as the structural “others” – “they do not belong to the original scheme of things”, as Hocart (above) puts it. The structural position of the “sea” as the domesticated other, combined with the phenomenon of leadership relinquished to the foreigners, has turned Fijian, or more generally Polynesian, chiefs into anthropological celebrities through whom the entire political systems have been analysed while the “ordinary people” have remained in the background. Another way to look at it is to say that Fiji, geographically a borderline case between the contested culture areas of Melanesia and Polynesia, has predominantly been analysed within the “Polynesianist” discourse. A.M. Hocart, who deserves some credit for establishing this pattern, also offers one of the best insights into how this came about. In an early piece titled “An Ethnographical Sketch of Fiji”, he draws a dividing line from north to south across Viti Levu island: everything west of it is “Low Fijian”; everything east of it “High Fijian”. “Low Fijian” culture is characterised by, among other things, “petty chiefs”, “simple social organization” and dialects that are “quite Melanesian in character”, whereas

31 In the mid-19th-century, Rev. Joseph Waterhouse expressed the same dualism in terms of religious affinities: he made a division into “seafaring tribes” and “aborigines”, both of whom had their own deity: Daucina for the seafarers and Degei for the autochthones. “Owing to their being Kalou-vata (worshippers of the same god), the seafaring tribes have a sort of freemasonry amongst themselves. If any go to a town in which they are perfect strangers, and find a temple dedicated to Daucina, they enter it, and are treated as fellow-citizens”, Waterhouse (1866: 364) writes. Later he, too, offers a historical explanation for the duality: “I venture to suggest that those who worship Degei, and the spirits of their fathers, are the aborigines, who have merely acknowledged the divinity of their conquerors’ gods, and continue to worship their own. Those who worship Daucina and the Kalou-vu [ancestor-gods] generally, I regard as the intruders, who, out of policy, have indeed nominally deified Degei, and the spirits of men, but who, out of custom, pay divine honours only to their gods proper, and to all those Kalou-vus which their respective tribes made known” (Waterhouse 1866: 364). Yet the religious dichotomy drawn out by Waterhouse also returns to the same structural core: as Christina Toren (1999 [1995]: 73) points out, on Gau island Daucina (“lamp bearer”) typically manifests himself as “a handsome stranger or desirable cross-cousin”. Thus the deity serves as a metonym for a structural relation that equates the stranger with cross-kin? In Naloto, Daucina manifests himself as a bright light that appears outside the village perimiters at night.
“High Fijian” peoples display “big sacred chiefs”, “elaborate social organisation”, and at least the peoples around the Koro Sea “all lay stress upon the secular side of life, and have little of those elaborate rites that distinguish the hill tribes. Religiously they have distinct affinities with Polynesians.” (Hocart 1915a: 73–74, 77.)

It is easy to note that the ethnographic details used by Hocart in his simple west–east division bears all the hallmarks of the Melanesia–Polynesia division as it has later been presented, perhaps most famously by Sahlins (1963). I evoke the distinction simply to point out that it is the “Polynesianist” point of view that has dominated the anthropology of Fiji; “instead of the Melanesian scheme of small, separate, and equal political blocs, the Polynesian polity is an extensive pyramid capped by the family and following of a paramount chief”, Sahlins (1963: 287) sums up the difference, but he might as well be describing the primary focus in Fijian ethnography. Thus it is Hocart’s work on the “High Fijian” Lau group (1929) and the bird’s eye view derived from it in Kings and Councillors (1970 [1936]) that is most often cited in order to set the anthropological baseline for Fiji (although Hocart is, throughout his work, well aware of the dualism at the root of Fijian social organisation), and through the work of Hocart most of the consequent literature has regarded the chiefly system as a self-evident, permanent, hierarchical mode of organisation. But since this view also bears a resemblance to those that informed the British colonial administration’s decisions at a time when they felt it was necessary to codify Fijian culture into Native Laws, it is crucial to view the matter from a point of view that has too often gone unnoticed.

PEOPLE OF THE LAND

The novelty of Martha Kaplan’s work on the “people of the land” lies in her change of perspective. Who are the land people; how does their point of view differ from the chiefly top-down perspective presented above?

The Vatukaloko people of northern Viti Levu whom Kaplan (e.g. 1988, 1995) writes about offer a case in point. At the time of Fiji’s cession to the British crown (1874), the Vatukaloko constituted an autonomous polity (vanua), considered the allies (bati) – rather than subjects (qali) – of the region’s largest chiefdom, Rakiraki. Due to their location by the Nakauvadra mountain range, they were closely associated with the autochthonous creator-god, Degei, living beneath the mountains. It testifies to Degei’s significance that in pre-Christian times, even the big coastal chiefdoms like Bau sent men to appease Degei in times of trouble such as the great drought of 1838 (Waterhouse 1868: 362). The Vatukaloko people were considered the descendants of the first Fijians, created by Degei in Fiji.
They were also heir to a power different from that of their eastern neighbours: their priests (bete) had access to the fertility and warrior invulnerability practices that evoked the power of the gods of the land, a power that they seem to have maintained even in the early colonial period, when Rakiraki chiefs still sent whale teeth to the “land” priests in order to gain the Nakauvadra gods’ assistance in their wars against Bau and the colonial British (Kaplan 1995: 47).

But the most significant point is that the land people were responsible for installing — that is “making” (buli) — the chiefs. This practise can be seen as the structural equivalent of Hocart’s (1929) famous descriptions of chiefly installations in the Lau group, in which the stranger-chief symbolically dies during the ceremony in order to be reborn as a god of the land (see also Sahlins 1985: 73–103). Hocart thus regarded the 19th-century divine kings as synthetic personae who combined the gods of the land with their own stranger ancestry. Consequently, in Hocart’s analysis “the king = the sum of his chieftains […] the chief is the supreme god and includes all the others; he is the whole and the parts” (Hocart 1970: 88). Hocart views the matter in what can be described as pre-Dumontian terms, which is to say regards a hierarchical relation as one which exists between a whole and an element of that whole, thereby ending up with a hierarchical model wherein the paramount chief subsumes the land people’s deities and derivate powers.

Kaplan’s merit lies in upholding the opposing (but equally correct) view, according to which the eastern/coastal chiefs or kings were not hereditary rulers but rather dependent of the land people for their rule (lewa). Indeed, it is sometimes even said that the “kingmaker” groups were responsible not just for installing, but also for choosing the future chief — the Naloto village “kingmakers”, for example, are very clear about this. In Kaplan’s words:

[I]and people controlled the ability to make chiefs, and to make people invulnerable, by invoking the gods of the land, using kava (yaqona) as their medium to do so. Among the inland hill people, priests, as mediums to the gods, invoked the gods, offered them sacrifices, and as mediums or conduits, were identified with their warlike as well as their fertile power. (Kaplan 1995: 108)

Here Kaplan no longer refers to just the Vatukaloko people of northern Viti Levu, but to the “inland hill people” more generally — a label that was, if not created, at least redefined by the colonial administration in the late 19th century. In other words, there are, or at least were, several groups who were defined as “land people”, and that definition tended to correlate with the geographical division into inland and coast. Since all this has a bearing on
the matter at hand, let me continue with Kaplan’s argument a bit further before summing up.

Generalising her argument from the Vatukaloko to the various land people groups, Kaplan shows how the British idea of Fijian culture could not be brought to contain the “hill people” or “mountaineers”, as they came to be known in late 19th century. For one thing, the inland polities were less eager to convert to Christianity than the coastal chiefdoms, where the missionaries were often rewarded with overnight successes following the conversion of a paramount chief, thus creating an opposition between Christian and heathen Fijians. For another, the inland-dwelling land owners vehemently contested the coastal chiefs’ right to trade land to the white settlers, which in some instances led even to the settlers, coastal chiefdoms and British troops organising joint military campaigns against the dangerous “mountaineers”. Having thus been defined as “dangerous and disaffected”, the particular traditions – exemplified by particular types of invulnerability rituals – of the “hill tribes” also came to be viewed negatively, in opposition to the coastal model which came to be defined as “the” Fijian culture that served as basis for a system of indirect rule in the colony.

Kaplan has gone through letters and dispatches sent during the military campaigns and consequent monitoring of these troublesome groups, and shows that even the political organisation of the “land” polities came up short in comparison with the coastal ones. The less centralised organisation and smaller size of the inland polities were not just inconvenient for a system of indirect rule that sought to establish clearly-defined lines of administration, but was also regarded less developed than the larger coastal variant. The “mountaineers” or “hill people” were, in other words, not recognised as something that significantly differs from the – by late 19th century – standard view on Fijian culture. Rather, they came to bear the stigmas of negative culture (“disaffection”, in the colonial discourse); were considered heathen, warlike, and underdeveloped version of a Fijian culture that found more acceptable expressions elsewhere. Indeed, the Vatukaloko people Kaplan writes about were finally deported to Kadavu island with the intention of “cutting off their communication with the mountain people” and “ameliorating their condition morally” through association with the Christianised, fairer-skinned Kadavuans (Governor Thurston, letter to Secretary of State, 1891; quoted in Kaplan 1995: 67–68). The distinction was often addressed in racial terms, as the colonial administrator-turned-ethnographer A.B. Brewster did in his Hill Tribes of Fiji:

Most of the important clans of the interior [of Viti Levu] boast of a foreign ancestor as their originating spirit, and from his advent comes the first dawn of authentic history. Many of the tribes,
however, are pure-blooded Melanesians without any intermingling of foreign blood. Their tribal chronicles do not seem to be so well kept as those of the people who adopted strangers, but their legends mention the arrival of the latter, recording the occurrence as “The coming of the gods.” (Brewster 1922: 73)

The way Brewster juxtaposes “important clans” and “authentic history” with “Melanesians” and “tribal chronicles” once again reproduces the logic of the Polynesia–Melanesia division. But the division also works as a political classification: in the “Polynesian chiefdoms”, the large polity was more tightly controlled by the paramount chiefs than among the “Melanesian tribes”. Indeed, the early European traders and settlers had from the early 19th century onwards followed a pattern of obtaining their trade, labour power, land and other utilities from the coastal chiefs. The colonial government followed a similar practise: assuming the chieftaincy to be a hereditary institution held by a ruling class, much of the practical administrative work was carried out through the hereditary chiefs as well as the system of administrative village-level and district chiefs set up as part of colonial administration. In short, the colonial administration had to come up with a “Fijian culture” in order to rule in accordance with Fijian culture, and the culture compiled for administrative purposes not only ignored the claims of the “land” polities, but also devalued them by refusing to recognise their independent status: they were too small, their chiefs did not appear powerful enough and they lacked the centralised organisation of the large coastal polities. Even the religious practises of the land people did not get recognised as such, but rather were constructed as “cult” practises – “negative tradition”, as Kaplan (1988, 1989, 1995) has put it. They were, in sum, depicted as backward on various fronts – one can still hear echoes of the colonial disposition towards the inland people in the way ill-mannered Fijian children are chided for being like kai colo – “inland people” or, as most Nalotans now prefer to translate it, “bush men”.

Since at least Johann Reinhold Forster’s 1778 views, presented in his Observations Made on a Voyage Round the World, the “two great varieties of people in the South Seas” had been divided into the fair-skinned, good-looking, benevolent and more civilized, on the one hand, and the dark-skinned, ugly, hostile and “debased” on the other. The labels “Polynesia” (“many islands”) and “Melanesia” (“black islands”) had become fixed by the 1832 publication of Dumont d’Urville’s “Sur les îles du Grand Océan”, in which he also summed up the differences between the two types of polities corresponding with these areas: the Polynesian type with its chiefly dynasties, etiquette and organised religion, and the Melanesian “fragile tribes” with “neither a form of government nor laws nor established religious ceremonies”. (Thomas 1989: 29–30.) The label “Melanesian” given by Brewster – among others – to the “hill tribes” carries all the necessary information for interpreting the colonial administration’s moral view on the “land” polities.
But Kaplan’s analysis of the inland vs. coastal peoples in Fiji only tells one side of a more complicated story. What Kaplan discusses in her analysis are polities that, through their mutual relations are defined “land” and “sea” – or, in the terminology adopted by Kaplan, itaukei (“land owners”, autochthones) and turaga (chiefs, gentry) – to each other in their entirety. The groups Kaplan analyses consider themselves fundamentally different from the coastal peoples, and are in this respect similar to the mid-19th-century informants of Consul W. T. Pritchard who was told that “Fijians were created in Fiji itself; and did not come from another land” (Pritchard 1865: 203, original emphasis). Yet, to counterbalance the neat bird’s eye view, the same dichotomy of “land” and “sea” is found within more or less every Fijian polity and village, and even exists at the level of individual ceremonies. Thus among the people I have worked with, the chiefdom of Verata is “sea” to its traditional warrior allies (bati) such as the chiefdom of Vugalei, a neighbouring inland polity comprised of nine villages. The chiefdom-level yavusa that make up the polity of Verata, for their part, can also be divided into “land” and “sea”, and the individual villages again divide into “land” and “sea” moieties. Thus the division also stands for context-dependent relational categories: people who are considered “land” at one level, such as inter-chiefdom relations, may be categorised as “sea” at the intra-village level. The categories are not, in that sense, fixed substantial entities except in the sense that within an existing relationship the roles cannot be reversed. An analogical dichotomy is also applied on ritual events, where everyone attending an event is either glossed as “host” (taukei) or “guest” (vulagi). These ceremonial roles are even more flexible: within a given ceremonial event – a funeral, for example – a group of attendees may be categorised as guests upon their arrival, but in the course of the event be subsumed into an expanded group of hosts.

Now let me return to the social organisation in Naloto village. As described in the previous chapter, the village is divided in two – the Rokotakala and Saraviti moieties. Although the traditional chieftaincy in Naloto is hereditary to one of the “land” clans (Mataqali Rokotakala) that make up the land moiety (Yavusa Rokotakala), one can see that otherwise the tasks reserved for the “land” groups – as described (above) by Kaplan – appear the same in an intra-village perspective than they were in the historical inland polity. The Kai Naloto clan are the chief’s warriors (bati), and one of the six sub-lineages in the composite Kai Naloto clan holds the office of the village spokesman (matanivanua). Another land clan, Sauturaga, are the installers of chiefs, though the last chiefly installation in Naloto took

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33 There are several versions of the old creation myth; in the prototypical version, the snake-god Degei hatched the primal pair from the eggs of a snipe. For a compact version, see Tregear 1903.
place in the fifties or sixties. The uninstall ed chiefs are titled komai rather than ratu, a member of the clan responsible for installing claims that installations no longer take place because the chiefly clan refuse to recognise Sauturaga’s right to choose the chief. The Vosaratu clan were once priests (bete) in possession of rites no longer known in the village. As for the sea moiety (Saraviti): they are the chief’s fishermen and “marines”, as it was translated to me: guardians of the sea around Naloto village. The sea moiety chief, Na Tunidau, rules over that part of the village which is occupied by members of the sea moiety, but is encompassed by the Komai Naloto in the sense that the Komai presides over the entire village.34

Though they occupy different structural levels, it is nevertheless easy to see that the land people in Naloto and the Vatukaloko discussed by Kaplan hold the same (today mainly honorific) roles of warrior, priest and kingmaker, but with the significant difference that the “land vs. chiefs” dimension of the dichotomy is more ambiguous in Naloto. And the same dichotomy, though with different emphases, can be found throughout indigenous Fiji; Hocart used to call it the Fijian “passion for dichotomy”, a passion he regarded great enough to obscure the “real” dualism at the root of what Hocart referred to as “the dual organisation” (1970 [1936]: 269). But this is where I part ways with Hocart: rather than viewing the dichotomy that plays itself out at every level of social organisation merely as a reflection or ripple effect of the dual kingship (diarchy), as Hocart tends to do, I would concentrate on the land–sea relation itself. More precisely, what I find significant is “land” and “sea” as values that are defined relationally – through each another: there can be no strangers if there are no locals.

As already mentioned, I take my cue from Kaplan’s analysis of the colonial-era devaluation of certain paradigmatic land groups, but instead of particular historical peoples, I want to shift my attention to the categories of “land” and “sea” as they are applied in practice – or “risked” through practice as Sahlins (1985: 145–151) might have it. From this perspective, Kaplan gets me only halfway. In charting out the colonial administration’s measures towards homogenising Fijian culture, she opts for a one-sided view: the colonial administration’s failure to recognise the land people’s legitimate claims. This, Kaplan implies rather than states, removed a structural restraint on chiefly power – empowered a hereditary class of chiefs whose power was no longer counterbalanced by that of the land-owning autochthones. Kaplan’s view is, in this respect, complemented by that of Christina Toren (1994) who regards the relation of land and sea itself as an antithesis to the supremacy of “the stranger chief” – in Toren’s terms, the values of social

34 However, the sea moiety chief occupies a particular place in inter-village ceremonies: he sits next to the Verata paramount chief [Ratu] and drinks yaqona right after the Verata paramount, thereby acting as the high chief’s “support”, raviti.
hierarchy and equality are mutually encompassing, and therefore one cannot stand to the other in a hierarchical relation of the Hocartian-cum-Dumontian type (which is to say: not as the “chiefly” sea containing the constituent value of land within it). The value of equality encompasses hierarchy just as hierarchy encompasses the equality represented by the dualism. I feel indebted to Toren, for her work (as I read it) has consistently upheld the categories of “land” and “sea” as mutually dependent containers of differentiating value. However, Toren derives her viewpoint from the chiefly village of Sawaike on the island of Gau, where the chiefly yavusa is “sea” by definition. Thus she has no reason to abandon the underlying assumption that “chiefly yavusa are always ‘sea’ […] Thus, even while people relate to one another as ‘land’ and ‘sea’, they simultaneously relate to one another as ‘chief’ and ‘commoner’” (Toren 1994: 209). In Naloto village, this is not the case.

On one or two particular instances, some of the land people in Naloto did point out to me that the Saraviti moiety are related to the Ratu (the Verata paramount) himself – that “they are all ratus”, as it was once put to me. Yet this does not create a juxtaposition of “land” vs. “chiefs” – there is no “class” distinction between the two sides – and definitely not the hierarchical relation wherein “sea” could encompass the “land” side. Quite the opposite: on ceremonial occasions the Komai Naloto stands for the entire village – when he so chooses – and the Komai title belongs to the land moiety, Yavusa Rokotakala. For another thing, as I will illustrate in the following chapters, the Naloto sea people hardly employ the exchange practices, specialist activities or mythological tropes relating to their “seaness”, which is to say to their alterity. This is why I have in this chapter emphasised their claim of “originality” which is, after all, a curious claim to make in the context of a mythology that strictly speaking portrays everyone as immigrants rather than autochthones (see next chapter). I should also point out that for example Toren (1994: 205) and Sahlins (1962: 77) both discuss chieftainship rivalries in the islands of Gau and Moala respectively, in which “different origins” (kawa tani) or the label of “foreigner” (kai tani) are deployed against the holders of paramount titles who in both instances are classified as “sea”. Alterity may, in other words, function as a negative value – an out-group status used to undermine rather than bolster social hierarchy.

But enough with the chiefs, for now. After all, foreign origin in itself does not make one a chief, nor does it offer an unquestioned justification for power. It has even been argued that the early 19th century had been a time of increased foreign influence in Fiji, due to increased political unrest in Tonga prior to large-scale European influence in the Fiji islands (e.g. Spurway 2002). As such, the structural arrangements inherited from Fiji’s 19th-
century wars, where foreign resources were employed by all of the major
confederacies, can be said to represent just a particular phase in Fijian
history. The dichotomy of land and sea, on the other hand, should not be
regarded a product of short-term historical processes but rather a typological
scheme within which history is played out. In the words of Claude Lévi-
Strauss (1993 [1963]: 159) – writing on “dual organisations” – “it would
not be the first time that research would lead us to institutional forms which
one might characterize by a zero value”, which, as he elsewhere explains,
refers to “a sign marking the necessity of a supplementary symbolic content
over and above that which the signified already contains, which can be any
value at all” (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 64).

The dual pattern can be found in a number of corresponding systems
in other Pacific island societies, such as the “bush” and “coast” sides of
Marovo (Hviding 1992) or “front” and “rear” in Anuta (Feinberg 1982) in
the Solomon Islands, Itaki and Vaerota of Ma’uke in Southern Cook
Islands (Siikala 1991) or even Egelan and Amelika of Nukunonu, Tokelau
(Huntsman 1971). Often reproduced in series of binary oppositions ranging
from older:younger, autochthonous:foreign, female:male and profane:taboo
to domesticated:wild, indoors:outdoors, garden:sea or taro:fish, we can see
what Lévi-Strauss’ “supplementary symbolic content” means. But what these
opposed pairs also reveal clearly is a pattern of complementary dichotomies,
which is to say a system wherein the two halves are differentiated through
interdependent phenomena. In this respect, the principle of “dual symbolic
classification” (Feinberg 1980) that has been a reoccurring theme
particularly in Polynesian ethnography, differs significantly from the idea of
the “dual organisation” that Lévi-Strauss (1993 [1963]) was so opposed to.
That notion of “dual organisation” was originally conceived by Rivers,
Frazer and their contemporaries in reference to a social organisation
comprised of two exogamous halves that exchange spouses with each other.
Lévi-Strauss, while pointing out that pure dual organisations of this type do
not exist in the real life, merely references this other, symbolic, type that is
better suited to the Polynesian examples, in which exogamous moieties do
not exist. To put the matter bluntly, the dual organisation in the classical
sense assumes a concrete “base” (i.e. dualism as “the theory that in any
domain of reality there are two independent underlying principles” [Concise
Oxford Dictionary]) while the symbolic variant is an a priori form that, in a
sense, even precedes cosmogony – though is typically validated by it (e.g.
McKinnon 1991; Siikala 1991). Hence for example Richard Feinberg has
illustrated the “binary disposition” in Anutan history, wherein binary
divisions are a re-emergent phenomenon that appear throughout mythical
and historical accounts, social contexts and levels of social organisation:
Repeatedly, events have contravened structure. Yet, the binary pattern seems to be so firmly entrenched in the Anutans’ thought that it has always reemerged to mold the course of social interaction and relationships. Both quasi-mythical accounts of ancient history and better documented stories of more recent happenings illustrate the Anutans’ propensity for structural replication. (Feinberg 1982: 3)

A similar cosmological principle is evidenced for Fiji already in Hocart’s remarks on Fijian “passion for dichotomy” (1970 [1936]: 269) or “dichotomy […] becoming so common as to be cheap” (1952: 58). In present-day Naloto village the “binary disposition” appears at every level of organisation, whether one looks at symbolic representations of the pigfish or warrior:fisherman type, the spatial division of the village, or on a more general level, the reproductive logic of bilateral cross cousin working itself out into a “binary” kinship network that divides everyone into “cross” and “parallel” relatives so that a newly-arrived wife only needs to invert her husband’s kin network into a mirror image: cross-cousins to siblings and vice versa, uncles to fathers, aunts to mothers, and so forth.

Indeed, there is, to cite one of Hocart’s Lauan informants, a strong assumption that “everything goes in twos”. Or, rather, that “there should be two”, as a visitor from one of the Lomaiviti islands disapprovingly commented upon hearing that a clan in Naloto comprises but a single subclan. But the point is that the division precedes historical fact, not vice versa, as Sahlins (1976: 41), too, shows for the island of Moala, where the “village of Nuku […] has the usual dual organization of land and sea sections, although strictly speaking there has never been a single Land group in the community”. In response to a criticism that accused Sahlins of being blind to the “two section” system evidenced in the kinship system (Groves 1963), Sahlins has illustrated the extent of the symbolic division in an exhaustive account:

“Everything goes in twos,” A. M. Hocart was told by a Lauan friend, “or the sharks will bite.” Similarly for the Moalans, their island and each of its villages are essentially made up of two ‘kinds’ of people: the Land People (kai vanua) and the Chiefs (turaga). The Land People are also known as the ‘owners’ (taukei) an expression synonymous with first occupants or original settlers. The Chiefs came later, by sea, to assume the rule over a numerous host that had filled the inland regions […] One can already sense the symbolic productivity of the dualism. A difference of social groups corresponds to the distinction of the land and sea on the geographic plane, itself an instance of a general spatial differentiation of interior
and peripheral, correlated with oppositions of indigenous and foreign, earlier and later, even animal and cultural; the same groups again are inferior and superior politically, ritual and secular functionally. As it were, the myth of origin is a temporal rendition of these basic conditions, the setting of binary logic to time, to reproduce it as narrative (cf. Thompson 1940). But it would be inadequate to consider the contrasts merely as a series of congruent oppositions. Local legends of the coming of the Chiefs as well as many customary practices reveal a definite structure of reciprocities. In its most general terms the reciprocal logic is that each “kind” mediates the nature of the other, is necessary for the realization and regulation of the other (Sahlins 1976: 24–25).

From James Cook (Sahlins 1985) to Charles Savage (Sahlins 1994a) and the Bau–Rewa war (Sahlins 2004), Sahlins has amply illustrated how “the setting of binary logic to time” becomes a process wherein even unprecedented phenomena are allocated into the binary categories. However, the quote above already offers a significant contrast with the Naloto material discussed earlier in this chapter. Whilst in Sahlins’ example, the geographical division of land and sea is but “an instance of a general spatial differentiation of interior and peripheral”, it is evident that central and peripheral are easily reversible. I refer to the Naloto sea people’s origin story, in which the geographical relation is inverted through analogical reference to the *yaqona* bowl that holds the liquid inside, thereby making the solid matter or “land” peripheral to “sea”.

The symbolic reversal in fact goes further than this, for it also shows the possibility of a hierarchical reversal – sea contained or encompassed by land – that, furthermore, shows how the categories in question are interdependent or mutually defining. This is why I have constantly emphasised the relational nature of the categories; to show that a shift at one end of the dichotomy affects the other as well. This is also why I consider the potential implications of Martha Kaplan’s work on the Vatukaloko land people largely unexplored (see above) because she limits her discussion on the particular people instead of viewing the wider ramifications of a colonial misrecognition of the land peoples’ claims. In other words; where Kaplan’s study foregrounds the lack of recognition of a particular people’s role during an era that witnessed “Fijian culture” being codified in law and bureaucratic practise, her viewpoint allows for even more far-reaching questions. That is, if we follow Locke’s dictum that the nature of relation “consists in the referring or comparing two things one to another; from which comparison one of both comes to be denominated. And if either of those things be removed, or cease to be, the relation ceases” (Locke 2004 [1690], Vol. I,
XXV: 5), the question then arises: does not the misrecognition of one half of a relationship also affect its referent, too?

FIGURE 1: Tanoa (kava bowl) displays land on the outside and sea on the inside
Indeed, according to Joel Robbins (2007: 301), this would set the stage for radical cultural change, if the hierarchical relations that hold between traditional values have been transformed. On these grounds I feel justified to take one more historical detour before finally getting on with my Naloto data. In the following, I therefore briefly relate a key plot in Fiji’s colonial history in order to portray what, in my view, underlies the reversal discussed above. This historical account is presented to highlight the wider relevance of my argument, its applicability within the Fiji archipelago more generally.

THE QUESTION OF LAND AND THE INDIGENISATION OF STRANGERS

“No commonly-understood and observed rules of land tenure can be confidently hypothesized as a pre-contact ‘Fijian’ system” Peter France (1969: 14) states in *The Charter of the Land*, a book that remains the definitive reference on the history of Fijian land tenure. By the time of Fiji’s cession to Great Britain on October 10th, 1874, a view of Fijian chieftains as an all-powerful aristocracy had already been established among the European and American settlers. As a matter of fact, the coastal chiefs’ claims were even actively endorsed by the settlers, who had found it much easier to deal with established authorities rather than a greater number of local chieftains. Even the coronation of Ratu Cakobau as the first King of Fiji (*Tui Viti* – a title that had not previously existed) in 1852 was largely a matter of accountability: as a king of Fiji, Cakobau was held responsible for maintaining peace and good order in the island group and accountable when he failed to do so. And account he did: following a pattern whereby various chiefs had, over the preceding decades, alienated tracts of land to their European servants, allies and business partners, Cakobau was forced to compensate a debt of £9,000 exacted by the U.S. consul with the sale of 200,000 acres of land. (Derrick 2001 [1946].)

Although the Melbourne-based Polynesia Company that handled the transaction never managed to occupy much more than 500 acres around present-day Suva harbour, the case is illustrative of the land transactions that were becoming increasingly common in the latter half of the 19th century. For the Suva lands were never Cakobau’s to give, except under the terms of his newly-created kingship; similar sales were going on all over the islands in numbers that were nearly matched by the multiple modes of selling land. Sometimes lands were considered the property of the highest-ranking chief in a given polity, sometimes a sale required the consent of multiple chiefs ranging from the current occupiers to the paramount ruler of a political confederation (and generally many signatures – even those of far-off high chiefs completely unrelated to the lands in question – was better than one or...
few); sometimes it was assumed the right of King Cakobau to alienate any land in his kingdom, and sometimes chiefs at various levels of the hierarchy sold lands from underneath their neighbours, rivals, conquered rivals or political underlings. (France 1969: 43–46.) The multiple land sales, for their part, meant that there was an increasing number of aliens in the kingdom of Fiji who were not subjects of its king – this was the rationale given for the cession of Fiji: European troublemakers needed European law.

It was therefore among the most urgent tasks of the colonial government to establish the rules of land ownership which could then be used in deciding which land tracts had actually been alienated in accordance with the laws of the colony. This was no easy feat – the question of land tenure had been on the agenda also prior to the cession during King Cakobau’s reign. A committee had been set up to examine the land question, but due to the variety of practices, the committee could only agree that each case of land ownership should be decided independently. The Committee was soon disbanded due to its members’ numerous interests in the cases they dealt in. Towards the end of the Cakobau Government, Chief Secretary J.B. Thurston set out a land policy that was to become the Cakobau Government’s policy:

In cases where of disputed ownership, where the Natives have continued in occupation, the Government will not intervene unless it can be shown that the sale made by a ruling chief was as a ruling chief in effect and not mere name, and that such sale was clearly consented to by the qase taukei living and planting upon the land. In other cases it will regard the title as invalid. (Minute by Thurston on T.V. White to Minister of Native Lands, 31 March 1873; cited in France 1969: 100)

This policy sets the tone that Kaplan, too, writes about: the sale of land is considered something that a “ruling chief in effect” is entitled to. In other words, even though a majority of the chiefs who conducted transactions with Europeans were of the coastal, “stranger”, “guest” and hence landless designation, they were granted the right to alienate land, though subject to the “land elder’s” [qase taukei] consent. Yet this only makes it more remarkable that the British colonial administration actually did the opposite.

The practicalities of the matter are 19th-century applied anthropology: in 1880 the missionary-ethnographer Lorimer Fison – also known for his role as a data collector for Lewis Henry Morgan – gave a lecture on Fijian land tenure (published as Fison 1881) which gave birth to what Peter France calls “The Orthodoxy” of land ownership in Fiji. In his lecture, Fison asserted that Fijian land ownership is collective rather than “feudal”.

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Thus prior to the cession, “[t]he Fijian was on his way to the feudal system, but he was a long way from reaching it. The lands were not vested in any chief”, Fison (1881: 349) stated, and proceeded to show that land ownership had to be “tribal”. Fison’s argument relies heavily on Morgan’s evolutionary scheme; indeed, in his correspondence with Morgan, he assures that Fijians had “developed” pottery, bow and arrow, salt-making and the canoe, and upon the arrival of the missionaries, Fijians still maintained traces of “the patriarchal family” (Stern, Howitt and Fison 1930), all bearing evidence of a stage of development that had not yet reached private property. Fison’s heavy reliance on Morgan’s scheme is witnessed in a letter to Morgan, in which Fison states his resentment towards J.C. McLennan – a known critic of Morgan’s theory: “I feel towards him as a Fijian feels toward a man who has insulted his chief” (op. cit.: 275, original italics). No surprise, then, that he built the foundations of Fijian land tenure on Morgan: Fijian society represented the “Middle Period of Barbarism” – whilst feudalism belongs to the “Upper Status of Barbarism” – and where Fijians seemed to diverge from Morgan’s model, they did so because the chiefs had been corrupted by European influence.

But it was not just Fison’s affinity with Morgan that defined the colonial administration’s approach. Arthur Gordon – the first Governor of Fiji – apparently arrived in Fiji with a copy of Maine’s Lectures on the Early History of Institutions; he saw parallels between Fijian traditional organisation and the clan organization of his native Scotland, hence his view on the illegality of the Fijian land sales would have been strengthened through comparison to the Highland Clearances. It therefore became obvious to Gordon that “an arbiter was needed to distinguish between ancient and adulterated custom” (France 1969: 124). This led to the emergence of a circle of European experts who were seen as possessing an insight into Fijian culture greater than that possessed by even their native informants whose understanding of their own culture could, after all, be declared susceptible due to culture contact. It was mostly through their work that colonial Fiji received a rigid set of laws that were said to follow the “immemorial” customs of “Fijian society”, laws which were based on the customs observed by a majority of Fiji’s people’s – as long as they were in accordance with the principle of communal land ownership. (France 1969: 124–127; see also Kelly 2004.)

The emergence of a state-approved Fijian culture has already been described and proven elsewhere (e.g. France 1969; Kaplan 1988; Kaplan and Kelly 2001; Kelly 2004), so let me make a long story short. What emerged from the work of a group of turn-of-the-20th-century ethnographer-administrators was an administrator’s version of Fijian culture, encoded in the Native Laws and Regulations. Almost every aspect of Fijian culture was
codified in the Native Laws: from the chiefs’ obligations towards their people to the limits of their privileges; from proper window and house foundation sizes to correct religious practises, acceptable reasons for going to town; marriages, funerals, taxation values for village produce, observance of the Sunday Sabbath, monetary limits for requests from kinsmen and rules regarding stray pigs – although some laws were held up more strictly than others. But, crucially, the whole construction was founded upon collective land ownership. From Fison’s lecture it still took almost forty years to decide at which level of social division land ownership ought to be fixed; in the end it was decided that the land-owning unit is the mataqali, here translated as “clan”, although it became obvious early on that not only did patterns of land ownership vary throughout Fiji, but also the meaning of this social division varied – people were uncertain what was the difference or relation between mataqali and yavusa, for example.

Nevertheless, this turned virtually all native Fijians into land owners. Every mataqali’s history was recorded as evidence in the Native Lands Commission books where mataqali membership was likewise registered; every native village’s lands were surveyed and divided amongst the resident mataqalis, and remain so to this day – presently 87.9 per cent of Fiji’s land area belongs to indigenous Fijian groups (Fiji Bureau of Statistics 2011). The real-life conditions in the villages, therefore, hardly support the taukei vs. vulagi distinction any more. Hocart’s Lauan informants attested as much in the early 20th century:

The nobles of old had no land; they had only the authority (lewa); it is only since the Tongan rule [in the Lau group] and the Government that it extends to the soil. They could not take land; only the sister’s son could bring land to the nobles; the elders of the landsmen […] would decide to give land for their sister’s son to plant in. The nobles used to refer to us landsmen. (Hocart 1929: 98)

However, it was not just the material conditions of the Land–Sea division that changed. Over the course of translating a seemingly endless number of Native Laws, Regulations, Bills, Bulletins and Circulars, the Native Administration also adopted a practice of translating “native Fijian” as taukei (rather than kai Viti – “Fijian” – for example), a term that in the old order was reserved for the titular land owners (see Kaplan 2004). And it is this application to an entire ethnic group of a term that previously referred to one half of the whole which, finally, sees the Dumontian logic of parts and wholes reversed.
Whether the adoption of the term *taukei* was a purposeful act on behalf of an administration committed to the principle of collective land ownership or just a random choice, the application of the word to all indigenous Fijians still did not remove the relational quality of the category. The dichotomising nature of the categories “*taukei*” and “*vulagi*” can be observed in every major ceremonial event, where all participants are divided into two sides – hosts and guests (further discussed in the following chapters). But from a term once translated by Hocart as “divine god”, *vulagi* has witnessed a significant inflation: where native Fijians nowadays refer to themselves as *taukei*, the binary opposite of the term is routinely applied to the other ethnic groups in Fiji, particularly the Indo-Fijian population, with moralistic connotations: “they are strangers, they are here because we allow them to”.

The Indo-Fijian population are obviously the silent third party whose presence in the islands, since the late 19th century, has crucially affected the entire process described in this chapter. Crucially, because the conceived need for indentured labour in the islands was intimately tied up with the colonial project of codifying native Fijian culture: taking a protectivist interest in Fijian culture, the first generation of administrators in particular conceived a need to safeguard “the native” against the ills of modernity. Neighbouring archipelagos providing an insufficient source of labour, the colony turned to South Asia. But as John Kelly has pointed out, while the ideas borrowed from evolutionary anthropology – Morgan and Maine – played a key part in deciding what was deemed true native custom, Governor Gordon drew on another source for the overall structure of the colony’s administration – J.W.B. Money’s *How to Govern A Colony: Showing a Practical Solution of the Questions Now Affecting British India* (1861). The book outlines the differences between the British administration of India and the Dutch in Indonesia; in it Money argues a case for two separate legal-administrative systems, one for Europeans and another for “the Natives” – and as little as possible for the “intermediate races” such as “foreign Orientals”. (Kelly 2004)

The success of this legal separatism has been documented elsewhere; Martha Kaplan and John Kelly (2001), in particular, have illustrated not only how Fiji’s indigenous population came to be cocooned in the “polity within the colonial polity” of native administration constructed on a cultural foundation, but how at the same time the Indo-Fijian population was systematically denied a recognisable “culture”. Instead, they were assigned to the business sector, a significant percentage of former indentured labourers later actually redefined as land-leasing entrepreneurs – working under the monopoly of the Colonial Sugar Refining Company, denied the possibility
of unions, and so forth. And the country’s two major ethnic groups still remain apart to an astonishing degree. Less so in the urban areas and traditional cane-growing areas in Western Fiji, but in relatively isolated, practically mono-ethnic places like Naloto, one can hear the echoes of the colonial-era reasoning: the *kai India* still retain a reputation as the self-serving, money-obsessed mirror image of indigenous ideals, as evidenced by the villagers’ often striking distrust in their interactions with Indo-Fijians.

Since independence in 1970 the short history of the Republic of Fiji, particularly the three military coups of 1987, 2000 and 2006, have so far mainly highlighted the two ethnic groups’ disparate claims to citizenship in Fiji. Indigenous Fijians have enjoyed a double representation in the state, in contrast to the Indo-Fijians: on the one hand through the recently-abolished Great Council of Chiefs, the Native Lands Trust Board, Ministry of Indigenous Affairs and other quasi-traditional bodies, on the other through the parliamentary system. The 2000 coup in particular illustrated that even in represetational party politics, the Indo-Fijians were tolerated rather than endorsed by the indigenous nationalist groups. The coup that began with the removal from office of Mahendra Chaudry, Fiji’s first Indo-Fijian Prime Minister, escalated into widespread civil unrest that in many areas took the form of ethnic violence:

Following May 19, 2000, outbreaks of violence between civilians, rebels, and the military occurred across the country. Never before and never since has postcolonial Fiji experienced such levels of violence. Much of the civilian violence was directed against Indo-Fijians, their homes, businesses, and properties. It was fuelled by a racialized, anti-Indian rhetoric that promoted images of Indo-Fijians as *vulagi*, or foreigners, who had usurped the rights of the *taukei*, or indigenous Fijians, to govern Fiji. Hand-in-hand with taukei assertions of “indigenous rights” were condemnations of non-Christians and calls for Fiji to restore its status as a Christian state. The violence was, however, highly racialized; targets were not limited to Hindus and Muslims but Indo-Fijian Christians were also attacked. (Trnka 2008: 3)

The violence has calmed down since then, and what one of the Naloto men described as a “heat of racism” has died down in Naloto, too. But the usage of the *vulagi-taukei* dichotomy has now become a political commonplace among those commonly referred to as Fijian supremacists (e.g. Kurer 2001), a doctrine seeking to secure the paramountcy of indigenous interests in Fiji. As expounded by Aselela Ravu in *The Façade of Democracy*, the key
argument in favour of ethnic Fijian structural hegemony uses familiar concepts:

Fijians have always categorised the population […] into two main divisions. A person is either a taukei (indigenous or owner) or a vulagi (visitor or foreigner) in any place […] The taukei are the indigenous or the original or first to be in a locality or those who conquered them in war. They thus claim rights of ownership and control over land. Any who arrive later to settle with the original settlers […] of that area are known as vulagi, or foreigners […] The taukei are normally at the forefront of the discussion in decision making. The vulagi are allowed to participate in the process but they must not be seen domineering or forceful […] Traditional protocol requires the vulagi to be humble and know well his role and position […] His descendants will have little claim either (Ravuvu 1991: 58–60; cited in Kurer 2001: 302).

Ravuvu’s portrayal of the relation between guests and hosts gives no implication that the foreigner could ever have been anything except meek, passive and submissive; yet this rhetoric is also familiar to me from the village, where it was applied both to the strangers now residing in the islands and to ceremonial guests – though in this moralistic sense predominantly to guests who were coming into the village to “wash clean” a previous transgression, such as “stealing” a wife (see chapter six). Conversely, there were no groups in Naloto, the chiefdom of Verata or the neighbouring chiefdoms that would have been denoted as vulagi.

As a matter of fact, the absence of vulagi among indigenous Fijians was recently even confirmed at the national level, when a 2010 Government Circular announced that the word taukei replaces the terms “Fijian” and “indigenous Fijian” in the English names of all Fijian government institutions. Hence the former Ministry of Indigenous Affairs is now Ministry of iTaukei Affairs, the former Fijian Affairs Act is now iTaukei Affairs Act, and so forth (Government of Fiji 2010). This was, I should add, not a particularly popular edict among the Indo-Fijian population, if the blogs and discussion sites are a reliable indicator. Most of the commentators did not identify with the new official appellation, “Fijian”, which they felt still connotes primarily the indigenous population. “Those indigenous Fijians who feel that Bainimarama’s name change threatens the viability of Fijian culture, should stop worrying. Calling a rose a mokosoi changes neither the rose nor the mokosoi”, Wadan Narsey (2011) consoled the disconcerted on the “Coup Four and a Half” blog. On the final point, however, I disagree with Prof. Narsey. As I have been showing throughout
the chapter, the bureaucratic finalisation of nomenclature was only the epilogue to a metamorphosis that took place over the preceding century or so; this transformation has, however, left in its wake a new dichotomy wherein all indigenous Fijians now form the *taukei* side in a new application of the dual organisation. The state-level, inter-ethnic dichotomy displays what strangerdom or alterity represents at the most generalising level of political discourse: something no longer compatible with or incorporated by indigenous tradition.

Take another significant case from Fiji’s recent political history: “the Qoliqoli Bill”, which sought to transform the ownership and control of traditional fishing grounds from the state to the indigenous owners (e.g. Ratuva 2007). One of the three highly controversial bills that played a key part in triggering Fiji’s 2006 coup, the main aims of the bill were potential rents from the coastal areas utilised by tourist resorts and a higher degree of local decision making on marine reserves. However, the move to turn the qoliqoli, or fishing grounds, into property held by the *taukei* also parallels the change portrayed in this chapter by further reducing the difference between land and sea on the physical plane. “If distinctions in environment are metaphorically connected with differences in political status, it is because the same relationships that order production also order polity”, Marshall Sahlins (1976: 41) has argued to underline the significance of the dichotomy, but the argument works just as well reversed. If the distinctions that order polity change, then so do the distinctions in environment. The sea, as we have seen in this chapter, is now encompassed by land, and the ultimate strangers are now subject to the benevolence of the autochthones.

From this point of view, it makes perfect sense that even the recently immigrated sea people of Naloto regard and present themselves as “the originals” – because they now are. This does not mean that the dichotomy has ceased to be; the Naloto sea moiety remain sea people, but at the same time they are also *taukei*, or owners of the land, both juridically and within the state discourse, where the category subsumes all indigenous Fijians. But reversing the hierarchical polarity of the land–sea dichotomy implies consequential changes. The most obvious, the valuation of foreign origin, has been discussed at length here but it still has to be spelled out that the change from a society which placed great value – political and economic – on foreign origin all the way to the current negative value assigned to foreign origin is enormous. Not just because of the contrast between the 19th-century cosmopolitanism and the present-day ethno-nationalism that prevails particularly in the northern chiefdoms of the Tailevu province such as Verata, though this in itself is remarkable. Yet the paradox underlying the current version of the dichotomy may well be even more significant.
Keep in mind that the indigenous–foreign dichotomy is complementary, that “[c]ritical to the health and wellbeing of the chiefdom was the effective combination of complementary elements: sea and land, chiefs and people, foreigner and indigene, guest and host, male and female” (Hooper 2006: 35). The foreignness that complements autochthonous origin is, however, also its binary opposite and hence potentially incompatible with the superior, all-encompassing indigeneity. There is, in other words, a difference in the mode of encompassment that defines the hierarchical relation between the two elements: in the pre-colonial order, the encompassment took place in the person of the chief; in the post-colonial order it is the overall category of the land-owning “original” that defines the relation. Hence, as Joel Robbins (2007: 297) has pointed out, in a hierarchical relation of the Dumontian type, the “more valued elements tend to be more elaborately worked out, more rationalised as one might put it in Weberian terms, and to control the rationalization of less valued ideas such that they can only be worked out to the extent that they do not contradict more valued ones”. It is from this perspective that I will now set out to study the elaboration of the values of autochthony and foreignness. Starting out from the cosmological core I will, over the next two chapters, show how a shift in what I have described in Dumontian terms as an encompassing value affects changes in the realisation of value in the spheres of politics and economics respectively.
ORIGIN

INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapter I have already presented what Marshall Sahlins (1985: 78) labels a typical Fijian myth of the origin of the current ruling clan: a (fair-skinned) male stranger is taken in by an indigenous tribe, marries a woman of rank and eventually becomes the apical ancestor of a ruling lineage. Sahlins’ assessment of the myth’s common occurrence agrees with those of A. B. Brewster (“almost every […] occupant of the chieftaincy was the ninth in descent from the first known ancestor, who in every case was a light-coloured stranger” [Brewster 1922: 79]) and A.M. Hocart (“it is so in all countries in Fiji” [Hocart 1929: 27]) as well as Christina Toren (1988: 710): “In myth, the first high chief of a country (vanua) and founder of the chiefly clan is always a ‘foreigner’.” Martha Kaplan (e.g., 1995), and after a fashion even Buell Quain (1948), address the same issue, but from an “inland” perspective: yes, the “Polynesian-style” chieftainship is in ascendancy, but the pattern should not be generalised to all of Fiji. Quain’s interest is on the uneasy combination of “Melanesian” and “Polynesian” culture evidenced in the island of Vanua Levu: “This contradiction in ethos has a historical background, the same which underlies the dual set of origin legends: the ethos of aboriginal Fiji and the quite different ethos of Tongan invaders”, as summed up by Ruth Benedict (Quain 1948: xvii). Quain, in other words, views the duality as a relatively recent appearance, though a situation where “the two cultures are inextricably mingled” (op.cit.: x). As explained in the previous chapter, Martha Kaplan looks at the same patterning, on Viti Levu, not as a historical set of particulars, temporal conjuncture, but as a stable arrangement. Following Hocart (1970 [1936]), Kaplan (1995: 107–108) regards the coastal chiefs as synthesised figures combining the efficacy due to foreign origin, on the one hand, and autochthonous legitimacy, on the other. She contrasts the coastal chieftaincies with the fully-autochthonous “land” policies of interior Viti Levu, where strangers never ruled prior to colonial-era rearrangements. Presenting the legacy of the “land” viewpoint, Kaplan focuses on the late 19th-century “land” priest Navosavakadua’s ritual polity, wherein all the central symbols of “top-down”, chiefly Fiji were reversed: humans were brought to life in the earth oven, kava was drank under conditions that bespoke of a fundamental equality of “chiefs” and “people”; indeed, 

35 See also Capell and Lester (1941: 38) for an attempt to turn the relation into a historical series of migrations.
according to Kaplan (op. cit.: 103), Navosavakadua never even sought to establish a lineage.

What Kaplan and Quain both argue is that the scope of cultural variation within Fiji is greater than what is generally allowed for. In addition to the hierarchical, chiefly, Polynesian Fiji that is relatively well known to anthropologists, there is also a more egalitarian, “Melanesian” Fiji of the inland polities. Both authors, though their publications stand half a century apart and their fieldwork sites are on different islands, highlight the existence of two separate sets of origin myths. “In the origin stories of the land people”, Kaplan writes, “chiefs do not necessarily come from the sea, or even if they do, the agency of the autochthonous original or subject people is different and greater […]. In some of these land people’s versions, the original Fijians sprang from the soil itself” (Kaplan 1995: 28). Here is a specimen of the type Kaplan writes about:

As Degei [the autochthonous creator god] one day passed along the valley he perceived that the snipe (kitu) had built a nest and therein had laid two eggs. Thereupon the god resolved that these eggs should receive divine protection, and, covering them with his influence, he brooded over them until the eggs grew warm with life. Then the shells divided, and forth came a boy and girl, the primal pair whose eyes first saw the great ocean and land, the future home of men. Degei removed the twins from the nest, and placed them in safety from the hot rays of the sun, under the shadow of a gigantic vesi tree (the “green heart” of India; Afzelia bijuga). Here the god tenderly watched over them, nourishing them with delicate food day by day, until they were about five years old. Up to this time, however, the children had not seen each other, for the vast trunk of the tree was between them, and they had not known of the existence of other beings than their foster-deity.

But the boy, peeping round the tree, discovered his little mate, and with celestial cleverness prompting him said, “O girl, the great unborn gods (kalou vu) have brought us two into existence in order that we may have children who shall people this land.” Then Degei put forth his power on the soil of Viti, and the ground produced yams, ndalo (taro) and bananas for their food (Tregear 1903: 182).

Not only does this autochthonous myth account for the origin of Fijians locally, it also portrays the creator god Degei giving Viti (meaning either “Fiji” or the island of Viti Levu) to the first people who, furthermore, form a reproductive couple – unlike in an often-cited “sea” myth, in which the arriving stranger saves the autochthones from potential extinction or incest.
by marrying the daughters of the land. This is the ultimate land people’s point of view from the Kauvadra range, under which the snake-god Degei dwells. However, I emphasise again, the land perspective would not have been restricted to the inland regions just as – judging by Christina Toren’s work – the egalitarianism that both Quain and Kaplan associate with the inland-dwelling land people also appears as part of the “relational” land denomination in the sea-dominated chiefly village of Sawaieke on Gau island (e.g. Toren 1994: 209). It is just that some people are more “land” than others – Kaplan (above) for example mentions inland myths ranging from full autochthonous origin to ones where the leadership is offered to a stranger by the autochthones’ own decision. Similarly, some people are more “sea” than others: out of the paramount chiefs in Fiji, the Verata paramount (Ratu mai Verata), for instance, is probably most consistently held up as representing the senior lineage amongst the ruling aristocracies of eastern Fiji.

In Naloto village, too, some people are more “land” than others. The bati or “warrior” clan, Mataqali Kai Naloto, is actually an agglomeration of seven small, land-owning mataqali whose ceremonial responsibilities previously ranged from warrior to spokesman (matanivanua) and the chief’s undertakers. The undertaker specialisation is now all but forgotten, the spokesman’s office is held by the small Nakakoso subclan, while the warrior designation applies to all the groups that make up the Kai Naloto clan. The Kai Naloto are the prototypical land people, whose particular obligation is to provide pigs on ceremonial occasions and correspondingly abstain from eating pork on said occasions. According to the generally accepted village view, the Kai Naloto originate from the inland kingdom of Naloto in the Wainibuka area. It is said that upon their arrival into the village, they changed its name to Naloto: previously the village was known by another name, Ucunivatu. This, however, is ancient history: the first written documents that mention the village, dating back to the Bau–Verata wars in the mid-19th century, refer to the village with its current name. The “Naloto people” themselves, however, prefer a different origin story, one which makes them autochthonous rather than later arrivals to the place:

Long ago this place was known as Ucunivatu and the people who lived here were known as Kai Ucunivatu. There were eight mataqali back then: Mataigau, Bona, Nasonini… They did not drink yaqona like we drink it: when one drank, no-one would rabe [drink the second cup, typically done by a chief’s herald]. The Naloto people came in from Wainibuka. They settled down in Mataimoana [land area outside the present-day village proper], but were invited into the village, where they were treated like guests: they were taken care of in
a guest house, food was brought to them – they did not have to go farming themselves. When they drank yaqona, the Kai Ucunivatu would rabe. Then one day the Verata paramount held a big meeting, and there, too, the Ucunivatu people allowed their guests the first cup, which caused everyone else to think that the people who drank the second cup were the “Kai Naloto”. [...] Eventually, even the name of the village changed, and Rokotakala became its chiefs. (Kai Naloto man, age 41, April 2008)

In their own clan history, Naloto’s land warriors thus claim a status as the original occupants of the village – a village that, as everyone in the village agrees, has always been there and never moved. One might, on the basis of this, expect a sequence of arrivals – as in a system of differentiation based on the principle of precedence (Vischer [ed.] 2009). But no such sequence exists: rather, the other clans also present themselves as “the originals”. In a way it is as if every group has two potential claims at its disposal – one emphasising originality, the other immigration. Each group systematically elects originality, although their neighbours tend to prefer the alternate versions that highlight their immigrant status, thereby largely making sure that each groups preferred origin myth remains the group’s own business. Thus the Sauturaga or “kingmaker” clan, for example, also claim to have been the first inhabitants of Naloto village. They came from the mythical origin place of Vuda (see below) with the first chiefs, but were given Naloto as their own well before any of the other clans moved in. When the Rokotakala clan arrived, the Sauturaga decided to give the chieftaincy to the newcomers and act as advisors to the chiefs.36 Likewise the Vosaratu clan, the land moiety’s former “priestly” (bete) clan who assume old kin relations with the paramount village, Ucunivanua, and are generally thought to have emigrated from therein, claim firstness due to having occupied an adjacent land area before any of the other clans came to occupy the present-day village site. Indeed, land tracts are sometimes also used for articulating an order of arrival: it was explained to me by one of the Naloto kingmakers that the closer a clan’s lands are to the village itself, the earlier their arrival – though as he explained it, the lands closest to the village, held by the two subclans that make up the chiefly Rokotakala clan, were given to the chiefly newcomers only upon their arrival.

The chiefly clan, after whom the entire land moiety is named, again give a different account in which it was the chiefly Rokotakala who originally founded the village. Here is a lengthy excerpt from a previously published history of mataqali Rokotakala. It differs in some respects from

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36 The same motif is repeated within the mataqali, too: the senior subclan (Vunileba) decided to give the chieftaincy to a junior line, the now-deceased Natadevo subclan.
the one that was told to me in the village, but which I was asked not to put into print. The legitimating principle, emphasising Rokotakala's firstness in Naloto village, remains the same in both versions.  

Rokotakala is the founder of the Qalibure tribe which is now known as the Rokotakala tribe. There were two brothers: the elder one is Roko, and the second one is Rokotakala. Their father was Nakumilevu and their mother was Naivudre. They were born in Africa; a country which was homeland before [they] came over to Fiji. They have joined the party which was led by Lutunasobasoba. While crossing the vast ocean of the Indian Ocean . . . came up to the Pacific, sailed through New Guinea, the Solomon Islands, the New Hebrides, then they came over to Fiji. Reaching Viseiseivuda on the west side of this island, Viti Levu, were their leader, Lutunasobasoba and all the tribes following Lutunasobasoba. 

When Lutunasobasoba came here, he came with his five sons and the only daughter. Her name was Vuisavulu. The five sons: one was Rokomoutu; the second one, Romelasina; the third one, Tuinaiyavu; the fourth one, Daunisai; the fifth one is Sagavula. When they reached Viseiseivuda, they stayed there for a while and left the place because it was not their place for . . . it was not a nice place to plant their crops which they brought from Africa, like dalo, yams, and tivoli. When they left Viseiseivuda and came through the western region which is now known today [sic]. From there, their destination was Nakauvadra. Before reaching Nakauvadra, Lutunasobasoba, the paramount chief of that time died, and they buried him there, in a place known as Vucawai near Naloto – Naloto in Ba [North-West Viti Levu]. When they buried him there, they left the place of Vucawai and came straight down to Nakauvadra. They were in Nakauvadra for several years, and one day a brawl was started and they left the place of Nakauvadra and came up to Verata. They left Degei there, with some of the people: the Mataisau, the carpenters; the Kawai, some of the Kawai; the fishermen; and some of the warriors – tamata i valu. 

Then Rokomouttu, with his four brothers and sister with Nakumilevu and his two sons and a wife left Nakauvadra and came up to Verata. They travelled down to Rakiraki. When they reached Rakiraki, the Mataisau – the carpenters built a canoe and they sailed up the coast on the Tokalau side of Viti Levu, or the east side of Viti Levu and sailed up to Verata. They reached Verata safely.

37 Here “tribe” refers to yavusa: Qalibure is the name of the supra-village yavusa in which the Naloto clans are branches along with clans from several other Veratan villages.
When they were in Verata, then Nakumilevu ordered their sons to go and guard the only daughter of Rokomoutu. While they were guarding the princess, one of the sons, Rokotakala, who was the founder of this tribe Rokotakala, got into the bed where the princess was lying and slept with her. When the elder one woke up, the only thing he saw [was] the war club owned by his younger brother, Rokotakala, was lying on the place where he was standing. He go [sic] through the royal house, peeped inside and saw his brother sleeping with the princess. He came over to his father and reported the matter, that Rokotakala was sleeping with the princess. Then Nakumilevu quickly sent a message to his son to come over to their house and told him to leave the place of Ucunivanua, of Verata, to go on the opposite side of the bay to establish his own village there which is now known today – Naloto.

When he came over to Naloto, he came with the princess. Before leaving for Naloto, the people of Verata performed the vakarabukiliku. Vakarabukiliku means wedding. They had been vakarabukiliku in Verata. They left the place with these gifts given by the people of Verata and the chief, who was the father of the princess, Rokomoutu. He came to Naloto. Here he established his new village, which has never been shifted away, where we are still living today. He has three sons. The elder one is named after him, Rokotakala. The second one is Sauturaga, who is the head of the mataqali Sauturaga, and the third one is Kai Naloto. (Ratu Josateki Waqa: The History of Rokotakala, in Lee 1984: 227–229.)

Let me state at the outset that Rokotakala’s African origins are in no way different from the other land clans’ origin myths presented above: the Sauturaga clan history states as much, for “Vuda” and “Viseiseivuda” are one and the same thing. The other two versions simply skip the part about Africa – partly because everyone knew I had already heard the part and partly because people were often ashamed or apologetic with regard to their African origins. The myth, usually known as “the Kaunitoni migration” myth, after the name typically given to the canoe used by the first Fijians, has been repeatedly discredited by scholars. Throughout my field work, for example, articles appeared regularly in the Fiji Times in which archaeologists piled up proof of its impossibility. Historians, linguists and anthropologists38 have also been keen to demerit the Kaunitoni myth (see

38 There is a worn-out copy of Sahlins’ Moala in the University of the South Pacific Laucala campus library. At the very outset, Sahlins (1962: 14) warns the reader about these origin myths – tainted, as they are, in the course of colonial rule. Someone has written on the Margin: “How can you be so sure?”
France 1966 on “the genesis of a myth”), and I was generally expected to share the scholarly distaste for it. At least two of the more well-read villagers were trying to combine the Kaunitoni myth with the archaeological findings: the gist of their argument was that all Fijians probably did not arrive at once, because remains of Lapita pottery have not been found everywhere in Fiji – not in Verata, for instance; hence the story of Lutunasobasoba and Rokomoutou is entirely plausible.

The particulars of the story remain faithful to the “land” viewpoint, though. Not only does the story establish Rokotakala’s claim at being the first and original people of Naloto village, it also connects Rokotakala with the Kauvadra (alternately spelled “Nakauvadra”) range of interior Viti Levu, home of the snake-god Degei in autochthonous mythology.\footnote{The role given to Degei in these myths varies; sometimes the brother of Lutunasobasoba, sometimes a false god, sometimes an unspecified figure who appears in the myth without further explanations (see also Capell and Lester 1941).} However, Lutunasobasoba’s children all move to coastal Verata, where they divide to found their respective coastal dynasties. Most renditions round Fiji agree that the oldest son, Rokomoutou, stays in Verata, while Romelasiga moves out and establishes the Rewan dynasty, Tuinayavu the Batiki dynasty and Daunisai the Kabara dynasty in Lau, whilst Sagavula is left behind due to his young age. The firstborn daughter, Adi Buisavulu, here becomes Rokotakala’s apical ancestress – thereby making the entire Rokotakala moiety vasu (or tauvu) to the Verata, Rewa, Batiki and Kabara chiefs – though in the more widely established versions, she moves to Ovalau whilst her offspring become the Bau chiefs (for alternate versions, see e.g. Sahlins 2004: 46–69; Tuwere 2002: 20–32).

But allow me to draw attention to the minutiae. In this version of Rokotakala history, all the specialised “classes” of Fijian society are already present at Kauvadra before Rokomoutou brings his originals to Verata. This is so regardless of the fact that the mataisau or carpenters were, as Hocart (1970: 108) has pointed out, always strangers by origin, often from as far Tonga or Samoa, and attached directly to the chiefs rather than the society at large. The “kawai” and the fishermen listed in the script are one and the same, a misspelling of kai wai or “sea people”: hence the sea people are also stated to be present at Kauvadra where some of them were even left with Degei. I point this out because in the sea people’s traditions, this is the one minor detail that separates the kai wai from the land people – a group which here includes the chiefly dynasties. Here, for comparison, is a Naloto sea people’s version of the story which upholds a difference between land and sea people, but only as the difference between walkers and sailors during the final leg of the original migration:
When the Kai Viti _rangau_, people of the first Fijian _taukei_, left our ancestors’ place in the eastern side of Africa; from Tanganyika right up to the coast of Ethiopia, they were brought by these sailors. Lutunasobasoba, the chiefs, his children; his brother Degei and other chiefs: when they were sailing on the sea, they were looked after by the leader of the _gone dau_: Tunidau Ramasi. Ramasi was the captain of those five canoes. They left Tanganyika, along the coast, south of India, along the Mauritius, down through the Malacca straits, North of Australia, through Papua New Guinea, right down to New Britain, where some people were left in there; Vanuatu: some left in there; down to New Caledonia, then came right over to western side, Vuda, Nadi.

They first settled in Vuiseiseivuda. That was the place of the first separation, that is where the name comes from: _vuiseisei_ means separation; separation of the _vu_ [ū = ancestor]. Lutunasobasoba decided to walk to the top of the highlands. He wanted to see where the sun rises. When he reached the top of the Naloto highlands in Ba, he saw the rising sun but could not continue any further. He died there and was buried at Uluda in Ba.

Before he died, he told his sons and daughter not to stay in the highlands but to go to the eastern coast where the sun rises from the sea. His younger brother Degei decided to stay in Nakauvadra. Lutunasobasoba told his sons not to stay with Degei but to go so that they could be worshipped by their own people.

The name of Viti Levu was given because they had no tools with them, so they had to break off branches – _vitika_ – all the way through the bush: _viti kau levu_ [kau = tree, levu = big] to make way for the chiefs. The women and children were travelling along the coast by boats that were captained by the _Tunidau_, who had captained the boats all the way from Taramela [Dar es Salaam] to Verata. The strong people walked on the land, the weak ones sailed under the _kai wai_ right up to the bay. They followed the coastline to the eastern coast where the sun rises from the sea. Rokomoutu brought his brothers and sister right up to Verata. (Tuvaleni man, age 67; edited and combined from two different, predominantly English-language versions in June and July 2007.)

Peter France (1966) has convincingly shown how the myth of Fijians’ African origins abruptly turns up in an 1892 publication by the administrator-ethnographer Basil Thomson. Abruptly, because the myth or anything in its resemblance had not been heard throughout the preceding missionary or colonial history, including several purposeful, extensive
collections of Fijian myths over the previous decades. Indeed, as France shows, the myth emerges subsequently to the adoption of new teaching materials by missionaries Carey and Fison, who establish links between Tanganyika and Fiji on both racial and linguistic grounds – because settlements bearing Fijian names such as Vuda had been found on the shores of lake Tanganyika. However, as Ilaitia Tuwere (2002) points out, the “Kaunitoni myth” was widely adopted to use, not just because of the impact of missionary schools but also because the story offered a national myth, a shared origin for the people of a recently-united Fiji. This is what made it acceptable, even endorsable, to the colonial government and the Methodist church, too. Many versions of the Kaunitoni myth also portray Egypt as the original home of Fijians, thus combining Fijian and Biblical histories. “The story of the Kaunitoni”, Tuwere sums up the myth’s triumph over the early 20th century, “was given its largest audience in the 1960s when a paramount chief of Verata, Ratu Kitione Vesikula, gave a series of radio broadcasts. It was perhaps this presentation, coming as it was from Verata, home of the descendants of Lutunasobasoba, the great ancestor, that the Kaunitoni migration acquired its final, irreproachable authority.” (Tuwere 2002: 22.)

But as the Naloto versions of the myth show, there is little point in ignoring a myth simply because its origins can be tracked down: accounts of the voyage of Lutunasobasoba and Rokomoutu’s arrival to Verata contain significant expressions of how the relations between social groups are currently conceived of. As Tuwere (2002) shows, the Kaunitoni myth can be taken as the basis of a nationwide network of relations covering all of Fiji – I have witnessed as much while accompanying excursions from Naloto to other villages, ranging from the neighbouring chiefdom of Vugalei all the way to the Mamanuca group on the west side of Viti Levu or Lau islanders residing in the capital area. However, what I will focus on is less underlined than the original kin or affinal relations explicated through various versions of the mythology – though in my opinion far more significant. I am talking about a shift in the relation of encompassment that affects the land–sea dichotomy.

THE VALUE OF ORIGIN

From the origin myths presented above, it becomes obvious that the substantive division into different kinds of people – autochthonous and foreign-origin – no longer applies in Naloto. Actually, the most salient
difference between the two types of proto-Fijians sailing from Africa is based on specialisation – division of labour. This is evident in both of the longer accounts reproduced above: the land account carefully mentions that there were both kai wai or “fishermen” and warriors (tamata i valu, “people of war”) or land people present upon leaving the Kauvadra range in the interior. The sea people’s version presents the kai wai as “marines” (as it was translated to me on a couple of occasions) who sailed the canoes round Viti Levu while the landsmen walked through the island’s interior. The distinction of land and sea is still maintained, but loses much of its weight. This is particularly significant with regard to the chiefs whose alterity, in pre-colonial times, rose to divine proportions.

The Naloto myths, at least, seem to eradicate exactly this alterity, which is to say that the myths no longer seek potency or legitimation from beyond the Fiji islands. Of course, strictly speaking the Kaunitoni mythology transforms the origins of all Fijians abroad – tries to enclose everyone in a “sea-centred” viewpoint, as the people in Kaplan’s study see it. “I hold to Fiji only, I do not come from South America, Egypt, or Tanganyika. I have always been here, not arrived there”, as a Vatukaloko man phrased it to Kaplan (1995: 28). But while the Kaunitoni myth undoubtedly is an affront to the autochthonous point of view, the Naloto versions at least utilise the migration narrative to argue what Kaplan’s Vatukaloko informant also claims: “I have always been here”. In other words, the Naloto myths treat pre-migration Viti Levu as terra nullius and the arrival of Rokomoutu and his retinue as the point of origin before which there is nothing. Everyone who have remained where they first settled are “originals”, from the Naloto sea people’s viewpoint even themselves, even if strictly speaking, they only moved to Naloto from the paramount village around the beginning of the 20th century. From their point of view, they have nevertheless, been in Verata since the arrival of Rokomoutu, who brought the “people of the first Fijian taukei” over from Africa – which is to say that every Fijian was a taukei (“host” or “land owner”) even before they arrived in Fiji.

The wider issues at stake can be illustrated through comparison. Martha Kaplan (1995) has described the way the Christian religion was made compatible with the land-centric viewpoint of interior Viti Levu by making Jehovah, Adam and Eve all Fijians and re-naming the Kauvadra landscape so that it became the scene of biblical history. In order to become acceptable, Kaplan argues, the arriviste religion had to be transformed into
an original Fijian one witnessed by reference to the surrounding landscape. In contrast, the sea-affiliated viewpoint could be illustrated by a mid-20th century rendition of the biblical tradition by a retired buli (colonial administrative chief) from Rewa. Though “syncretistic” in the sense that it begins with the first humans habiting an original paradise in Fiji – a now-extinct land mass called Vunivilevu between Viti Levu, Vanua Levu and Ovalau – the narrative takes great care to connect the first humans, banished from paradise for listening to the urgings of “Kalou Loaloa” (“Black God”), with the powers residing beyond Fiji. In the myth, the original “Tomanaivi” family (named after Mt. Tomanaivi in the Kauvadra range) settle first in Turkestan, then in Egypt, before being again banished (and punished for their sins by cannibalism) until they finally end up back in Fiji. But the narrative ends with a flourish, connecting the Rewa lineage with the (non-British) powers of the day:

One of the chiefs of Rewa called Ro Lutunauga went to Tonga after the election of chiefs at Dreketi in 1756. Ro Lutunauga came back to Fiji and after twenty-seven years it was decided that he should go to Tonga and see his elder brother who came from Germany in a warship.

Ro Lutunauga again went to Germany to see Martin Luther’s work in printing the Bible in 1777. Ro Lutunauga died and was buried in Toga. There was a monument of a lion standing on his grave for a hidden sign of the lion of the tribe of Judah. Ro Lutunauga’s family were those who were crowned to be Kings of Tonga from the olden days to this day starting from Tafahau I. The deterioration of this chiefly blood occurred when Sina was married to the wife of Kubunavanua I, the brother of Lutunasobasoba whose father was Tura. (Brewster Papers: D-24c: Legend of the ancestors of Fijians by Buli Noco, Rewa, Circa 1947)

The narrative in its entirety is in many ways indicative of Fiji’s humiliating encounter with the missionaries and the colonial administration, discussed in detail by Tomlinson (2009). Yet this epilogue that connects the Rewa lineage not just with the sole unconquered kingdom in the Island Pacific, but also with the Germans who but recently had fought with the British, and with biblical mythology and church history for good measure, is a prime example of the positive valuation of alterity, xenophilia. Similar to what Kajsa Ekholm-Friedman and Jonathan Friedman (1995) have labelled “endo-sociality” and “exo-sociality”, the two adaptations of a Christian worldview portray no less than two alternate cosmologies of power: one is based on the assimilation of foreign into local models, the other on utilising
distinctly foreign means for local ends. But as both Kaplan (1995) and Toren (1994) – both drawing upon Hocart (1929, 1970 [1936]) – have illustrated, Fijian political organisation is a combination of both. The coastal or “sea” chiefs’ power is derived from beyond the society, but their rule is legitimised by the autochthonous kingmakers. The dichotomy (and the corresponding diarchy) has been discussed from various viewpoints. Kaplan, as already shown, has concentrated on the omission of the “land” viewpoint in colonial understandings and formulations of Fijian culture; Sahlins (1985, 1994a, 2004) has concentrated on the historical coastal polities and the dominant value of alterity therein; Toren (1994) has produced a more balanced view on the dichotomy, claiming that in Fiji, it is impossible to speak of one or the other as “the” encompassing value, because the two mutually define each other.

The Naloto myths presented above are, strictly speaking, unlike any of the models as sketched above; they neither utilise outside influences nor assimilate them. The object or aspiration of the Naloto origin narratives is to argue a group’s “firstness”, originality in terms of arrival. But as already pointed out above, this does not produce a sequence of arrivals: each group have their own version, and though most villagers would on a general level know of others’ origin stories, too, they are never questioned or contested. This does not mean that there is no rank order among the groups, I should add: when rank is required on formal occasions, such as determining the order of speakers in a meeting or the order in which women go out net fishing, the standard order is 1) Rokotakala, 2) Sauturaga, 3) Kai Naloto, 4) Vosaratu, 5) Tunidau, 6) Tuivaleni. This order, however, is based on an abstract model of functional classification (Hocart [1970: 107–108] calls them “castes”), which in full is indicated in the table below. The assumption here is that corresponding divisions are found in other Fijian villages, too, where the groups would be ranked in the same order according to the pre-existing rank order amongst the recognised types of hereditary “specialist” kin groups.

Under the classic dichotomy, most of these “castes” would be subordinate to the land and sea designations: the kingmakers stand for the superseded autochthonous lineage, they are the bati-turaga, whose is the power to provide the land-owning hosts’ legitimacy to the stranger chiefs. The fisherman and carpenter categories are reserved for foreigners who ply their trade “only for the chiefs” (Hocart 1970: 108); “they do not belong to the original scheme of things”, as Hocart (ibid.) puts it.

“The kai wai are not supposed to be in Naloto”, I was also told by the Tuivaleni clan chief, but what he meant was that the “fishermen”, “carpenter” and “liga ni magiti” divisions should only exist in paramount villages, which Naloto is not – in that sense, he considered the Naloto sea
people as an anomaly (although a common one, since there are in fact sea people in at least six out of the seven Verata villages, and I presume in the seventh one as well). He also expressed a doubt about whether the *liga ni magiti* “caste” actually ought to exist at all. The Kai Naloto group does, however, contain a subclan whose members describe their traditional responsibilities as those of the chief’s body servant. The subclan known alternately as Nause or Bona not only used to look after the Naloto chief’s person but were, in former times, also responsible for guarding a dead chief’s body and for burying the chief. They say their alternate clan name, Bona (“stink”, “stench”) reflects their trade. (Perhaps Hocart was right in classifying these groups as castes after all?) Bona is part of the Kai Naloto clan, and thus one of the groups comprising the fundamental land people of Naloto. This stands in marked contrast with the pre-colonial days, when the high coastal chiefs’ body servants and undertakers were typically foreigners – mostly Tongans, Samoans or Europeans. What this spells out is that the “strangers” who in historical accounts of the dichotomy, surround the chief – as the proxemical markers of chietaincy – have been either replaced by landsmen or made tantamount to landsmen.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. turaga (chiefs)</th>
<th>mataqali Rokotakala</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. sauturaga (kingmakers)</td>
<td>mataqali Sauturaga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. matanivanua (spokesman)</td>
<td>mataqali Kai Naloto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. bete (priests)</td>
<td>mataqali Vosaratu</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. gone dau/kai wai (sea people; fishermen)</td>
<td>yavusa Saraviti (Tunidau + Tuivaleni)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. bati (warriors)</td>
<td>mataqali Kai Naloto</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. mataisau (carpenters)</td>
<td>none</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. <em>liga ni magiti</em> (lit. “hands of the feast food”; chief’s servants)</td>
<td>(mataqali Kai Naloto)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Table 4:** rank according to specialisation (“caste”). The left column shows the abstract model, the right column the corresponding Naloto groups. Note that the entire mataqali Kai Naloto takes the highest slot available to them, while Tunidau precedes Tuivaleni because Tunidau is the chiefly clan of the sea moiety.

As expressed in the Naloto origin myths above, the difference between the land and the sea groups has diminished. In fact, a typical way of telling one of the old myths in Naloto emphasises the all-inclusiveness of the ancient chiefs’ comings and goings: the various social divisions are typically

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41 In his opinion, the typical formulaic incantation preceding a *yaqona* session refers to this contested point: whenever the person opening the session calls out “seven” (*vitu*), the assembly responds in unison: “eight!” (*walu*!), in reference to the number of the social divisions within traditional Fijian community.
listed at points of departure to indicate that all were represented. The key phrase “he took with him some warriors, some carpenters and some kai wai” appears regularly in the accounts I have collected, which can be interpreted either as a way of emphasising the extent of a chief’s retinue, or as asserting the unity of the people in history. Every “specialist group” is represented at every step of the way, and the fishermen are but one among many such groups. And as illustrated by the origin myths above, none of the groups in Naloto actually try to establish a claim to either the “land” or the “sea” origins in the strict sense of the dichotomy. Rather, they are all vying for a claim at “firstness” so that an emphasis on originality replaces the emphasis once placed on one’s point of origin, though such originality approximates features usually sorted under autochthonous rather than foreign origin.

Yet the sea people are obviously different from the specialist designations. For one thing, the land–sea divide coincides with the highest-level social division in the village, the moiety. Though uneven in the sense that the land moiety greatly outnumbers the sea moiety and asymmetrical in the sense that the sea moiety is conceived as a kin group and the land moiety as an agglomeration of kin groups, the moiety division is nevertheless often even portrayed as a wife giver–wife taker relation. Neither the moieties are exogamous units, and though marriages across the moiety line seem to slightly outnumber other intra-village marriages, the wife giving and taking obviously goes both ways. But the ideal model is derived from the original “founding” marriage of the leader of a group of sea people cast out from the paramount village at the turn of the 20th century following a fight over a woman.

Were there sea people in Naloto before that, or more than one moiety? I do not know; all I can say is that regardless of the claims for originality, the Naloto social organisation appears to comprise layers of previous arrivals, any or all of whom could have made up a previous group of “strangers”: mataqali Vosaratu, villagers seem to agree, came from the paramount village, too, though well before the sea moiety. The groups comprising Mataqali Kai Naloto, “People from Naloto”, are also commonly considered foreigners by origin — “Mataqali Naloto are the same Naloto as those in Naitaisiri, but they have always been here”, two villagers explained to me – even seem to indicate internal specialisations, from “chiefly” to “rite specialist” and “grave digger” groups, though these come through in indefinite hints rather than anyone’s assertions of a past that was.

But whether there has been a continuum of sea people in Naloto or not, the distinctive relation of land and sea is substantiated by practices and observances that are recognised beyond Naloto village and the groups therein. I am, to be precise, talking about the ceremonial obligations – exchanges and food prohibitions – that characterise the relations between
land and sea. A.M. Hocart, writing on “the food taboos that exist between coast and hill people on the east coast of Viti Levu”, describes the pattern that is repeated throughout the region thus:

each coast tribe stands to one or more tribes inland of them in the relation of coast and hill, or noble and mbati [bati] or tooth on edge; the “hill tribe” in its turn is “coast tribe” to one further inland, and so it goes on. This relation is called veimbatiki [veibatiki], or relation of noble and mbati. It involves certain food restrictions: thus the coast tribe may not eat fish in presence of its mbati, nor can the mbati eat pig in presence of the coast tribe; as for turtle and large fish, the coast tribe might not eat them at all, but had to send them to the mbati; if they ate it in secret, as often happened, and it was found out, they had their houses burnt down. (Hocart 1924: 186)

What Hocart describes in terms of “nobles” vs. bati is not a hierarchical relation in Naloto, where the same obligations apply to the land and sea sides without assumptions of noblesse. This does not, however, mean that the characteristic implications of hierarchy would be unknown in Naloto, though they are absent in the intra-village register. Even the history of the village (at least one version of it) reveals as much, for as already stated, most people in the village agree that the village got its name from migrants originating in the inland polity of Naloto. The Naloto people, according to the Kaunitoni mythology, once came from the Naloto range in Ba. Following the rising sun, they made their way through the Viti Levu island until they came to Cegu Naloto in Wainibuka, where they split into two groups. The Tui (“king” or “chief”) people, closer to the Wainibuka river, were the chiefly group vis-à-vis the Bati, who were “in the bush”. The Tui people’s ceremonial obligation was to provide fish from the Wainibuka river, which they gave to the Bati, the Bati people gave pork to the Tui. The agreement between them was that “our ceremonial meat (sasalu) will be your food; your ceremonial meat will be our food”. A section of the chiefly group later moved away from the chiefdom of Naloto and settled in what then became Naloto village “probably because they ate something they should not have”, I was once explained.

The same food taboos – “sea” should not eat fish in the presence of “land” and vice versa – are also applied to the inter-village relations of present-day Naloto village. That is, they apply to ritual feasts that bring Veratans together with the neighbouring chiefdoms who are bati in relation to Verata. As a rule, the inter-village events are a matter of higher formality than intra-village ones, yet in truth very few people in Naloto observe the prohibitions in either register. The ceremonial menus of the sea people’s
chief (Na Tunidau) and the village paramount (Komai Naloto) form a highly significant exception since they, particularly when both are present, comply with the food taboos; the significance of the exception is that they, strictly speaking, are representative of their respective moieties in toto.

Nalotans on the one hand acknowledge the norms connected with the land and sea designations, on the other hand they disregard the food taboos just as they disregard the food exchanges associated with ritual specialisations (the exchanges will be discussed in greater detail in chapter six). Indeed, during my field work, I was repeatedly told about the food taboos – they are the peoples’ way of conceptualising the difference between “sea” and “land” and as such brought up whenever I asked questions on the subject. I even tried to follow the principle “when in Rome”, after all I was in every other way trying to act in accordance with my status as an adopted member of the Tunidau clan, but on this account, all I managed was to amuse my hosts. From the young to the old, from clan chief to plebeian, from land to sea, everyone cited the prescriptions: “we cannot eat pork in front of kai wai”, and vice versa. But in practice, no-one treated them as binding – as a matter, the current bati-turaga was particularly fond of pork and publicly expressed his delight when pork was served as part of a feast. Still, the two chiefs’ abidance to the taboos made the others’ repeated statements true in the sense that on ceremonial occasions, the chiefs do “stand for” or formally encompass their people. Yet this does not mean that the two chiefs’ actions would have satisfied the requirements of the prohibition. Some Naloto men seemed almost ashamed of discussing the taboos; the laughter given in response to my inquiries at feasts was often embarrassed, while the few explanations I received portrayed the prohibitions as a bygone phenomenon, something people have left behind – part of an “uncivilised” past (in my Naloto teacher’s words, not mine).

One of the young men in the village, more interested in the “vanua stuff” or village traditions than most of his peers, once remarked to me that in his view, the villagers should invite “someone from [the Ministry of] Fijian Affairs” to teach them how to observe the food taboos which “some follow and some don’t”. His comment was made during a conversation that touched upon issues of leadership. In his opinion, that was what the village lacked: “the elders [na qase]” or “those who should be making the decisions do not know how to act properly” – call people up, give them instructions – but only “stay up too late and wake up late”. His solution – re-learning the food taboos – thus resonates with the view on these taboos in the Fiji ethnographies discussed above: that they do indeed express a hierarchical relation.

Perhaps this is why, in present-day feasts, the majority of men do not eat at all, except when “snack food” is served to the kava drinkers. In all the
communal eating events I witnessed, it was predominantly the women who ate while men gathered round the yaqona bowl. To be specific, a ranking senior male always acts as the formal recipient of a feast offered, and a number of other men always join him in partaking the feast food, served upon a long strip of cloth that allows for a seating order indicative of rank among the villagers. But the majority of eaters at any Naloto feast are women and children, though even among women and children it is quite common that they, too, pass the commensality and rather retire to eat at home amongst the nuclear family after first providing their household’s share to the feast. In funeral feasts, particularly ones that are held in another village, it is customary that women carry the men’s portions in plastic boxes to be eaten only when the yaqona is finished; either at home or on the back of a lorry on the way home. For the men in particular, it is as if the yaqona offers a more appropriate, or “elaborating” (Ortner 1973), symbolic model for social organisation than the food. But it also shows that while these norms remain significant and acknowledged, people also feel uncomfortable with what they connote.

What it all boils down to is that one apparently cannot take the hierarchy out of the food, even in Naloto where the autochthonous land side sits paramount. One can, however, take the food out the hierarchy, it appears. A telling episode occurred in March 2008, during a large women’s fundraiser organised in the Naloto village hall. As the fundraiser was organised by women, for women, it was the men’s duty to show support to them, which on this occasion meant yaqona, but also food prepared in an earth oven. This was not just any food, though, but rather the only time during my time in the village that vakalolo or “red coconut cream” (“lolo damudamu”) was served. Red coconut cream is actually a pudding made out of ground tapioca and coconut wrapped in banana leaves. Socio-semantically “red coconut cream” is by definition “chiefly” food: forbidden to the bati, or only allowed to the “chiefs”, which in this case meant the sea moiety (who are “all ratsus” due to their genealogical links with the Verata paramount) as well as the chiefly Rokotakala clan. As the food was the men’s presentation to the women, the bundles of vakalolo were served to the women. What then remained was served to the upper section of the yaqona ring: “the chiefs”, or the top-ranking seniors regardless of clan. But while most of the women enjoyed their bundles on the spot, none of the men chose to eat what they had received: the Komai Naloto saved his and took it home with him. The sea chief did the same; the Vosaratu clan chief handed his bundle to one of his children after a while, one of the Kai Naloto clan chiefs untied his bundle and peeked inside, but then redid the wrapping and later carried it home, and so forth. One of the ladies, head of the organising committee (and my tavale, or cross-cousin), made fun of me sitting with the
bundle I had received by my side: “What? Aren’t you going to eat that?” – obviously fully expecting me not to. Besides joking, though, no-one would comment on what took place, except telling me that the red coconut cream is a delicacy that people may want to save. I suppose the last assessment at least is correct, for someone filched my bundle before the event was over.

The practice was in stark contrast to other types of food served during a *yaqona* session: sandwiches, stuffed roti, or cakes served to kava drinkers are typically eaten on the spot by all men. The possibility does exist, of course, that on this occasion the ranking men refused to eat in public what they themselves had offered – that is, what men, collectively, had offered to the women collectively, even if I do believe that someone would have been willing to explain this to me if that were the case. But there is another possible interpretation: an unwillingness to proclaim oneself “chiefly” vis-à-vis the village community. The event described above – a ladies’ fundraiser in the village meeting hall – may be an isolated one, but if interpreted as a refusal of “chiefliness”, it is also a formalised expression of something I observed often enough in Naloto: a pronounced unwillingness on the paramount chief’s part to act chiefly.

For example, the village paramount, Komai Naloto, systematically refused to take his prescribed place in the village church. This is quite remarkable considering the fact that every Fijian Methodist church I have seen reserves a special seat for the ranking chief or chiefs in the “upmost” part of the church, next to the pulpit and facing the congregation – “their position is ratified by association with the divine”, as Toren (1988: 707) describes the chiefs’ status in relation to the church. The Naloto Methodist church also keeps a chiefly seat reserved on a raised platform where the pastor or preachers and visiting chiefs are also seated. The Komai Naloto, however, insists on sitting as part of the village church choir who occupy a separate set of benches below the chiefly seat, on a level plane with the congregation, looking sideways to both the priest and the congregation. The Komai himself says that he made a promise to his father to help the church choir – this is not, however, sufficient to the other senior men who have made repeated requests that the Komai would take up his proper place at the uppermost part of the church. When the Komai is absent from church, the chief of the sea moiety occasionally takes the chief’s place.

The Komai often also refuses to take his honorary place at the head of other gatherings, too. I am, for example, reminded of a fundraiser at which he adamantly sat “below” the Methodist church steward (*tuirara*) and the

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42 “Chiefly”, *vakaturaga*, also means “honourable” or “gentleman-like”, and in that sense, every adult male head of a household may be considered a “chief in his own house” – that, however, differs crucially from the dichotomising type of “chiefliness” foregrounded by the food taboos.
Sawa village chief (Komai Sawa) in the yaqona ring. When he had ignored his companions’ repeated requests to move to the uppermost position in the circle, the men present made a practical decision to turn the yaqona bowl around to face the chief, thereby altering the spatial coordinates of “up” and “down”. Eventually, however, it became obvious that this still did not meet everyone’s sense of propriety, and so the group finally made the decision to manoeuvre the entire group, until the two chiefs, the church steward and the headmaster of the village school were level at the head of the circle and the yaqona bowl was turned to face the four men. Although a degree of ceremonious refusals to accept a high-ranking seat always takes place in similar events, the chief’s refusal goes way beyond courteousness: he refuses to accept the station that is part and parcel of his office. But it is much more common that he simply does not attend an event at all, in which case one of his classificatory brothers takes his place as Komai. In such an event a stand-in chief uses the same chiefly title and receives the same honours – or lack thereof.

The Komai’s refusal to act the chief is equalled and often surpassed by the villagers’ refusal to allow him the respect due to his rank. I have observed the villagers regularly fail to hush up in order to hear what he has to say or, when they have heard his words, decide not to heed them. Take, for example, the village meeting (bose vakakoro) called up after a cyclone had hit the village in March 2008:

While discussing the unrepaired damages caused by the storm, the meeting received a request to appoint a “task force” (solosolovaki) for repairing the damages, particularly for working the plantations that had been hard hit by the storm. The Komai Naloto countered the suggestion of a single work group by suggesting that several task forces, each comprising four young men, would be formed because the one-group model just wastes or “eats” time (kania na gauna). His proposal, however, was soon overturned too: one of his relatives announced that instead of such a centralist approach, each mataqali ought to be allowed to make their own arrangements. In the end, the matter was decided by a hand vote.

This was not an isolated event. I have seen several events in which the chief’s words were drowned by people’s chatter, and witnessed a number of instances where the villagers made a collective decision to ignore or contradict the direct command from the Komai. Villagers often commented to me that it is the responsibility of the spokesman and the bati to act as the chief’s functionaries and police: that “in the old days”, the spokesman would have made sure the chief is listened to in silence, the bati would have made
sure people show the proper signs of respect to the chief and observe his decrees. But whilst obviously not commanding the full respect of his functionaries, the chief also lacks respect from other villagers. Some of this is expressed through typical contestation of his pedigree – “he is not the real chief”, meaning that in many villagers’ opinion, the rightful successor to the Komai Naloto title went away to Vanua Levu and stayed there: “now they prosper” while things are going wrong in Naloto. But the chief is also subject to witchcraft accusations muttered behind his back, accusations that “he has forgotten God”, and so on.

People do not bring first fruits offerings (sevu) to the Komai Naloto, but apparently that has never been customary in the village. Neither do people perform work for the chief in Naloto. Some claim that villagers did work for their chief as late as 2000, but not today, but I have no proof of this even if that were the case. However, the relatively small land area belonging to the chiefly mataqali is, so I was told, proof of the changing status of chieftaincy. “In the old days” (i liti) – an expression one hears often in the village – the chiefs requested (and received) their food from others. “Today, if they try to ask, they’ll have to pay: ‘mai na ilavo!’ [“hand over the money”]. But today the chiefs also keep the yau [“wealth”] for themselves – in the old days they used to give them away”, a Naloto man in his early forties explained the difference.

The difference does not exist only in the social memory of the villagers; it is also manifested on the physical village. Today’s Komai Nalotos are buried in the cemetery on the south side of the village, together with their fellow clan members – there is a separate cemetery on the north side of the village for the north-side dwellers. The predecessors of present-day Komais, however, were buried in the sautabu, chiefly burial ground, at the top of the hill dividing the two halves of the village, next to where the Naloto Methodist Church now stands at the centre of the village. The old chiefly burial ground still remains the whole village’s concern: once a year, the village cleans up the sautabu, clearing up the graves, cutting the grass and trimming trees while the senior men drink yaqona outdoors by the old cemetery. The two cemeteries for the two halves of the village are, by contrast, looked after by the smaller divisions: clans or even individual households.

43 There are no specific planting or harvesting times for any of the main subsistence crops used in Naloto – hence the “point” of first fruits or food exchanges tied to the annual cycle does not exist. Sevu (first fruits) is now practised in the Naloto Methodist church, though only by members of the Methodist congregation. Today, there is a nation-wide or unified date for the i sevu in March, when some people took their first fruits offerings to the Naloto Methodist church. The offerings were blessed and distributed to the old and the widows.
And then there is the grave of the late chief Waisea Waqa, whose cemented burial place lies right next to his house foundation, within the village – the south side, to be specific. Buried in the 1960s, no-one could tell me why he, out of all the Naloto chiefs, was buried amidst the south side residential houses. One of his descendants did, however, describe his funeral, which other villagers also alluded to from time to time. According to Sera of the Rokotakala clan, Waisea Waqa’s death was followed by a 100-day taboo on fishing; his body was carefully handled by the Nause group prior to the funeral, and after his death there was an absolute silence in the village. Back in the old chief’s time, she also stated, the chief’s word was absolute: nobody argued or questioned his word. Other villagers also refer back to Waisea Waqa’s day, recounting examples of high respect: “no-one would shout in the village”; “no one would enter the village wearing a hat”; “if you wanted to bring something into the village on your shoulder (cola), you would enter the village via the hill in the middle in order to avoid insulting the chief”, and so on.

The current Komai Naloto, Leone Dabea, is the fifth since the death of Ratu Waisea Waqa, who was the last installed chief in Naloto; the last Ratu – since his time, the chiefs have been “just komais”. “Nowadays there is only one Ratu in Verata, in Ucunivanua”, says an elderly member of the Nause clan who used look after the chiefs’ bodies. He thinks the installations ceased when the installing clan – Sauturaga – lost the paraphernalia required for installations. However, a senior member of the Sauturaga clan insists that the installations ceased when the chiefly clan started choosing the chiefs themselves – that they tried to disregard the kingmakers’ right to elect the successor to the chieftaincy. “The sauturaga and the matanivanua are born into their stations, the Komai is not”, he said to emphasise the fact that the paramount is supposed to be “made” (buli) instead of just succeeding to the paramount title.

However, it also appears that the Komai title is not as coveted as the kingmakers make out. Indeed, before the incumbent Komai Naloto, the senior men in the chiefly clan turned down the chieftaincy so that the title was finally given to a senior man of the Wawa subclan – the diminished former clan now merged into the chiefly Rokotakala clan. As all the Rokotakala house sites are on the southern side of Naloto and the Wawa houses on the northern side, villagers have renamed the two groups “Rokotakala South Side” (Rokotakala baba ceva) and “Rokotakala North Side” (Rokotakala baba vualiku); the names are interchangeable with the groups’ traditional names “Rokotakala Draunikau” and “Wawa”.

The change that occurred in the chiefly succession for one time only has produced an interesting re-interpretation of the system, according to which the Wawa or “Rokotaka North Side” lineage provide the “second
chief” of the village, the Komai’s representative on north side of the village. Though apparently not a widespread theory, it was even explained to me by one of the clan chiefs – a recognised authority on village traditions – that the Komai title should actually alternate between the two sub-lineages or, to be precise, between the north and the south sides. Now, whether his claim ought to be regarded as a political attempt to get an alternate basis for chieftainship recorded in writing (which I deem highly unlikely on personal grounds), a misunderstanding, a desired state of affairs or something else, it stands in stark contrast to what everyone else says – that the title is hereditary to the chiefly lineage whose house sites are situated in the middle of Draiba. However, the argument according to which the paramount title properly ought to rotate between the two geographical halves of the village actually duplicates a principle of balanced power sharing that the village council tries to apply to administrative village posts – namely the post of the turaga ni koro (“village chief”), an administrative official who receives a small remuneration from the state for his troubles.

“Sides”: Symmetrical Opposition

On an abstract level, the villagers make a distinction between three levels or spheres of organisation. The first is vanua or “land”, meaning traditional affairs such as ceremonial events or generally matters that are under the Komai Naloto’s jurisdiction and, at least theoretically, implemented by the village spokesman, Matanivanua or “face of the land”. Hence when a vakavanua matter requires attention, it properly ought to be presented to the spokesman who then takes it to the Komai and afterwards announces the decision by calling it out (kaci) from the top of the hill (actually, in Naloto, calling it out twice: once to the south side and once to the north). The second is koro or “village” level, the state-administrative sphere. Typical vakakoro matters include village clean-up (werekoro) days, visits by state functionaries, and generally trying to uphold a wide range of matters relating to village welfare and upkeep. As the majority of these are tasks no-one willingly takes up, the task of administrative chief, turaga ni koro, is one that most villagers avoid. The village council, who appoint the administrative chief, try to rotate the job between the two sides of the village and, if possible, amongst the six mataqalis. The administrative level of organisation would probably contain the numerous village-level or smaller committees as well, but in practise these act independently or in co-operation with the village council, which embraces all the administrative levels in the village. The third level of organisation is the church, lotu, which mainly refers to the Methodist Church, since the different denominations only rarely engage in ecumenical co-operation. The Methodist Church in Naloto is headed by the
vakatawa or pastor, though it is the church steward, tuirara, who carries out the earthly tasks, acts as an intermediary between the church and the vanua and oversees the church matters. In practice, all three levels casually blend into one another so that ultimately, most major issues tend to be discussed at village meetings whatever their administrative sphere. With regard to the trivia of village upkeep and state-appointed bureaucracy, however, the administrative chief is on his own.

The “geographic” division into two Naloto halves, south side and north side, can be traced to the administrative (vakakoro) level, whereupon it is utilised for the division of communal labour: “tomorrow, the south side will attend to the pastor’s gardens and the north side to the headmaster’s”, or “the south side will clean up the southern half and the north side the northern half”. The same divisions – north and south – are also generally adopted by the school committee in fundraisers and other practical functions. But they are not just administratively convenient: the two halves of the village also have their separate cemeteries, separate inroads, and used to have their separate shops, too. Southsiders like to engage northsiders in jokes about the pleasant conditions they enjoy on their side (the south side is sheltered from the wind), northsiders have been known to gossip about the potential reasons for the bad mobile network coverage on the south side (back in 2008), and the two sides stand opposed in fundraisers or issues such as the uneven distribution of water coming from the bore hole to water points on the two sides. In such events, the physical division of the village represents a far more natural dividing line than the moieties, particularly since the moieties produce an uneven division.

The geographic division differs significantly from the moiety-based one in the sense that the former creates a symmetrical opposition of two sides that are essentially similar. Now, if this were only restricted to “bureaucratic-administrative” contexts wherein the land–sea dichotomy has no bearing (cutting grass, collecting money), it would be of little significance. But the symmetrical opposition is applied in matters that go beyond village administration: for example, the spatial category of “us gang here on this side” is a highly relevant unit in the organisation of other collective labour and solidarities, too, while the non-moiety-based tasks and duties, assigned in accordance with the symmetrical model, have taken on features of the traditional (vakavanua) organisation. Thus the spatial division of labour is visible for example in house building, where it is customary that one receives assistance from the members of one’s clan and affines, but the concerted effort also draws in help from neighbours or, more generally, “us here” which is usually a spatially defined group. My Naloto mother, for one, was very critical of such practice on the north side, where both moieties are represented, insisting that sea people thus joining in on the land people’s
labour was a deviation from proper custom – the old custom being that when the land moiety had work to do, the sea moiety expressed their solidarity by going out to fish and providing the workers with some fish. This may be a detail that only a few villagers would find disturbing, while being one of numerous instances where it is difficult to ascertain how much customs have actually changed, but what she was addressing is a significant change in terms of solidarities. The transition from moiety-based expressions of solidarity to spatially organised labour also involves a change from group-based complementary solidarities to a more symmetrical model.

The south and north halves are, it turns out, “real” or consequential enough to recognise each other as existing social groups, which in Fiji is to engage in reciprocities. The cemented footpaths of Naloto village provide a good example: these were built through an arrangement where the south side made the north side’s pathways and vice versa. Which is to say that rather than being organised on the simple basis of bureaucratic efficiency, the work was carried out as an exchange of communal labour. Likewise, when the Naloto Ladies’ Committee decided to take care of their overdue duties – visiting the sick and the elderly (veisiko) – the backlog of overdue visits was distributed by halves: ladies from the south side went to veisiko those on the north side and vice versa.

But not only have the administrative roles of the two sides taken on features from the traditional reciprocities known as “vanua stuff”. The symmetrical “north–south” distinction also increasingly replaces the moiety division in villagers’ conceptions. The sides are commonly referred to with their geographical names: “Draiba” for the south side, though it strictly speaking is the name of the area comprising only most of the southern side; “Buretu”, the area where most of the sea moiety lives, and “Sikitai”, housing members of the Vosaratu, Sauturaga, Kai Naloto and Rokotakala North Side groups, are both used in reference to the entire north side, though the north side is actually subdivided into these two halves. But the oppositional

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44 Reading older ethnography, such as Quain (1948), another striking contrast arises: there are no age-specific tasks in men’s communal labour, either, in Naloto. Everybody does the same work, whether in agriculture or construction work. Once a man is old and/or esteemed enough not to work, he joins the chiefs and other seniors who support the workers. This is done by sitting close by and saying “thank you, thank you”, as one of the clan chiefs explained to me a ranking senior’s duties: “It is our custom. Whenever someone in the village is building a new house, especially some important person, we should go over there to sit and watch them build the house and say ‘vinaka, vinaka’ to show our support.” When the significance of the task at hand extends beyond the mundane, the supporting requires yagona; in instances such as cleaning or cementing old graves, preparing an old house site for use etc., the labour force is matched and frequently surpassed in size by the group of seniors gathered around a kava bowl.
relation of the two halves increasingly also serves as the medium for conceptualising relations between the traditional groups.

On a telling occasion in July 2007, a large number of people from the sea moiety had gathered round a bowl of yaqona in an empty house that often served as the sea moiety’s meeting place, on this occasion to welcome home two urban relatives. In addition to the two, one of whom was from the sea moiety and the other from Mataqali Kai Naloto (north side), but related to the sea moiety through his mother, there were others present, too: a dozen or so members of the sea moiety, the Vosaratu clan chief, a man from the Kai Naloto clan who, by special arrangement, had built his house on top of the dividing hill, and a man from “Rokotakala south side”. After a few hours of exchanging news, one of the guests of honour left the session to get some sleep whilst the other fell asleep in the yaqona ring, and soon after that the Rokotakala man politely asked to leave, too. After his departure, the sea moiety chief made a long, angry speech about present-day villagers’ lack of respect. The gist of his lecture was that in the old days, people had more respect for chiefs – they stayed on their own sides and did not go wandering across the hill just like that. Back then, the village was also blessed: trees always carried ripe fruit, the villagers could sell their bananas in Suva for good profit and still had plenty for themselves. His outburst visibly agitated many of the men in the company, and some of them actually responded angrily at the old chief. Finally one of the younger men in the group – the chief’s namesake, which gives them a special relationship – defused the situation by resorting to humour: “if Jesus Christ our Lord can come over from Heaven to help us, then why shouldn’t father-of-Epeli come over to Buretu to help us?”

What I want to draw attention to is that what angered the old chief was the presence of a Draiba man in a Buretu gathering. He was not offended by the presence of men from the other moiety – indeed, one of the guests in whose honour the yaqona was served was a Kai Naloto man, which is to say from the bati clan that, in theory, embodies the strongest form of the land–sea opposition; likewise, the man living on top of the hill was also of the bati clan, whilst the clan chief of Vosaratu also comes from the land moiety. Yet their presence did not anger the sea chief, who was happy to berate the absent south sider in the presence of the other land moiety members. I should also point out that the old man’s view of the village in the old days was, generally speaking rather than on this particular occasion, questioned by many villagers, who told me that he had actually only moved to Naloto upon his retirement from wage labour in the capital city. Indeed, the spatial division into south and north sides was embraced by urban Naloto villagers perhaps even more strongly than those in the village, at least it was customary for urban Nalotans (at least the ones with more remote
connections to the village) to begin accounts of their village affiliations by stating which side they were native to. This definitely outweighed *yavusa* affiliations, for example. Even the urbanites with close connections to the village, who had lived there and visited the village regularly, often preferred the geographical model, as upon my first visit to a one of the many Naloto families living in Lautoka town on the west side of Viti Levu:

prior to the visit, I was instructed to address the lady of the house as "*na*" (shortened from *nana*, "mother") due to her status as the wife of a *mataqali* Kai Naloto man whom I address as "father". However, she quickly corrected me and asked me to call her "*nei*" ("aunt"), because she was a member of my adopted *mataqali* Tunidau by birth, and therefore a father’s sister as well as a father’s *wife* to me. This, though, was not how she would explain the difference to me, but rather in terms of village geography: “Don’t call me *na*, that means I’m from Draiba! You call me *nei*, I am from Buretu!”

The reason why I should have call her *nei* rather than *na* is an acknowledgement of the fact that the geographical divisions of the village correspond with relations between people to the degree that kinship terms of reference can be expected to coincide with them. But notice that *nei* Mere’s point of reference, her native quarter of Buretu, is not contrasted to the rest of the village: only Draiba, the south side. I have already pointed out that villagers often tend to discuss the moieties as if they were wife-exchanging groups: “If we don’t get fish, then you don’t get women!” as members of the land moiety jokingly put it. But as the Lautoka example shows, even this logic of the “wife-exchanging” moieties can be transposed upon the symmetrical model. This actually explains the sea moiety leader’s demand for more respect from the south-siders, too, for the model that equates cross and parallel relatives with two sides of the village would, in theory if not in practice, also require the behaviour associated with the two types of relationships. But while this is obvious in the jokingly competitive behaviour between the two sides – something approximating a generalised cross-cousinship between the south side and the north side – it is much more difficult to put one’s finger on the respectful avoidance that is characteristic of the *veivugoni*-relationship: relations between father or mother-in-law and son or daughter-in-law, or mother’s brother and nephew or niece, and so forth. I say difficult because, even though these are relations that are characterised by avoidance in principle, in Naloto such avoidance is – just like the prohibitions between land and sea – practised by few and ignored by
many (on several occasions, villagers explained this to me as a matter of individual choice). 45

I find the relations between the geographical halves hard to describe. For most of the time, most villagers tended to stay on their sides of the village when there was no particular reason for visiting the other side. Such reasons, however, did not have to be particularly important: a yaqona session, the need to buy something, a rugby game on TV, and so forth. Yet people would, all the same, typically stay on their own sides. Upon my arrival in the village, my Naloto mother instructed me to stay in the Buretu quarter of the village, though she had no problem with me extending my expeditions to Sikitai, also on the north side. Familiarising myself with Draiba, the south side, however, required us to sit down to work out an understanding: I did not know how it would reflect on her if I roamed across the village disregarding all proprieties, but nevertheless had to spend time at the Draiba side, too. Recognising my necessity, she conceded but asked me not to enter any of the houses on the other side, even when invited, or accept any food or drink offered to me across the hill. As she could not explain these requests with any other reason than that I could never know the innermost thoughts of people beyond my adopted mataqali, I finally had to refuse these demands as well. Trying to assess the severity of my infringement, I asked others about the boundary crossing, but they were all quick to brush such concerns aside: “just go”; “if you have to go, then go”. I thought it was said in the same vein as I would brush off minor formalities in my native Finland. Yet I admit that with the degree of questions or attention that walking across the Naloto hill always raised, the boundary remained a marked, somewhat awkward spot for me throughout my fieldwork. My wife, who joined me in Naloto for six months, found crossing this particular boundary even harder. And reading the work of Dorothy Sara Lee (1983) from Naloto, I find it striking that her point of view is so recognisably from the “north side”, as if she, too, had been shy of the dividing line.

45 With the benefit of the hindsight, this is something I probably should have asked specifically from the women married into Naloto from elsewhere, since it was the women who were conscious of the way they acquired more room to wander in the village only gradually with more and more time spent in the village. It is also the women who observe the avoidance etiquette more carefully than the men, both because they are strangers in a new village and because they often come from villages where avoidance behaviour is held up more rigorously.
IN CONCLUSION

The chapter has taken a few twists and turns before reaching this point, so allow me to recapitulate. I started out with the different origins recorded for the two kinds of people as portrayed in various Fiji ethnographies: the foreign origins of the sea people and local, autochthonous origins of the land people. I then proceeded to compare these with the present-day Naloto origin stories which all stress the “originality” of the Naloto groups, regardless of their place in the traditional land–sea dichotomy. In a way, this claim at “originality” could be regarded as a synthesis of the two viewpoints: foreign, since the stories all have their point of origin way beyond Fiji, in Africa, and autochthonous, since the common emphasis is on “firstness” — the canoes filled with Tanganyika Fijians land onto terra nullius which these originals then populate, all at the same time. But the significant difference is that there are no groups in Naloto village that would emphasise their alterity through differing origins. In this respect, the “sea” point of view is available as a mythological trope, but it is systematically refused.

The common origin of the people, all now referring to themselves as taukei, gets reflected in the way the difference between two groups — labelled land and sea people — is conceived of: as hereditary specialisation rather than marked difference in the kind of people they are. This leaves the sea people in an anomalous position. On the one hand, they are considered one of various specialised groups, such as warriors, priests, carpenters and the like. On the other hand, the fact that they are not structurally on a par with the other specialist groups is evident in the fact that they comprise a separate moiety. This division of the highest level, dividing the village in two, is safeguarded by acknowledged food taboos and ceremonial obligations that bear witness to the complementary relations between the groups. The striking thing is, however, that even though all villagers cite the food taboos, they are observed by very, very few. It is this disparity that I focus on here.

The land people, comprising the majority of the village, sometimes joke about the sea people’s lack of “sea” activities, the core item of which is that the sea people ought to bring fish to the land people — namely the bati and the chief. The claim never goes the other way around: it is only the fishermen who are expected to display this particular propensity, though in everyday life people of both moieties are actually equally skilled in fishing and collecting seafood. People of both moieties also farm and raise pigs, but these land foods are only rarely named someone’s particular duty. I have once heard a festive company of villagers — men and women from both moieties gathered around some kava and a birthday cake — agreeing that Naloto is a “complete” village: no-one wants to eat just root crops or just fish, which is why it is good that there are both land and sea people in the
village. Thus in principle the moieties are regarded as reciprocal groups, parts of a larger whole; but in practice I have never heard anyone demanding the land people to act land-like: they are all-rounders and expected to remain so. The non-task-specific nature of the geographical division into equal “sides” highlights the difference between the two kinds of opposition discussed in this chapter: where the ideal formulations of the land–sea dichotomy are expressed in terms of complementary groups that make up the “complete” village, the actual practice of dividing the village into north and south witness a model where a distinguishing element is absent: the geographical opposition is more symmetrical in nature.

The symmetrical opposition also represents a departure from a hierarchical relation in the particular sense that Louis Dumont uses the notion: the opposition of a whole and a part of that whole. The Naloto land chief (Komai Naloto) has authority over the entire village, which is to say both moieties, while the sea chief (Na Tunidau) only rules over his moiety, the sea people. But while evoking the Dumontian model, it is necessary to also keep in mind that for Dumont, hierarchy is an “order resulting from consideration of value” (1992 [1986]: 279). But what is that value? To continue with Dumont’s concise glossary, value is what “he prefers to call hierarchy”, but also “an integral part of representations in holistic ideology” (op. cit.: 280). To elaborate, Dumont works primarily with the “values” of moral philosophy or sociology; he regards value as something we might simply call “good” under less fragmented, relativistic or diversified conditions. In short, we could not talk about conflicting “goods” but we can acknowledge the different “values” that people hold. (Op. cit.: 234–237.) Hence Dumont’s notion of “value” is a concept arising out of what regards as the conditions created by the key value of individualism, which is to say a feature of modern ideology. In “non-modern” thought, however, values and ideas are inseparable to Dumont, which causes him to adopt the notion of “value-ideas”.

I have no need to go into the definitions of modern and non-modern;46 I only point out the difference they make in Dumont’s thinking. For Dumont, the division coincides with the (scientific, materialistic, individualistic) worldview that distinguishes between what ought to be and what is, in contrast to one which does not distinguish between “value” and “fact” (Dumont 1992 [1986]: 243–249). It is the proximity of “idea” and “value” that I am getting at, though still not in the context of modern/non-

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46 But I will, needlessly, point out that present-day Fijian custom has been demarcated, shaped and legislated under conditions of “modern ideology” and should consequently be regarded a “modern” development when such labels are required.
modern; indeed, Dumont too seems to say that the division only applies to moral ideas. What I am, then, getting at is this: I have already figured out that the relation between land and sea in Naloto constitutes, in Dumontian terms, a hierarchy. But hierarchy is an order, not a value in the sense of an idea. What, then, is being valued when “land” is hierarchically superior?

Another way to approach the issue; another idea of value: in the previous chapter I described a process whereby two “kinds” of people, labelled taukei and vulagi, came to be known by the common term taukei, “land owners” or “hosts”, the term now comprising all indigenous Fijians. Now, in semiotic terms it is neither the labels (symbols, words), nor their referents (people, the ideas of autochthoneity and alterity) that comprises the “value” under consideration. In schoolbook terms (Saussure 1993 [1983]: 110–120), I will refer to these as signifier and signified respectively to point out, that in structuralist linguistics “value” lies in-between the signifier and what it denotes. The names we use – “land” or “sea”, for instance – are arbitrary sound patterns whilst the phenomena they denote are made specific only through other ideas that exist in relation to each other. “The content of a word is determined in the final analysis not by what it contains but what exists outside it”, as Ferdinand de Saussure (1993 [1983]: 114) puts it, meaning simply that signs can only bear meaning in relation – or contrast – to other such units, and that the content of the sign is limited or made specific by what surrounds it. Following the Saussurean model, “land” and “sea” or taukei and vulagi would be nothing but words used in reference to the ideas such as autochthonous and foreign; “value” would be whatever makes the distinction between these two possible.

Sticking with Saussure, it would be impossible to identify a Dumontian “idea-value” in these relations: for Saussure “linguistic value” is only the relational difference that makes reference to ideas possible in the first place. Sticking with Dumont, it would be impossible to define values apart from ideas; “value” becomes the “unpleasant”, “empty”, “elusive” and “uneasy euphemism” that Dumont (1992 [1986]: 237) describes it as. The understanding of value utilised in this study arises from my data rather than presenting an applicable theory, but in so doing it also plots a course in between these two seemingly incompatible ideas of value.

For Dumont, “to distinguish is to value, and to value is to introduce hierarchy” (Parkin 2009 [2002]: 45), but this is as far as he takes his analysis on distinction and value. Saussure, in contrast, elaborates on this particular account: he conceives value as an something that lies between the symbol and its content. Saussure (1993: 114) illustrates this by comparing

47 Naloto again definitely falls on the “modern” side, it is a “ought” society; it is just that it is not a scientific or individualistic “ought” – “what ought to be” is, as a rule, associated with the past in contrast with an unsatisfactory present.
words such as the French mouton and English mutton: the English word has a more specific meaning, made distinct by the existence of a parallel item, sheep. Sheep and mutton, in other words, have different values. More importantly, the disappearance of an item in a contrastive set means that the remaining one will take on the added reference, and thereby become vaguer in the absence of nothing to distinguish from.

The historical development in Fiji, described in the previous chapter, could be regarded as an instance of the latter, a “linguistic” process: the disappearance of the fixed reference to vulagi – foreigners – among the indigenous Fijian community at large has extended the reference of taukei to the entire community.\(^{48}\) The current chapter shows a different process, one that Saussurean linguistics does not account for, wherein the categories kai wai and kai vanua remain in place, indeed portraying a hierarchical opposition, but their referents have merged into “originality”. However, understanding value as something contained in the relations between the categories and their referents, it is easy to see that something is taking place here, and that that something goes beyond mere distincional value. Fijians still distinguish between natives and foreigners just as fluently as French speakers distinguish between raw and cooked ruminant mammals.

So what is the value that correlates with the currently all-encompassing idea of originality or of being a taukei? The most extensive work on the subject has been carried out by Martha Kaplan (1995), who identifies an absence of chiefly hierarchies of the Polynesian type as an important constituent of the land denomination. Indeed, she indicates on various occasions that the true land people of interior Viti Levu appear more egalitarian than their coastal neighbours in terms of social organisation and hereditary rank. In a similar vein, Christina Toren (1994) looks at the opposition of the land and sea categories in Sawaieke village on the island of Gau as a “radical opposition between equality and hierarchy”, but in a setting where neither value dominates the other. “Equality”, however, is almost as slippery a concept as “value” or “relation”. As Joel Robbins (1994) has shown, the concept actually connotes several conflicting ideas from levelling to absolute individualism, and is consequently too broad to work with here.

However, the optional form of dual organisation that, to a large extent, overlaps with the traditional land–sea dichotomy in Naloto reveals a relation constructed on the principles of balance, symmetry or similarity. Preference for evenly matched sides, even alternating chieftaincy, as well as the absence of the elsewhere significant food taboos all point towards

\(^{48}\) Saussure is, to be precise, talking about partial synonyms within a set whereas I am discussing binary opposites, but as Sahlins (in turn quoting Floyd Lounsbury) points out, “opposites are things alike in all significant respects but one” (Sahlins 1996: 424).
relations conceived primarily in terms of sameness or “undifferentiation”, a concept adopted by Petra Autio (2010) in order to emphasise that a profound similarity should not be assumed as a neutral baseline for human relations but is rather a socio-cultural construction, the man-made absence of distinction.

Thinking about the value shift taking place in Naloto in terms of differentiation/undifferentiation actually also makes sense under the historical land–sea dichotomy as discussed by Sahlins. For though Sahlins’ analyses have focused on the sea side, his work (e.g. 1983, 1985, 1994a, 1994b) has always shown that the value contained in the category of “sea”, or notions of the stranger or guest, has been that of profound difference, viewed as exotic otherness, xenophilia or simply alterity (indeed, in his recent work Sahlins [2008, 2012] has elevated alterity to the level of a universal condition of politics). For Sahlins, the crucial connection between “sea” and the chiefly system is a community’s need to legitimate power as an other, position it outside the community. A Sahlinsian view would thus account for the weakening leadership in Naloto, if one wanted to look at it from that angle: the chiefs today are in no way different from their people. But the crucial point is, chieftainship and even hierarchy are (or were) connected with “sea” only by association with the value of alterity, which is directly opposed to the sameness or undifferentiation that appears to be the dominant value in the land-dominated Naloto. Yet I have so far only shown why it makes theoretical sense to treat undifferentiation, sameness or identity as the key value that orders social relations in present-day Naloto. I will present more tangible evidence for this working hypothesis over the following chapters. Before that, let me lay the ground for where my argument is headed next, and by so doing explain why I have taken up the particular tools that I use here for understanding what constitutes value.

In the next chapters I will look into the value of exchange items and practices in Naloto. In so doing I join a long line of anthropologists analysing the economic and symbolic dimensions of Pacific valuables, dating back to, and still revolving around the work of Bronislaw Malinowski and Marcel Mauss. For it was these two founding fathers who established a tradition that regards exchange value chiefly in the context of relations between people, to the degree where much of what I here discuss in terms of “value” could equally well be glossed under “relations”. Indeed, the two concepts are alike in their extraordinary theoretical scope (in the English language), “relation” covering the ground from kinship to comparison and relativity; “value” the ground from signs to economic worth and moral virtue. Yet I follow David Graeber (2001) in the belief that the convergence of these notions of value goes beyond an unlikely accident and all the way to offering a useful tool grounded in the idea that all these values somehow
reflect the desires or needs of the people and societies that maintain them. From such a point of view, even the terminological history of the linguistic usage of “value” is revealing, in that Saussure originally derived the concept from his understanding of money. “Values always involve”, he writes:

(1) something dissimilar which can be exchanged for the item whose value is under consideration, and
(2) similar things which can be compared with the item whose value is under consideration. (Saussure 1993 [1983]: 113)

Never mind his odd notion that words are somehow “exchanged” for ideas, what I find fascinating is the idea of incommensurability involved in Saussure’s explanation. Any money, in his understanding, bears a double reference: on the one hand to other monies – which is to say to similar things within the same system – and to dissimilar things that it can be exchanged for (Saussure’s example is a loaf of bread, but read Gregory [1997] for an account of the things involved). But where Saussure merely treats this double reference as an illustration of value’s non-availability for analysis, except through its constituent parts, Dumont (1992 [1986]: 259–260) regards the mismatch as the outcome of a historical development, stating that what he labels “primitive” money stands in relation to money in the modern, restricted sense that is “homologous to the relation, among us, between value in the general, moral or metaphysical sense and value in the restricted economic sense” (1992 [1986]: 258). Dumont actually goes far enough to claim that there is not just a lost linkage between the content or essence of these two separate values, but that under particular circumstances, even the qualitative worth of money may be regulated by the normative values of a society:

When the rate of exchange is seen as linked to the basic value(s) of the society it is stable, and it is allowed to fluctuate only when and where the link with the basic value and identity of the society is broken or is no longer perceived, when money ceases to be a ‘total social fact’ and becomes a merely economic fact. (Dumont 1992 [1986]: 259–260)

It is from this point of view that I now turn to the exchange practices prevalent in Naloto village in order to show that the value shift visible at the level of categorisation and in relations between people can also be witnessed in the value of exchange objects. In what follows I will expand the scope of my argument from merely pointing out the reversed hierarchical relations between categories or the reassessed signification of the key symbols in
Naloto. I will draw attention to a change in the “rates of exchange” in Fijian exchange objects, as used in Naloto, in order to provide proof for the claim that the value reversal thus far analysed is paralleled in practices of “undifferentiation”, the purposeful undoing of difference among exchange partners.
THE VALUE OF WHALE TEETH

The Fijian word tambua is used to translate the English ‘whale tooth.’ These whales’ teeth were obtained from the cachalot whale, and in order to acquire value as tambua – the most precious possession of the Fijians – they were polished and oiled, had two holes bored one at either extremity, and a cord attached, usually of plaited coconut fibre, for convenience in handling. (Roth 1937: 121)

Although the Fijians find it difficult to pronounce which of the three, tambua, yangona or pigs, is the most important, I should say myself, as an impartial observer, that the palm would be assigned to the tambua, or ivory whale’s tooth. A subtle aura seems to emanate from it, breathing of mystery and religion. (Brewster 1922: 22)

INTRODUCTION

Up until this point the focus of my analysis has been on the symbolic and organisational dimensions of the land–sea dichotomy. Expanding on that analysis, it is now time to illustrate how the “semiotic” or “linguistic” value, brought out over the course of the preceding chapters, couples up with value in an economic sense. For the sake of simplicity, I will define such value as an item’s “worth” in exchange, ignoring the finer distinctions of value made in political economy and economics: utility value, labour value or surplus value to name the most obvious. These are hardly irrelevant either, but analyses utilising the utility or labour theories of value would comprise a whole new book in a setting where production time is not calculated and is freely given and where utility equals the grounds for soliciting a thing. Moreover, it would do justice to the rationale behind the different types of exchanges discussed here to divide them more meticulously into gift and commodity exchanges, as this would mean admitting that the exchanges take place in two very different contexts, only one of which is concerned with exchange value (Mauss 1966; Gregory 1982). However, though the objectives in these two varieties of exchange remain worlds apart, I maintain that the type of gift exchange discussed in this chapter, where the participants take care to match things with equal things in return, does not make exchange value non-existent: it only makes it absurd. To phrase it differently, objects of exchange can have exchange value or worth even when the production or increase of said value is not the objective of the transactions. Hence for the present, I focus on abstracted worth through the
tangible example of whale teeth before expanding my argument first to the different rationales for exchanging the objects, then to other ceremonial exchanges in the next chapter, and state money in the one after.

Whale teeth fitted with a length of coconut fibre cord, known as *tabua*, have been referred to as “Fijian money” since Europeans arrived in Fiji in the 19th century. In the anthropological literature, these items have been discussed as “Fijian money” by Marcel Mauss (1966: 29), as similar to money by Nicholas Thomas (1991, 1995), or as “cultural currency” by Andrew Arno (2005). Fijians themselves refer to *tabua* as the “head of valuables” (*ulu ni yau*), in reference to whale teeth’s status as the top-ranking category of items used in ceremonial exchange. As “the head of valuables”, the whale tooth conveys not just notions of prestige but also wealth, and Fijians themselves also associate the *tabua* money. Fiji’s international airline, Air Pacific, offers passengers the opportunity to travel in the “Tabua Class” (business class); the country’s perhaps most prestigious tourist complex on Denarau island is run by Tabua Investments Ltd. The Fiji Islands Revenue and Customs Authority emblem depicts a *tabua*, like the emblems of many other associations and authorities; in 2008 it was even possible to try to obtain riches through buying a Tabua Scratch Lottery card decorated with the image of a whale tooth. And of course the likeness of a *tabua* also decorates the “tails” side of the Fijian 20 cent coin.

At the same time, though, the whale teeth now circulate primarily in a closed, ceremonial sphere of exchange, “outside the sphere where goods and services are circulating” as Solrun Williksen-Bakker (1984: 112) puts it, or isolated from money. The important exception to this rule is made by urban pawnshops where *tabua* are bought and sold (during my fieldwork the price of an ordinary-sized *tabua* was reported at about 300 FJD). Yet important as the pawnshops are for keeping the *tabua* in high esteem in terms of monetary worth, their high valuation ultimately derives from another comparison: in traditional terms, a *tabua* is the equivalent of a human being. Hence what is today considered a proper traditional marriage is conducted by offering the girl’s family a whale tooth known as “cutting off” (*musu*): if accepted, the marriage is valid.

It is also customary that should a wife outlive her husband, her kin offer a *tabua* to her husband’s kin in an offer to take her back to her native kin. In Fijian funerals, the corpse is also

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50 This ceremony (or the whale teeth therein presented) is known as *duguci* which by dictionary definition (Capell 2003 [1941]) means taking “gifts to seek a wife for a chief”, just as the verbal form *musu-ka* (“to cut”) is defined as “chiefl y giving women in marriage”. Yet it is now considered the proper custom for all in present-day Fiji.
embodied by a whale tooth known as the “body of the deceased” (yago na mate). Tabua are also required when a child – particularly a first-born one – is introduced to his or her maternal kin for the first time. As the vehicle of both socially sanctioned reproduction and proper or “clean” (savasava) relations with the living and the dead, the items’ high prices on the urban market are understandable.

FIGURE 2: Fiji Islands Revenue & Customs Authority office in Suva

Whale teeth also display an affinity with chiefs. Not only are persons of rank considered more likely to be in possession of these objects, in a formal sense, the recipient of a whale tooth is also always a chief. In short, this means that where a formal or ceremonial prestation otherwise includes two parts – presentation by the giver and reception by the recipient – a prestation that includes a tabua comprises three parts. The spokesman of the group who offer a tabua first gives a formal speech to state the purpose of the valuable offered; this presentation is matched by a speech of reception (kacivi) by a spokesman for the receiving party. These two components are compulsory to any traditional gift giving. But when a tabua is involved, the item first has to be accepted (ciqoma) by a top-ranking member of the receiving party before the spokesman can proceed with a reception speech. In other words, an exchange of any other type is conducted between the two spokesmen; only when a whale tooth is involved, does a ranking chief get involved. “Only the tabua we give to the chief. If no tabua, then it goes direct”, it was affirmed to me when I first observed the pattern. But the affinity between chiefs and whale teeth goes much further than this.
To recapitulate the point made in the previous chapters, the origins of *tabua* seem to have coincided with the origins of the stranger-chiefs. In a 1983 article titled “Raw Women, Cooked Men, and Other ‘Great Things’ of the Fiji Islands” Marshall Sahlins recounts a myth about the origin of the *tabua*. The myth, Sahlins claims, is an exhaustive account of the structural arrangement at the core of Fijian socio-political organisation: “once told it tells all” (1983: 72). The myth describes the “first man” living with his wife and daughters in western Viti Levu. A handsome stranger called Tabua is found canoe-wrecked on the shore. The newcomer wants to marry the first man’s daughters, but the old man disagrees, saying that Tabua should perform a miracle before he can be deemed worthy of the old man’s daughters. So Tabua returns to the shore and pulls off the teeth of a dead whale that had drifted ashore just as he did. While pulling off the whale’s teeth, he accidentally knocks off a few of his own. A few days later he returns to the old man and his family, claiming to have grown the whale teeth by planting his own. This time the old man agrees to his proposal, but asserts a number of laws with regard to the future: that from now on, whale teeth shall be called *tabua*, that such an item is to act as the price of a woman in marriage, and that in the future, foreigners who will be washed ashore like Tabua will be killed and eaten. (Stanmore papers ca 1875–1880; also Sahlins 1983: 72–3; Thomas 1991: 70.)

Before proceeding to what the items may actually be exchanged into, which is also to say what kinds of relations they feature in, it needs to be spelled out that the stranger-chief is related to whale teeth in ways that go beyond narrative similarities: Fiji received its whale teeth from the source that also acted as the islands’ primary supply of foreign people. Before trade commenced with the Europeans, Fiji’s main source of whale teeth was Tonga in an inter-island trade network that Adrianne Kaeppler describes as “Tonga-centric”. The Tongans’ acted as the middlemen in a triangle where they exchanged whale teeth and wood carvings for canoe building materials, sinnet and red feathers in Fiji, trading the latter again for Samoan fine mats (Kaeppler 1978; see also Beaglehole 1974: 548;Williams 1985 [1858]: 94).

Though the late 19th-century myth above depicts the *tabua* as objects invented in Fiji rather than imported from elsewhere, it nevertheless couples the object with the stranger all the way to being named after him. But in addition to sharing, at least in this particular myth, a common point of origin in terms of entering Fijian history, the whale tooth also appears to have shared a common source of prestige with the chiefs. In an article arguing that the 19th-century influx of whale teeth outweighed the arrival of
muskets in terms of political leverage, Sahlins identifies the Fijian chiefs’ charisma in familiar terms:

The great chiefs of eastern Fiji have for a long time cloaked themselves in Tongan guises, which is also to say in cosmic forces of prestige. The tui title of Fijian paramounts is Tongan in origin (Tongan *Tu’i*). The body ornaments of these chiefs were likewise Tongan, in some cases fashioned by imported Tongan craftsmen. The chiefly kava ritual (*yaqona vakaturaga*) and its paraphernalia are supposed to be derived from Tonga – supposed, that is, by Fijians themselves. Before the whaling ships, Tongans were the main source of whale teeth (*tabua*). Perhaps the most prestigious lineage of Fijian chiefs (from Kubunavanua) is said to have migrated latterly by way of Tonga. All this, it seems, is a way of endowing Fijian power with universal virtues. (Sahlins 1994a: 76)

This is of course a well-trodden path for anyone who has read Sahlins’ work; indeed, the prestige and power allotted to the foreign or strange is the leitmotif cutting through much of Sahlins’ work. In addition to the prestige of all things Tongan (and later European) in Fiji, he has demonstrated the same principle for example in the “bourgeoisified” behaviour of Hawaiian chiefs (1985, 1994b). But it is worth remembering that the issue, particularly with regard to indigenous valuables or “currencies” goes beyond the trans-Polynesian cosmological structure that associates power with the foreign. The prestige that accrues to foreign things has been thoroughly investigated all over Oceania.

Bronislaw Malinowski’s *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (1984 [1922]) offers a case in point; value increases with distance. The *kula* exchange items described by Malinowski circulate among people and islands hundreds of kilometres apart and thereby attain value that Malinowski refers to as “historic sentimentalism” (op. cit.: 89): value that is due to the objects’ movement and circulation beyond their current holder’s situation. Malinowski describes the items as “worn out”, “greasy” and “ugly”, among other things, thus pointing out that the objects actually even bear the physical signs of their histories; sentimental value becomes recorded on the very objects. This idea has been further elaborated by Maurice Godelier (1999), who regards the greasiness and ugliness described by Malinowski as a sign of the objects’ social activeness. They show that their bearer, too, is part of a social network that reaches far beyond his or her current surroundings geographically, historically and socially. Indeed, Godelier goes as far as to state that typical Melanesian valuables are beyond function and
aesthetics – “they no longer need to be beautiful; they merely have to be old” (Godelier 1999: 163).

What Godelier argues is that certain categories of valuables are devoid of any functional use-value, which in turn makes it possible for them to act as vessels of abstract value of a different order; this places them in a different sphere of aesthetic considerations. The same, I would argue, applies for Fijian whale teeth, too. Take, for example, a typical South Sea narrative published in Gentleman’s Magazine in 1820, in which Captain Richard Siddons describes a Fijian practice of rubbing newly-acquired whale teeth with a particular type of leaf; some, he writes, “almost for a month continue to labour upon it” (Arnold 1925 [1820]: 174). The beachcomber William Diaper in turn describes the “sentimental” value thereby gained, resorting to another system of value in order to make the phenomenon meaningful:

he had also five or six “tambua-damu” (red whales’ teeth), which are used as money, though not exactly as our money, there being no certain value put to them; but in that country they are invaluable, as life and death depend on the circulation of these teeth, and especially the red ones. I used to consider the difference between the white and the red teeth the same as between our shillings and sovereigns, estimating the number of white whales’ teeth throughout the Feejees to be twenty times as many as the red ones. The red teeth, which had become red by frequent handling and oiling for a number of years, they always told me were brought to the Feejees by the Tongans, by whom they were first introduced (Erskine 1967 [1853]: 439).

What Diaper presents as an analogy for making sense of the relative rank among Fijian valuables also illustrates a concurrence of the symbolic value and the quantitative worth in the object. Thought to be of Tongan origin, the whale teeth portray a close affinity with the chiefly “sea” designation; indeed, taking into account the sacred status of the 19th-century rulers, the items appear to stand for what A.M. Hocart considered characteristic to all monies – that “a few ounces of divinity are worth pounds of gross matter” (1973 [1952]: 101). But what Diaper suggests is that one could add a few more ounces of divinity – which is to say sentimental value – on the items to manifold their worth.

The key realisation here is not only that the signs of exchange value coincide with the symbols of ascendancy in the society at large. As a matter of fact, as C.A. Gregory (1997: 35) points out, the word “symbol” itself is derived from the Greek symbolon: a piece of metal broken in two as a sign of indebtedness between two parties. Insofar as currencies act as symbols, it is a point to keep in mind that for a currency to remain in use, there must be
an agreement with regard to what it stands for. Am I circling back to the previous chapter? The point I want to make here is that a currency (let us define it as “a medium of exchange and standard of value” following Malinowski [cited in Hart 1986: 651], likewise, does not stand for itself, but rather refers to something external to it; in the case of money as a token of the authority that guarantees its value (Hart 1986; cf. Gregory 1997); religious authority, according to Godelier (1999), or a divinely sanctioned earthly one according to Hocart (1973 [1952]), for example. According to John Twyning, shipwrecked in Fiji in 1829, Fijians “not only use [whale teeth] as money, but pay them a kind of religious homage” (Twyning 1996 [1850]: 46). However, Twyning (ibid.) also describes how he and other early-19th-century beachcombers were compensated for their services with turtle shell, sinnet and other articles that the beachcombers, in turn, exchanged for whale teeth.

Not to overstate the case, the value of the tabua among indigenous Fijians during the early-contact period was “about the price of a human life” as Charles Wilkes, Commander of the United States Exploring Expedition reports (Wilkes 1985 [1845]: 103). The primary usage of whale teeth was marriage, just as decreed in the myth about the young man Tabua, but also in funerals, acquiring cannibal victims, settling feuds, requesting assassinations and making political alliances. However, though its value was thus set for a very particular sphere of exchange, the usage of whale teeth obviously was not limited solely on those specific contexts. Not only were whale teeth exchangeable for greater amounts of utilities of lesser prestige, they also served as the primary trade currency between Fijians and the foreign vessels that sailed to Fiji in search of sandalwood and bêche-de-mer. And why should they not have, after all, before European arrival Fijians had received the majority of their tabua from trading with Tongans.

Tabua, in other words, circulated in at least two capacities: as bridewealth, or the price of humans, or human lives, among the Fijians and as trade currency used by non-natives trading in the Fijian archipelago. But as a number of 19th-century sources illustrate, whale teeth could be substituted with muskets in the case of Euro-American suitors (e.g. Erskine 1967: 199; Williams 1985: 168); similarly, it was customary for 19th-century traders to initiate their trade relations with whale teeth presented in (imitation of) local custom, as ceremonial gifts to chiefs prior to the actual barter or payment. And these transformations hardly exhausted the possibilities for value conversion: as both Nicholas Thomas (1991; 2006 [1995]) and Marshall Sahlins (1994a) have shown, the contact period witnessed a notable influx of whale teeth from trading vessels, and the ensuing invigoration of high politics amply illustrates the various uses that tabua could be deployed for: alliance, assassination, atonement,
compensation, marriage, mortuary exchange, redistribution, securing services and so forth. Indeed, this is the basis for Thomas’ (1991, 1995) argument that whale teeth were similar to money by being capable of converting value between dissimilar people, spheres or contexts of usage. Thomas actually takes the argument far enough to claim that the whole Fijian system was, in comparative Pacific perspective, particularly well-suited for value conversion.

I am not entirely convinced with Thomas' wider argument, that the Fijian system of exchange was particularly well predisposed to adopt market economy due to the generalised abstract idea of value functioning in Fijian exchange. For one thing, Thomas seems determined to write off the significance of whale teeth in pre-contact times in favour of “pre-whale teeth” indigenous valuables, the evidence for which he fails to deliver. The tabua, Thomas assumes rather than proves, must have played a minor role in Fiji prior to Euro-American trade, but took their slot easily due to the pre-existing convertibility of value in Fijian exchange. But more importantly, he fails to connect the quantifiable value of foreign trade with the ceremonial usage of whale teeth amongst the indigenes. Were whale teeth actually a “standard of value” in all-Fijian usage? Were there situations where one would have required a “red” teeth or a particularly large one for a particular purpose, for example? Or was the Fijian usage of whale teeth more akin to present-day prestations in that accepting one would have signalled consent to a request regardless of its size or colour? Based on the high desirability of particularly big and rare items in the 19th-century accounts, I tend to believe this was the case. But to me, the definitive proof simply is not available.

Yet Thomas is right in stating that the Fijian “was a conversion-oriented system in the sense that its prestations were structured by difference, that is, by the matching of things against each other in a fashion that produced or displayed relationships” (Thomas 2006: 294). This may be far removed from the thematic of money, discussed above with the intention of outlining the socio-cultural basis of the objects’ valuation, but the point offers a constructive starting point. Whale teeth did feature in two or three very different types (or modalities) of exchange, and their ability to remain valuable from one setting to another is indicative of the objects great value. Even the relative open-endedness of these settings indicates the versatility of whale teeth as media of value: traders could use them both in payment and as ceremonial gifts; beachcombers could, if necessary, replace them with other imported items; they could be deployed in all-Fijian affairs and in intra-ethnic ones, and they could be used for various ends ranging from the still recognised usages like marriage, mortuary, atonement, greeting and requesting to obsolete ones ranging from political alliance and assassination to decoration, paraphernalia accompanying the dead upon burial, or substitute for a widow set to be strangled upon her husband’s
death. And then there is the antiquated, at least as far as Naloto is concerned, usage of tribute, described by Rev. Williams in the mid-19th century:

Whales’ teeth always form a part of the property paid in. Those smooth and red with age and turmeric are most valued; and the greater the quantity of these, the more respectable the solevu (tribute). Canoes, bales of plain and printed cloth, (tapa,) each bale fifteen or twenty feet long, with as many men to carry it, musquito [sic] curtains, balls and rolls of sinnet, floor-mats, sail-mats, fishing nets, baskets, spears, clubs, guns, scarfs or turbans, likus, pearl-shell breast-plates, turtles, and women, may be classed under the head of tribute. (Williams 1985 [1858]: 40–41)

As described by Williams, the teeth do appear to top a list of valuables that contains trade items, utilities, people and (Williams goes on to illustrate) food items, too, alongside the priced tabua in a manner indicative of at least some degree of commensurability. He also points out the differential value placed upon the worn, dark teeth and the fairer ones. The contrast with present-day usage is remarkable, not only because the recognised uses of tabua are limited to a number of pre-ordained purposes, but also because — as Andrew Arno neatly sums it up — “quantity is irrelevant to calculating its [whale tooth] ritual import […] one tabua is always absolutely adequate to a ritual purpose [and] they are exactly equivalent in ritual import” (Arno 2005: 56). In order to explain the full implications of the difference, allow me to once more start from the beginning.

**TABUA AS A LOCAL VALUABLE**

The accepted account for the origin of tabua in Naloto has nothing in common with the myth discussed above. The story was not particularly fashionable during my fieldwork, in the sense that villagers would have been recounting it among themselves or even referring to it. It was, however, known to and accepted by all as far as I know. The version presented here was told to me, mostly in English, by a retired school teacher in June 2007. He did not want me to tape the story, so I kept notes and re-wrote the story afterwards; on another occasion he repeated the story with only a few minor alterations. My shortened version of the origin of tabua from a 21st-century Naloto point of view is based on the two narrations in June and August 2007:
Ratu Buatawatawa was the oldest son of the great Ratu of Verata, Rokomoutu. But he grew up very disobedient; he never followed his father’s orders. Finally he was chased out of Verata. He took with him some warriors – bati – and mataisau [carpenters] and kai wai, and a canoe. For ten nights, he prepared with his people, the canoe and the food. When he was ready to leave, his mother, Adi Leleasiga, cut him a branch of the frangipani tree and said: “wherever you go, plant this branch there”. This plant is known as “bua”.

So he set out to the open sea. The wind took him to southern Vanua Levu, and because of the wind, he named the place Savusavu. He named Wainunu after the fact that the ladies bathed there after the journey; he named all the places in southern Vanua Levu. When he came to Nabuawalu, he went up and planted the branch his mother had given him. That place is in the Setura Range, it comes from “se na turaga”, the chief being sent away. He called the place Bua; that is where he planted the tree.

Years later, when he already had some children, he decided to return to Verata to ask for pardon. So he collected some magiti: some yams and things, and caught four bi of vonu. But he still thought that he needed something to hold in his hands – you know, some tabua. So he decided to take the bua tree.

He cut down the tree, it was very big by now, and shaped it like the new moon, and tied some magimagi [coconut fibre cord] at both ends. He varnished it with some oil and colour, to make it yellow, because the bua tree is already a bit red. He scraped it nicely with shells, made it look good. He called it “taba ni bua” [from taba = “branch” + bua the tree].

Then he returned again to Verata. He waited for ten nights at Nabou Tini. Rokomoutu heard of this and was really worried, because he had already chased Buatawatawa from the village. But finally he accepted the tabua, and since then Fijians have been using the things for their most important…what do you call it? [Matti: “say it in Fijian”] Their yau, for giving and…exchange.

Later, when the Europeans came, they brought the whale’s teeth. They were whaling here, around Vanua Levu and brought the teeth to the Fijians, especially to the chiefs, when they came to ask for things. These teeth, they were also shaped like the moon, and the Fijians decided to use them instead of the bua tree.

There are a number of reasons for me to include the story here in detail, the foremost of which is, of course, the re-creation of tabua as a locally conceived valuable. Buatawatawa, the disobedient son of Fiji’s first king
Rokomoutu, carves the first tabua from the bua or frangipani tree. The introduction of actual whale teeth takes place only later when European and American whalers arrive with items that are similar in shape to the original wooden ones. The tabua is thus represented as an indigenously conceived valuable rather than a “foreigner”. Even the colouring of whale teeth becomes a sign of their original conception at Vanua Levu and therefore bears no reference to foreign relations.\(^51\)

Also, note that the story corresponds to the formal qualities of other contemporary origin stories, like numerous versions of the Kaunitoni myth, by carefully laying out the main protagonists’ route: the place names act as proof of the story’s accuracy – indeed, I heard the story in full two times, and both times the narrator produced a map of Fiji to show me Buatawatawa’s route and the place names that verify it. Savusavu gets its name from savu: “to run before the wind” (Capell 1991 [1941]); Wainunu (wai: “water” + nunu “dive”) is the place where the women in Buatawa’s retinue wash after the journey, and so forth.

But most importantly, the first tabua is made in response to Buatawatawa’s need to “hold something in his hands”. He already has collected the necessary food gifts or magiti (“food”, more specifically ceremonially presented “feast food”) – root crops and four bi (“sets” of ten) of sea turtles – valuables to be presented to his father. What is still missing is presented slightly differently in another version of the story by the same narrator:\(^52\)

He collected his gift of soro [ceremonial apology]; some pig, some mats. Then he thought: “I must think of something to present the leading yau” [“a valuable”, but only in a ceremonial sense]. So he cut down the bua tree that he had planted, and from it he cut a tabua, shaped like the new moon. He used it as the first tabua.

Whether “something to hold in his hands” or “something to present the leading yau” (i.e. something to present as the ulu ni yau – the “head/face of the valuables”), the meaning would be obvious to anyone familiar with Fijian ceremonial exchange. The “leading valuable” is a focal point in ceremonial occasions, an item held with both hands first by a spokesman presenting any

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51 I should also point out, that a tabua’s colour or amount of previous use does not appear to be a significant factor nowadays. There are relatively unused and white, worn yellowish and even bright red tabua constantly in circulation, but for evaluating them, people only refer to their size.

52 Other people were unwilling to recite these stories to me, because they felt they could not tell them as well as the teacher. This is quite common with regard to the old stories: most people would know whom I should ask, but were unwilling to give their own versions of these stories, though they were obviously familiar with them.
request or prestation serious enough to merit the use of a whale tooth – on lesser occasions, yqona can also act as the “leading valuable”. The whale tooth thus presented assumes a referential relationship to any other wealth presented at the same time: it encompasses all the other things – typically food items, mats, kerosene or print cloth – and acts as their visible symbol (vakaraitaki: “evidence or token of” [Capell 2003]). Likewise, whale teeth act as the visible tokens of any serious request: a spokesman holds a tabua in his hands and states its purpose, and then hands it to the receiving group’s representative. Unlike items of lesser gravity, the tabua are always first formally accepted by a ranking chief in the receiving party before being handed to the receiving group’s spokesman for the formal acceptance speech. This reflects the whale teeth’s status as the “heaviest”, most binding of all the Fijian exchange items: it has to be formally accepted, because accepting the item means accepting whatever it stands for.

This manner of usage covers by far the majority of occasions, which is to say all occasions wherein the whale teeth are presented by men. The tabua is predominantly a male valuable, and usually even women’s events grave enough to require a tabua also tend to require at least a male spokesman and a chief to handle the valuables. However, in rituals associated with marriage and introducing a child to his or her maternal relatives, women and children also exchange tabuas: their exchange is carried out in silence by the giver and recipient alike. I have been told that it is possible that the mother of a woman who seeks to atone for an elopement may refuse to accept the item, and hence the apology contained by the item. This would rarely take place, though, since such events are prearranged by both participant groups together, and so an unwilling participant would be substituted prior to the ritual, or the event be called off. But even in this capacity, whale teeth hardly evoke comparisons with (theories of) money or currencies – although Fijians regularly describe the tabua as “Fijian money” nevertheless.

Yet the usage of whale teeth as tokens – “something to hold in one’s hands” – is not a recent development as such, but something found already in the 19th-century accounts. This is how Rev. Williams describes the presentation of a large canoe by the Lakeba people to the Bau paramount, Cakobau (unlike present-day prestations, this one was conducted by the Tui Nayau – the Lakeba paramount – himself):

From the folds of his huge dress he took a whale’s tooth, and then began his speech. […] The sentences here strung together were picked out from among a great number of petitions, praying that “Tui Nayau and his people might live.” Neither was this omitted in the peroration: “Therefore let us live, that we may chop out canoes for you; and that we may live, I present this earnest” (the whale’s
tooth) “of the Ta iwe” (the name of the canoe) “as our soro and the
soro of our friends.” On receiving the tooth Thakombau expressed a
wish, almost like an imperial permission, that all might live;
whereupon all clapped their hands. Custom required the receiver a
custom like this: “Woi! Woi! Woi! The sacred canoe! Yi! Yi! Yi!”
and a long shrill shout in conclusion. (Williams 1985 [1858]: 41)

It is usages such as the one described by Williams that make me cautious
with regard to generalisations of whale teeth’s pecuniary characteristics,
because it remains uncertain whether the objects’ potency was due to their
desirability or their compelling eminence. Indeed, used as an “earnest”, the
tabua really is a “gesture”, as defined by Andrew Arno (2005) in an article
that draws a parallel between the ceremonial hand clapping (cobo) and the
tabua. Yet Arno also ends up with an economic model, claiming that both of
these gestures – whale teeth and hand claps – are exchangeable units of
“cultural currency in an economy of sentiment”. From an Arno-inspired
viewpoint, one could actually look at the event described by Williams above
as a series of exchanges: the whale tooth (encompassing the canoe)
exchanged for the lives of the Lakebans, and the latter in turn rewarded with
a respectful cobo. The tama or formulaic response to the use of tabua
(“Woi! Woi! Woi!”) is a clear illustration of the particular status and ritual
potency of the object, a theme that I will pick up later in this chapter.

What I want to highlight before that is something that is missing in
Williams’ description above, just as it is missing in every other 19th-century
description that I have come across. This is a major difference, since what
the historical accounts seem to lack takes up approximately one half of the
present-day tabua exchanges. I am talking about counter-prestations.

**TABUA IN USE: PAYING EQUAL RESPECTS**

In present-day Fiji, whale teeth circulate primarily in two distinct spheres of
exchange (in the “extended” sense; see Robbins and Akin 1999: 8–16); as
commodities and as ceremonial items. They appear as commodities
predominantly in pawnshops, an urban institution mainly operated by
people of Chinese or South Asian background. For indigenous Fijians,
pawning a tabua is embarrassing to the degree that no-one I know admits
ever having pawned one. Pawning a tabua is also considered unwise in the
sense that one only gets half the price one has to pay when purchasing the
same object. But the key thing is that I have not heard of a single instance
where indigenous Fijians would buy and sell whale teeth amongst themselves
– in this sense, the high convertibility that Thomas assigns to the 19th-
century tabua is severely limited in current usage. Requesting (kerekere)
whale teeth does take place at least occasionally; I have witnessed a clan chief sending out a messenger to another clan in the middle of a major funeral rite upon realising that they lacked the sufficient amount of tabua to reciprocate what they had received. But usually one would rather request someone in advance to participate in a particular ritual through ceremonially pooling in the object rather than discreetly lending it out to someone (particularly as such loans run a high risk of being forgotten).

Among the indigenous population whale teeth circulate in rituals. The typical ritual uses of tabua are marriages, funerals, presentation of gift items or feast food, welcoming a visitor of rank, requesting permission to leave a ceremonial gathering, making an apology, presenting a child to maternal kin, atoning for elopement, requesting permit for residence or temporary land use, and reciprocating another tabua. I may have forgotten one or two, but the number of accepted uses is not radically greater than here listed. All the established uses of tabua have a known name or label; this purpose determines the name of a tabua while it is in use. A tabua used for a marriage proposal is referred to as duguci (or alternatively as veivosaki, “conversation”, though these are sometimes separated as distinct parts of the ritual), one used for making amends for an elopement is known as bulubulu (“something that covers or buries” an offence), one used for conveying condolences at a funeral is known as reguregu (from regu, “kiss”), one used for transferring a bride to her husband’s group is known as vakadonu na musu (“ratifying the cutting off”) and so forth. Some names are pretty self-explanatory, like vakaraitaki na yau (“representing” or “token of the wealth”) for a whale tooth used for the presentation of ceremonial gift items, yago ni mate (“body of the dead”) for one used in ceremonially delivering the deceased to his or her kin group or (vakaraitaki na) magiti (“feast food”) for presenting feast food. In addition to these “functional” names, whale teeth are referred to with the generic ceremonial-language terms kamunaga (“valuable”, but only used for ceremonial whale teeth), tovuto (“whale”), batina (“tooth”) or vatu ni vanua (“stone of the land”); the term tabua is almost never used during ceremonies.

The most common occasions for exchanging tabua are funerals. Even a small-scale funeral typically has a dozen or so groups coming to pay their final respects to the deceased; to reguregu or “kiss” the deceased goodbye. In large funerals the number of participating groups can easily can easily be double or triple. Funeral guests pay their respects to the deceased’s kin group

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53 Since a tabua is kept out of sight until presented, it is also an option to carry a “spare” tabua into an event; an object carried along just in case the need should arise, but if it does not, the owner may leave the object unused.

54 People of Indo-Fijian descent are also involved in these ritual events in multi-ethnic communities or villages well connected with the urban centres; Naloto is not one of these.
with gifts that comprise mats, tapa cloth and food items. The gift items themselves are represented by a “token” tabua or, in the absence of one, a bundle of dried kava (waka). Whilst the things presented as reguregu gifts remain with the receiving group, who later reciprocate them by a feast and often a distribution of raw meat known as burua, the whale teeth are always immediately reciprocated. The hosts also reciprocate the kava received, but it is a common practice to waive or toss back the kava offered in reciprocation. Not so for the whale teeth. Every tabua given as reguregu is always immediately formally reciprocated by another, known alternately as vakavinavinaka na yau (“giving thanks for the goods”), tarai na yau (“acknowledging” or “laying hold of” the goods), or vakamalua ni yau (giving thanks; literally “softening” the goods). The names are interchangeable, the function remains the same: to thank for the goods received and to affirm the respectful and “clean” relationship between the groups involved in the exchange.

Funerary exchanges provide the basic model for observing how whale teeth are used because they usually involve no more than one tabua at a time. A group of guests (vulagi) present themselves before the hosts (taukei), offer their goods with a tabua or kava and receive a tabua in exchange if they have first given one. The same is repeated with the next group, and the one after, until all the guests have presented their reguregu. The objects have no individual names or histories outside the immediate context of their use, and can be re-used during the same ritual as long as one does not use a tabua in reciprocation with the people who gave it. The same pattern of immediate reciprocation is applied to other occasions where tabua are used for the presentation of gifts, and to many other ritual uses of whale teeth, such as the polite request for “release” (tatau: a tabua presented in order to ask permission to leave). As a matter of fact, a tabua given in reciprocation to a tatau is a fitting case in point: it is simply called vakatale — “in return” or “likewise”.

Many other frequently occurring rituals, however, are combinations of various “reasons” or intentions for presenting whale teeth, and participants do not necessarily have to resort to a designated “likewise” or similar, self-evident reciprocations. The bulubulu or atonement for an elopement is a frequent ritual particularly during public holidays, as the holiday season allows urban employed relatives to join the event. As it is by definition the woman’s kin group that have been wronged, they wait for the man’s group to come to them for an apology. The actual ritual has two sides. The woman’s kin group, typically assisted by other groups in the village as well as relatives and affines from further away, are collectively referred to as the

55 Guests of particularly high prestige may receive a tabua in reciprocation even when they have not presented one themselves, if the hosts have the objects to spare.
“owners” or “hosts” (taukei); the man’s group with their followers are the “guests” (vulagi) – note that the morally charged terms are the same as those discussed in previous chapters. The key elements of the main event are as follows (there are some differences between people’s ideal formulations; this not a definitive one):

1. Sevusevu: upon their arrival, the man’s group present their sevusevu or greeting: a bundle of dried kava roots or sometimes a whole, uprooted kava plant.
2. Sevusevu: upon receiving the guests’ sevusevu, the hosts respond with their sevusevu, typically kava prepared for consumption and served to the top-ranking participants.
3. Reguregu: the guests present a tabua as a generalised reguregu (“condolences”) for relatives who have passed away.
4. Bulubulu: the actual apology which, in theory, should be accompanied by one or two vulo (sets of ten) of whale teeth, but is usually conducted with a single tooth. In addition to the tabua(s), the guests present a large amount of kerosene (50–100 canisters) and bolts of print cloth.
5. Lululu (“shaking hands”): the woman walks over to her father carrying a tabua which she gives to him (receiving another in exchange); she is accompanied by attendants, who give one or two kerosene canisters and lengths of cloth to him. The same is then repeated with the woman’s mother.
6. Kau mata ni gone (“carrying the face of the child”): the elopee’s child or children go to greet their grandmothers, dressed in tapa cloth and carrying a whale tooth each, and receiving a whale tooth in exchange. This is not, properly speaking, a part of the bulubulu ritual but rather a separate one, yet the first never takes place without the second – to the degree that couples only go to the woman’s native village for a bulubulu once they have a child to present.
7. Yau ni mataqale: guests again give a tabua (or, ideally, one or two sets of tabua) incorporating kerosene and cloth. Typically, item 4. merges into 7.
8. Magiti: the hosts present a tabua that represents a feast provided for the guests. A bulubulu is supposed to be a one-sided affair, where the hosts are not obliged to feast their guests. However, the kau mata ni gone is an event where a feast is compulsory.
9. Tatau (asking for leave): when the event is drawing to an end, the guests present a tabua in order to ask permission to leave back home.
10. Vakatale: the hosts present a tabua “back”. Some say the meaning of vakatale is actually a reference to “the way back”, as the
speech accompanying the object takes the form of a “thank you and goodbye” speech. (However, it is possible to see tabua employed as vakatale in other contexts too, where their role as direct reciprocation is unequivocal.)

Looking at the formal or required parts of the ritual, it is evident that the demands set for the guests are considerably higher than those for the hosts, the latter being the injured party. In addition to requiring roughly one hundred kerosene canisters and up to an equal number of bolts of cloth (though normally handled with considerably less), the number of obligatory “purposes” for whale teeth is higher for the guests: seven or more for the guests, five or more for the hosts. However, in actual practice the numbers end up even almost every time. The hosts typically present intermediary whale teeth to thank the guests for the gifts (tarai ni yau, see above). It is also possible for either party to collate several purposes into a single tabua, replace a tabua with a bundle of kava roots, or omit some item from the list altogether. Typically, by the time the event has proceeded to the final transactions, the guests may ask for leave by presenting kava instead of a tabua, and be reciprocated with a whale tooth so that the final number of teeth given and received comes out even. The total number of teeth given and received is the same at the end of the ritual, unless a group purposefully presents more than one tabua for some particular purpose and the other side is unable to reciprocate. This, however, happens rarely in Nalotan exchanges.

Since an individual tabua cannot be used twice with the same exchange partner, it is important to accumulate the necessary number of teeth prior to an event. The bulubulu ritual described above serves as a good example, since it requires both the hosts and the guests to accumulate half a dozen or more whale teeth in advance, whilst a funeral requires a lesser number of teeth. Both the participating groups therefore hold their own preliminary sessions in the day preceding the main event. The events are called vakasoso yau (from soso, “to exchange”; “to replace” [Capell 2003]): these are typically hosted by the man’s and the woman’s clans respectively, and over the course of a vakasoso yau a number of groups ranging from other families within the same clan to other clans or even delegations from other villages come to formally present their contributions (cau) to the overall “pool” of things required for the ritual: food, mats, kava, tapa, kerosene, cloth and whale teeth. Only some of these groups present their items with a “token” tabua, others use kava for the purpose; however, those that do bring one do not receive an immediate replacement, but will be reciprocated only after the actual ritual is over on the next day. In theory, they stand a chance of losing their whale teeth over the course of the ritual, should their side give out more than they receive. In practice, though, not only does the number of
whale teeth exchanged tend to break out even, it is also customary that a potential loss is borne out by the organising group – the man’s or woman’s immediate kin group.

I will illustrate the entire proceedings with an example that is not quite the average way these events play out, but the more revealing precisely for that reason:

One of the Naloto families had been planning a *bulululu* excursion to an island in the Mamanuca group, off the west coast of Viti Levu, for months. The event had been called off several times, once apparently due to excessive New Year’s celebrations at the destination and twice because of funerals in Naloto (funeral dates cannot be manipulated and therefore always take precedence over reschedulable events). When the date was finally fixed for March 2008, finding participants for the excursion turned out difficult. The family of the young man for whom we were going to make amends had sent out word that they would pay for transport; everyone who wished to participate ought to provide a kerosene canister. On the eve of our departure, a *vakasoso yau* was held, where a total of sixteen 20-litre canisters were given (i.e. promised and filled at a gas station along the way), along with kava, tapa cloth for the bride’s and child’s ceremonial clothing and a dozen or so bolts of cloth. However, in addition to the *tabua* presented by the young man’s father, only one *tabua* had been presented. The adult men gathered for the *vakasoso yau* counted and re-counted the constituent rites that required a whale tooth, but every time were forced to conclude that four is the absolute minimum: one for the actual apology, two for the two “handshakes” and one for presenting the child. Finally a clan member who had earlier withdrawn from the affair because it shamed him that the *bulululu* would be carried out with such meagre presents promised his *tabua* for the expedition, though he himself still refused to come along. Since, despite repeated pleads sent to relatives, friends and other fellow-villagers, no more teeth were presented, the group had to agree on where they could cut corners. They decided that the actual apology and presenting the child are the “heavy” obligations (*ka bibi*) whilst the condolences and request to leave can easily be carried out with kava. Someone suggested performing the “handshake” only once, and though no-one liked the idea, it was agreed upon – provided that no-one comes up with another *tabua* before our departure. The men went on talking about whale teeth for an hour or two: who has received one and
when, who has a funeral to attend to, and so forth. Obviously men
are well informed of the whale teeth in the village.

The journey to the Mamanuca group took us a night and a day.
Along the way the senior men were able to prepare and designate
particularly large bundles of kava roots for important uses like our
tatau. However, when the ceremony started, the hosts wrecked our
well-made plans at the outset by presenting a whale tooth for our
sevusevu, the welcoming gift usually conducted with kava. Our group
had time for a quick negotiation, and then decided to bypass all the
usual formalities pleading to the length of the journey behind us and
the lateness of the hour. All our gifts were carried in and divided into
two piles: one pile for the bulubulu, another for the kau mata ni
gone. Both were presented at once with two whale teeth, whilst the
lululu and kau mata ni gone were performed back-to-back, the young
woman’s “handshake” accompanied by two more kerosene canisters
while the remaining tabua was given to the child to exchange with
her grandmother. The hosts responded with a single tabua, bringing
the sum total to an even three-a-side; relatives who had participated
in the ritual by submitting their whale teeth were able to get theirs
back following our return to Naloto.

The example above is a good illustration of the scope of manipulation
possible over the course of an event that includes tabua exchanges. From the
expected six-or-more whale teeth per side, the event can be downgraded to
the three-aside that meets the formal minimum requirements for the ritual.
And, it should be pointed out, the hosts could easily have beaten the guests
on this occasion, if this were a competitive event; they were a side rich with
tourism-derived wealth that had already overwhelmed the younger men in
our company before the ceremony started. But of course the bulubulu is an
occasion of atonement, one which is aimed at ritually “cleansing” (savasava)
— or literally “burying” (bulu) — the “dirt” (duka) staining a relationship
between two groups. As such, the atoners properly ought to be the side that
gives more than it receives — and in terms of the overall presentation, the
kerosene, cloth and other items, it is. But not in terms of whale teeth, though
any ideal formulation of the ceremony (see e.g. Williksen-Bakker 1984,
1986) would stress the large numbers of tabua that the atoning side is
obliged to give. The rare instance where I did witness the apologisers giving
more whale teeth than they received — though only barely so — involved a
visiting side from a Wainibuka village that shares common origins with the
Veratans (veitabani relation), in addition to which the visitors were classified
as warriors (bati) of the chiefdom of Bau, Verata’s old enemies. The event
was therefore competitive and playful, involving kava drinking challenges
among the men and explicitly sexual jokes and challenges by the women. The bulibulu, organised in Naloto in October 2007, involved the following exchanges:

Upon their arrival, the visitors from Wainibuka presented their sevusevu (welcoming kava) and expressed the purpose of their visit: purification. This was followed by a reguregu (condolences) for the Naloto people who had passed away recently. This took the form of one tabua, which the hosts reciprocated with a whole uprooted kava plant rather than a tabua. This exchange was followed by a round or two of kava drinking before the visitors presented their i soro, request for forgiveness: the guests’ second tabua, unreciprocated, followed by kava drinking while the women of the visiting party were preparing the women’s gift items – mats, tapa and bolts of cloth. After a number of boisterous rounds of kava, the guests performed the “hand shake”: the “stolen” bride silently walked in with her attendants, and went up to her grandfather. She shook his hand and presented him with a tabua; he gave her one back while her attendants wrapped him and his spokesman in lengths of cloth and young men of the visiting party carried in two canisters of kerosene which they placed in front of the old man. This was followed by presenting the woman’s daughter to her family (kau mata ni gone), during which the child (wrapped in tapa, decorated with wreath of flowers and a 10 to 15 meters long trail of cloth carried by her attendants) walked up to her classificatory great-grandmother and exchanged tabuas. Later in the ceremony, the guests gave gift items (22 canisters of kerosene, 10 pandanus mats and printed cloth unwrapped into a large heap) with not one but two tabuas, one representing the goods for the vanua (“land” here referring to the hosts assembled), the other to the girl’s mother. After the presentation of the gift items, the hosts responded with one tabua to thank for the goods, then another one whereby they entrusted the woman to her new family’s care. After an hour or two, the hosts presented the visitors with a tabua that stood for the feast food prepared for them, and finally – hours later – the visitors presented their tatau (request to “be released”) and the hosts responded with a vakatale – “return”. All in all, the guests presented seven whale teeth to the hosts and the hosts presented six to the guests.

Although this event witnessed an uneven number of tabua exchanged, I tend to regard it as the exception confirming a rule. Not only did the presentation of the gift items follow a number of challenges among the kava drinkers –
exceptionally big bowls of kava forced on members of the opposing side – the gift exchange was also followed by a general mayhem during which women of the visiting party rubbed talcum powder on the Naloto men’s genitals, made obscene gestures and even wrestled with an old lady originating from Vugalei (bati to Verata), all illustrative of a highly competitive mood between the two parties. “In the old days”, I was informed, “they would have beaten burning logs together above our heads.” But the visitors also presented their goods in a way that, according to the group of young men I was then sitting with, amounted to a challenge: the two men presenting the two whale teeth representing the goods stood up for the presentation. Since the (Naloto and nearby areas’) time-honoured custom is that whale teeth are presented on one’s knees, the village youths interpreted the gesture as a privilege made possible by the veitabani relation between the villages (“don’t write they stood up”, a young man exclaimed to me; “cross it over!”).

But far more important than a one-tooth mismatch between two parties swapping half a dozen teeth, in addition to other goods, is the fact that even on a highly charged event such as the one described above, the numbers of teeth exchanged nevertheless remain close to each other, if not exactly equivalent. Asking Naloto villagers for their views on the phenomenon, I received mixed replies: some told me that the custom of reciprocating whale teeth with whale teeth is a “new thing” that has replaced proper custom. Others informed me that in the old days, a tabua was always reciprocated with a tabua, whilst the moral decline of our times is visible in the fact that it is now possible to reciprocate a tooth with kava. Perhaps the most plausible (to my view) assumption was voiced by a group of men who informed me that the like-for-like pattern only applies for life cycle rituals and other public ceremonies, but that whale teeth accompanying requests are not reciprocated. This may apply on occasions where a request is the sole purpose, such as requesting use rights on a piece of another clan’s land – I do not know, no such event was held during my fieldwork, and villager’s descriptions on the matter of past reciprocations tend to be coloured by their notions of how they think a matter ought to have been handled. Furthermore, such requests appear to be very rare nowadays in Naloto.

However, looking at what can be considered the definitive usage of the tabua – requesting a wife – it is plain to see the assumption is that the whale teeth and the women move in different directions. This is expressed in the Fijian metaphors for twins: drua walu or “double canoe of war” for twin boys, druia dadakulaci or “banded double canoe” for a boy and a girl, and druia tabua or “double canoe of whale teeth” for twin girls; I was explained that this refers to the fact that women bring in whale teeth. On one occasion, trying to get anyone to comment on a particularly large tabua
received in a wedding, I was emphatically told that a *tabua* is a small thing compared to a woman with all the children she will give to her new family. Yet on that occasion the *tabua* was actually reciprocated, like on so many other occasions. It should hence come as no surprise that the actual marriage proposals, too, are indefinite in this respect.
I have actually witnessed no more than two occasions where the proper (considered proper by the villagers, that is) duguci was performed: elopement marriages are far more common in Naloto (for Suvavou village, see Williksen-Bakker 1984, 1986). Indeed, a Naloto man once told me that during the two decades he had spent in the village, he had not heard of a duguci being performed before March 2008. Though he had not, I can assure, been paying attention, the practice is nevertheless rare. Actually, in describing the practice, people tend to praise its cost efficiency: one does not have to spend on lavish parties or wedding gifts, everything is settled at once – which offers one explanation for the reason most people choose the disapproved elopement more often: it provides an occasion for a proper party. The duguci marriage is also often likened to an arranged marriage, even though the ones I witnessed or heard of were instances where the young couple had been living together well before the ritual. “The duguci is like a fixed marriage”, one of the Naloto men explained to me, “and fixed marriages are an Indian, not a Fijian custom”.

Yet the two duguci proposals I saw, and another that was described to me, followed a fixed protocol. After offering their sevusevu, the guests’ (boy’s group) spokesman announces the reason of their arrival (tukutuku); the girl is then summoned before the people present to answer whether or not she wants the boy; once she has replied “yes” thrice, the guests’ spokesman proceeds to present two tabuas: the first called either (vei)vosaki (“talking”) or lakovi (“leaving”), the second vakadonu ni musu, approximately “ratifying the separation”. In the first event I witnessed, the items were reciprocated with two tabuas; in the second one they were not. Without a larger sample it is impossible to say for certain, yet the room for variation appears similar to that described in relation to the atonement rituals above: the pattern wherein the whale teeth should move predominantly in one direction is counterbalanced with an obligation to reciprocate in kind.

The assumption that a tabua presented in proposal should not be reciprocated in kind is verified by the fact that there is actually a word for a tabua given in reciprocation with the purpose of averting or fending off the initial tooth: dirika – “to cancel the effect of one tabua by giving another” as defined in Capell’s Dictionary (2003). The monolingual dictionary (Na Ivolavosa Vakaviti, 2005) limits the practice of dirika to three contexts: proposal (duguci), fetching the bride (lakovi) and reclaiming the widow of a deceased man; in these events, a tabua may be given in reciprocation, “as a proof that the thing requested has not been confirmed” (op. cit.). In Naloto, whale teeth are only used as dirika in the funerals of deceased men who have left behind a wife. The custom is that at some stage over the course of the funeral, the widow’s relatives present a tabua to the relatives of the deceased
as a request to take her back to her natal home. This is, by all accounts, a formality in which the request (lakovi) is always cancelled (dirika), excepting the rare occasion where the couple have only been married for a short time, have no children, or where the widow is held in low esteem by her late husband’s group. A lack of reciprocation is dramatically marked behaviour; among the living generation in Naloto, it has only happened once, and everyone can point out the lady whose late husband’s clan chose not to dirika at the funeral.

In other words, the only context in which one sees the reciprocating tabua used for countering the effect of a request is one in which refusal is the presupposed conclusion. Even in marriage proposals, or so it appears, reciprocating the request does not annul the deed. Indeed, even the format of the marriage proposal seems to have been slightly altered to accommodate the possibility of reciprocation: a Naloto duguci event closes with the presentation of two whale teeth – one stands for the question, the other for the affirmation – but both are actually presented only after the proposal has already been agreed upon. Thus the guests’ “tukutuku” or “statement of intent” was, on an occasion I recorded, actually the proposal; the leader of the hosts who officiated the ritual also treated it as such, stating out loud that the veivosaki has already been done; if the girl consents thrice, it is time to proceed to ratifying the deed. Only then did the guests present two whale teeth: one for the question already replied and another to seal the affair.

In other rituals, as described above, reciprocation is the rule. In simple instances such as funeral gifts or the pooling of wealth before collective presentations, it takes the form of simple like-for-like exchange – direct or delayed – whilst in complex instances like atonements or receiving the body of the deceased in funerals, it means modifying the sequence and media of prestations and counter-prestations so that the outcome is even as far as the tabua are concerned. Notice, however, that this only applies to the whale teeth – other ceremonial gifts are not necessarily reciprocated in kind. As a matter of fact, looking at the circulation of whale teeth from a structural-functionalist point of view, one could easily point out that the scarcity of these valuables often compels villagers into wider co-operation where otherwise a smaller group would suffice. To put the matter simply, a group might often be capable of organising a feast on their own, in which case the goods received could be shared amongst the group members; having to request the assistance of other groups in order to enlist enough whale teeth for an event, however, means that the gifts will also be distributed amongst a larger number of participant groups (see following chapter on ceremonial exchange).

Yet the functionalist explanation would be insufficient for explaining why the tabua, and only the tabua, circulate in these particular modalities of
exchange. After all, it is possible to use kava roots, too, for many of the purposes that require “something to hold in one’s hands”, and there is even the custom of offering kava in reciprocation for kava, similar to the whale teeth. But these reciprocations are typically tossed back at their giver in a casual manner, or waived by a small gesture before the reciprocating kava even gets offered. There is, furthermore, no formal term or pattern for averting or cancelling kava. Hence, to recycle a famous question: “What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?”

“The Sau of the Gift”

One is tempted to reply Mauss’ question in Maussian terms, by pointing out that in dictionary definitions the whale tooth used for averting another whale tooth, known in Naloto as dirika, may also be called sau (Capell 2003; Na Ivolavosa Vakaviti). A Fijian cognate of the Maori hau discussed extensively by Mauss (and his critics, see e.g. Lévi-Strauss 1987, Sahlins 1972, Graeber 2001), sau bears no relation to that part of the donor’s spirit or soul that in Mauss’ original interpretation remains with the recipient to compel repayment. However, later re-analyses of the key text used by Mauss – an account by the Maori sage Tamati Ranapiri – have tended to downplay the “magical” explanation assumed by Mauss, in favour of more context-conscious ones. Thus hau has been reinterpreted as a principle of fertility, increase or generative potential (see Sahlins 1972: 149–183; Graeber 2001: 151–228), while Graeber (op. cit.: 180) extends the term’s reference to “commanding”, “animating” or “fame and reputation” in a way that ultimately overlaps another famously elusive concept, that of mana.

In this frame of reference hau and its Fijian cognate sau are not that far removed, though sau appears more directly connected with chiefly power. Indeed, in eastern Fiji, particularly the Lau group, sau is also a chiefly title closely related to the Tongan “Hau”, the political or war chief distinct from the T’ui Tonga title (e.g. Gunson 1979). In Naloto, and eastern Viti Levu more generally, the “chiefly” sau is contained in the title of the sauturaga, the installing land chief, as well as sautabu, the chiefly burial ground (unused in Naloto since the installations ceased) or saatu, a state of prosperous wellbeing. The term sau itself refers to the compulsory commandments or prohibitions laid down by a chief of power, something “powerful and effectively influential to cause ill or good” (Ravuvu 2005 [1983]: 120). However, like the infamously amorphous hau, the Fijian sau also carries a plethora of meanings and its by far more common usage, isau, (Naloto villagers only occasionally talk about the apparent loss of chiefly sau in the village) simply connotes an answer, response or price. Hence “the isau of the gift” would be a repayment, pure and simple, rather than a quality held by
the object. As a matter of fact, Capell’s *Dictionary* makes a reference precisely to such a usage, unknown in present-day ceremony:56 “*I diri*, the *tabua* given back in exchange for a *magiti* [food; feast]: synonyms *i sau, i uli, i diriki, i dole.*”

As shown over the course of this chapter, present-day *tabua* are not used in this asymmetrical manner. As a matter of fact, the way whale teeth are now used does, in some ways, even escape definitions of “exchange”. It is not just that, excepting the pawn shops, they circulate only in the ceremonial sphere: ceremonial uses are found in older descriptions, too, like the dictionary entry above in which the *tabua* acts as reciprocation for a feast. Rather, it is the highly ritualised use of these objects that makes them vehicles of efficacy rather than “worth”; indeed, in Fijian discourse, one does not exchange a whale tooth – one *does a tabua*. The objects thus act as the focal points in rituals performed for a purpose: typically, to affirm, alter or purify relations between people, but also for example to transfer land rights. Indeed, a *tabua* that stands for a very particular deed may be even taken out of circulation, though this is rare; such an object is found on display in the Naloto Methodist church, where it stands as a permanent marker of the land given to the church. But under normal circumstances, whale teeth carry no trace of their previous use and are therefore capable of standing for any purpose significant enough to require a *tabua*. They are, to recourse to a concept invented by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1987) for the purpose of describing precisely such things, “floating signifiers”, pure symbols that are able to “represent an indeterminate value of signification […] their sole function is to fill a gap between the signifier and the signified” (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 55–56). The idea has been further developed by Maurice Godelier, who has raised the “uselessness” that caused Malinowski to wonder into a defining feature of valuables: “These objects must first of all be of no practical use or unusable in the daily activities of living an earning a livelihood”, Godelier (1999: 161) writes. In order to make reference to status, wealth, power or divinity, these objects must be beyond the mundane world: only thus do they gain the “capacity to materialize the invisible, to represent the unrepresentable” (op. cit.: 109).

Representing the unrepresentable is precisely what a *tabua* also does. In short, the role of *tabua* in formal rituals could be likened to the felicitous conditions that make an illocutionary act effective in Austinian (1975 [1962]) speech act theory. The stated purpose of a ritual is contained by a *tabua* given – and notably received – during the proceedings. The *tabua* is

56 The Fijian Dictionary (Capell 2003) is the third edition of the dictionary published in 1945, based on material collected by the mid-19th-century missionaries and the following generations of linguists. The terminology therein recorded thus tends to record many older and even extinct Fijian expressions and phenomena.
thus a vital constituent for the conditions that make the ritual successful: not just because one would not seek to perform the ritual without a *tabua*, but because a *tabua* alone has the gravitas to make the desired state of affairs become a reality. Thus, in order to understand what gives the *tabua* this capability, we should start by asking what makes the *tabua* different from all other items used on ceremonial occasions? Godelier’s observations above offer a starting point, for not only are whale teeth the only Fijian exchange items without an everyday use, they are also insulated from the mundane world – usually by plastic bags. That is to say, they are kept out of sight until the moment of their use; sometimes carried inside one’s garments, sometimes in a book pouch typically used for Bibles or hymn books, the most typical means of concealment is nevertheless an ordinary plastic bag. Only when the designated moment arrives, does the holder of a *tabua* pull the item out of the bag while asking his group to perform the *tama*, a shout of respect that in the Verata region sounds like: “Vaa! Oi, oi, oi!” The shout is always immediately repeated by the receiving group, and yet again in a slightly longer form after the principle chiefly title of the receiving group has been announced.

Once used the *tabua* may often be handled quite casually. The recipient of a *tabua* may leave the object lying casually on the floor next to him for a while; on some occasions I have even seen people sliding whale teeth across the floor like people do with ordinary utility items such as cigarettes or lighters. And once a ritual is over, the “borrowed” (previously pooled) teeth are returned by unceremoniously depositing them on top of the piles of goods redistributed among participant groups. Outside the ceremonial context they are not, generally speaking, displayed or even kept in sight, but there is nothing to prevent one from showing a *tabua* if someone asks to see it, or showing what one got for one’s money from a pawn shop. On these occasions, there is nothing particularly reverent in the way people handle the teeth. The contrast with the ritual *tabua* is, therefore, significant; not least because it highlights the chiefly nature of the *tabua*’s power (see also Tomlinson 2012: 221). A speaker holding a *tabua* with two hands may respectfully “kiss” (*reguca*) it by holding it against the bridge of his nose and sniffing it: that is, greeting it as a person of respect. Indeed, the word *tama*, used for the formulaic greeting chanted upon the introduction of a *tabua*, is also used in reference to the highly formal, respectful greetings used for people — particularly chiefs of rank. According to a Vugalei myth, for example, the Verata *tama* originates from the screams of Rokomoutu’s daughter and her attendants who were surprised by Tui Nona, the founder of the Vugalei chiefdom, while bathing in Verata. There is a saying that recalls the mythic event: “qolouvaki ga na Tabua Basoga” (approx. “you only cry like that at the Tabua Basoga”) which links to yet another myth
conjoining the chiefs with the whale teeth. This particular tooth is, to my knowledge, the only tabua that has an individual name—Tabua Basoga (“the forked whale tooth”)—and it was lost in the mythical era of King Rokomoutu:

When Buatawatawa [the disobedient son and inventor of the first tabua] arrived in Verata, Rokomoutu was worried because his oldest son was coming back. Buatawatawa would be Ratu after him; the people of Verata would be ruled by Bua, and they would do their sevu [first fruits offering] to Bua.

So he decided to hold a running contest [cici cere]. All his grandsons would race, all seven of them, but none of his sons. The winner of the race would succeed him as the turaga Ratu. There were supposed to be eight contestants, but the eighth runner, Saraviti, had a crippled leg; he could not run. So Rokomoutu said: “You, my grandson, you will not run. But whoever wins, you will be the raviti [support].” He would sit next to the Ratu, ravi to him, shoulder against shoulder. That man’s name, it was Buretulevu.57

Ratu Rokomoutu announced that whoever wins will take Nasanokonoko [the chiefly house]. And the winner received the Tabua Basoga.

Rovarovaivalu was Buatawatawa’s younger brother. His son was Tui Vanuakula. They were living in Gau and Ovalau, in Koro. Tui Vanuakula won the race. In Bau and Moturiki they believe that Ratu Vueti won the race.

After the race, Rokomoutu buried the Tabua Basoga in his house. He said: “after four nights, we’ll dig it up again”. After four nights, they went to dig it up but it was missing. It is believed that someone stole it, took it somewhere else. (Tuivaleni man, age 67; recorded in August 2007)

This is actually no more and no less than the story of the downfall of Verata: the lost tabua was the vosa-mana, or the mana of Rokomoutu’s words, as spelled out in another rendition of the story (Tuwere 2002: 26). In that version, I should point out, the Tabua Basoga was not stolen: it was dug up by Ratu Rokomoutu himself when the other contestants would not accept Tui Vanuakula’s victory, whereby the old king himself caused the descent and humiliation of the first kingdom of Fiji, making Veratans themselves the agents of their fall from grace. In the Naloto version, however, the object’s mana was never undone and consequently whoever should find the Tabua Basoga would, so I have repeatedly been told, become

57 This is where the Saraviti moiety takes its name.
the “king of Fiji”. The key difference between the two versions is that in the Naloto version, the object remains somewhere out there, still maintaining its efficacy; what both renditions agree upon is that the tabua is a vessel of mana.

I would not repeat Mauss’ mistake of resorting to a native concept that turns out to be but a floating signifier: “in itself devoid of meaning and thus susceptible of receiving any meaning at all” (Lévi-Strauss 1987: 55). As A.M. Hocart pointed out a century ago, “the Polynesian-Melanesian word mana has become almost a technical term for European anthropology” (Hocart 1914: 97), whilst for Firth it was “a specialized abstraction of the theoretical anthropologist” (Firth 1940: 487, cited in Tomlinson 2012). I point this out in order to highlight the fact that I do not summon mana in the general theoretician’s sense, but only to the degree that is necessary for explaining the mana emanating from the tabua.

This, in short, means not contenting with a notion of “supernatural power” as The Fijian Dictionary does, but understanding the causative nature of mana. This view has been succinctly expressed by Roger Keesing, who refutes notions of mana as a substantive in favour of a view of mana as a stative verb (“be efficacious, be realised”) or an abstract verbal noun (“efficacy”, “success”, “potency”): “[ mana ] is a condition, not a ‘thing’: a state inferred retrospectively from the outcome of events” (Keesing 1984: 137). An illustrative Fijian account comes from Hocart, who sites a Lauan chief (the quote is placed under the heading “miracles”):

If it is true (ndina), it is mana; if not true then it is not mana. A thing done by spirits is mana. In the Solomon Islands things mana because they were from the beginning. In Fiji they don’t mana; they do mana once, but if another man uses them they don’t mana. A Fijian medicine does mana if it works; it does not mana if it does not work. (Hocart 1929: 186)

Hocart’s informant, the Tui Tubou, not only uses mana as a verb, but also appears to provide a confirmation for the way whale teeth, too, seem to “do” mana: “they do mana once, but if another man uses them they don’t mana”. He, furthermore, shows the overlap between mana and the condition of

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58 Tabua Basoga appeared several times in Naloto conversations in 2007–2008 when, in the aftermath of the 2006 coup, people were of the opinion that its reappearance would put an end to Fiji’s political instability. Villagers also thought that things would look very different for Verata had the object not been lost: the lands and allies lost in consequence to the wars with Bau would still be Verata’s, for example. There had also been rumours of the Tabua Basoga’s whereabouts over the years, the most recurrent one claiming it is hidden in Ovalau, but nothing definite enough to get the villagers excited.
being “true”, *dina*, that has been likewise reported by numerous observers from the 19th century onwards (see Hocart 1914; Sahlins 1985: 37–38; Tomlinson 2006; Toren 2007b); this overlap makes the two words, *mana* and *dina*, appear sometimes as nearly synonymous, at others to be causally related; something was *mana* if time proves it true. But the two words are also frequently coupled up in ritual speech in a way that finally brings us back to the performative characteristics of the whale teeth, too. For it is common to close a ritual oration with the declaration “*mana!* *E dina!*”

Translated as “let it be *mana*, let it be true” by Hocart (1914: 98), “it effects, it is true” by Toren (2007b), “let it be effective and true!” by Miyazaki (2004: 103) and so forth, the formulaic closure is frequent enough to have been labelled “the Fijian Amen” by Hocart (1914: 98). In an article that discusses the Fijian *mana* to a far greater degree than possible here, Matt Tomlinson (2006: 176) refers to it as “an apparently stable formula in Fijian ritual action”. However, what strikes me as odd in these translations and discussions is the fact that in the ceremonial exchanges I have witnessed, no-one actually chants “it effects, it is true!” — instead, the coupling appears in dialogue (just as described by Wilkes in 1845 for a Bauan wedding [1985: 91]). To be more precise, the dialogue occurs at the end of each acceptance speech for an item that “contains” a “purpose”, whether kava or *tabua*, so that the person receiving an item thanks the giver, acknowledges its stated purpose, and then closes the speech of acceptance by calling out “*Mana!*” It is in immediate response to this that the rest of the ritual participants call out “*E dina!*” — “it is true” (The recipient typically chants this in unison with the rest of the crowd). Now taking into consideration the fact that all of the ceremonial exchanges seek to affect relations between participating people or groups, what we are dealing with is a self-fulfilling prophecy! Indeed, the latest dictionary definition of “*mana*” is “*yago dina na kena inaki*” (Na Ivolavosa Vakaviti 2005) — translated as “achieving its intended purpose” by Tomlinson (2006: 174) — which is precisely what takes place in ceremonial exchange. A closer look at the orations made during ceremonial exchanges confirms the pattern.

Whatever a prestation consists of — kava to welcome visitors, a *tabua* offered in proposal, or the like — its presentation follows a standard formula wherein the ceremonial titles (*cavuti*) of all the groups present are listed before stating the purpose of the thing offered. Held with both hands by a spokesman sitting on his knees, the statement of intent is always bound to the thing offered: “the purpose of the *sevusevu* is to…”, “this is a valuable for…”, and after the object’s purpose has been explained, the object is referred to as “*kena kamunaga*”, “valuable relating to”, a genitive form meaning that the valuable “belongs to” a stated purpose. A typical presentation speech belittles what is being offered; a *tabua*, for example, is
routinely presented as “dua saka na kamunaga lai lai” – “a small valuable, sir” – a phrasing which the receivers always interrupt with “levu, levu” (“big, big”). The length of a presentation varies according to the gravity of the situation and the style of the spokesman, but typically lasts from two to five minutes. A typical speech also contains an appropriate biblical allusion and a reference to the history shared by the groups in question, before concluding with an apology for the length of the oration (e.g. “balabalavu saka tiko na vosa ni kamunaga” – lit. “long are the words of the valuable, sir”) and repeating the titles of the principle groups present.

What sets the presentation of a tabua apart from things of lesser gravity are the opening and closing formalities. I have already mentioned that the presentation of a tabua, and only a tabua, is greeted with a tama – a cry of respect fitting for a chief. Upon taking out a tabua, a spokesman orders his retinue to tama – “Vaa! Oi, oi, oi!” (no known meaning) – and the giving group’s tama is immediately repeated by the receivers. After naming the principal recipient – that is, the highest chiefly title of the receiving group – the presenters again repeat the tama in a longer format, ending in a long “ū” sound chanted with a descending intonation. The presentation of a tabua, furthermore, concludes with the exclamation “A soso Ratu!” , from soso, “give” or “exchange”, and Ratu, the paramount chiefly title. The phrase only accompanies the presentation of a tabua.

But the key difference is in the reception of a whale tooth. The presentation of teeth differs from that of other gift items mainly in the chiefly considerations that a spokesman, acting on behalf of his chief, has to master. But the acceptance of a whale tooth always involves a ranking chief who would otherwise remain quiet throughout the proceedings, allowing his spokesman to handle the affair. Thus immediately following the presentation of a tabua, the receiving party’s spokesman takes the object to the presiding chief who formally accepts (ciqoma) the object. This is the shortest one of the required speeches, often without the eloquent turns of phrase or resounding voice used by the spokesmen in their addresses. What the chief is required to express is that he accepts the object (“ciqoma saka tiko na kamunaga”) and that it takes effect: “Mana!” To this, everyone present replies “Edina!” – “it is true”.

The chief’s acceptance speech is elaborated upon by the spokesman, who “announces” (kaciva) the object received: “Au kaciva saka tiko mada na kamunaga sai vakaraitaki ni yau levu sa tiko e matai keimani” (“Sirs, I announce the valuable that stands for the great wealth in front of our eyes”). When the object received is not a tabua, the ceremony proceeds from presentation directly to the announcement. A spokesman’s oration is typically more powerful than that of a chief, he goes to greater detail in articulating the titles of the groups present and the intent and effect of the
item. Like his counterpart on the givers’ side, it is the receiving spokesman’s task to come up with the apt metaphors for describing the event. In the end he, too, pronounces the deed “mana!”, to which everyone again responds “Edina!” The entire assembly then chants the final formula that closes an individual presentation: “a muduo, muduo; a muduo, muduo!” The sequence is then repeated for a counter-prestation or the presentation of another “purpose-laden” object.

The particulars of tabua exchange raise a number of important points. First of all, we can see that the often-inflated concept of mana can also be viewed as ceremonial practice. From such a point of view, it appears much less “supernatural” or religious than commonly understood. Observed within a sequence where an intention is first declared, then accepted and finally announced, mana becomes the outcome of strictly controlled conditions that ensure the performative quality of these rituals. As a matter of fact, the mana contained or capacitated by whale teeth stands in stark contrast to the religious or miracle-making variety studied by Tomlinson (2006), who draws a parallel between Kadavu islanders’ sense of loss or diminution and the role assigned to mana in Biblical cosmology. Naloto villagers, too, comment widely on the thematic of loss, diminution and the diminishing powers of present-day Fijians in contrast to the bygone generations: the history of Verata is typically ordered upon a metanarrative of degeneration. From the very moment of the creation of Fiji’s first kingdom, the senior lineage has been humiliated and surpassed by upstarts. The difference is foregrounded in recollections of the war with Bau in 1850, when the paramount village was burnt to the ground and the Veratans retreated into Naloto. Yet just as the one tabua known by name – the Tabua Basoga – contains the possibility of reversing Verata’s fortunes, so the whale teeth in general, and to a lesser extent kava as well, remain potent in the face of conceived loss, even a self-conceived anomie. I cannot phrase the issue more convincingly than one of the Naloto men who was sitting with me, watching the traditional entertainment organised in honour of an esteemed guest in the village meeting hall. Having first taken part in the jokes, pranks, adornment and innuendos with the guests whose leader was vasu to Naloto, then joining in the feast served in the guests’ honour, watching the traditional dances (meke) performed for the occasion and an exchange of whale teeth carried out, my friend suddenly exclaimed (in English):

“Look at all these things! This is all bullshit! None of this is real, it has all changed. We still give the tabua, and have the yaqona, but the rest is just bullshit.”

59 This formulaic chant has no literal translation. Capell (2003) approximates it as “probably Ah! It is over!”
Returning to the subject of *mana*; what makes kava and whale teeth potent (and less bullshit) may well be their use in contexts where relations between people are made, affirmed, renewed and “cleansed”. For as Tomlinson points out, Bible translations in particular have turned *mana* into “miracles”, which are harder to come by than “mere” efficacy, especially as the chiefs have been stripped of much of their religious functions, indigenous deities have been illegitimated and people in general are thought to be declining. Socially efficacious action, meanwhile, is verifiably taking place – the whale teeth’s *mana* is true. But it works the other way as well – and I now get to my second point: the *mana* involved in whale teeth is markedly of a chiefly variety. The *tabua* are in most respects treated like chiefs, and their potency is the potency of chiefs. Whether regarded as *mana* or the largely overlapping notion of *sau* (see e.g. Quain 1948: 200; Tomlinson 2006: 174–177), their ceremonial use draws on images of chiefly power and hierarchy. Indeed, looking beyond Naloto it is easy to find examples where the *tabua* even figure prominently as chiefly paraphernalia: Quain (1948: 189–192) describes whale teeth being inherited as emblems of office in certain Vanua Levu chiefdoms, while Nayacakalou (2001 [1975]: 46) describes *tabua* being used as tokens of chieftaincy in the installation of the *Tui Nalilo*; the Veratans, meanwhile, regard the lost Tabua Basoga as an epitome for the decline of Verata chieftaincy. It feels but natural, therefore, that the *tabua* should be greeted with a chiefly tama, accompanied by the form of address reserved for chiefs (saka) and so on.

Asesela Ravuvu has defined the *tabua* as “the highest symbol of respect, deference, loyalty, goodwill, acceptance, recognition, and even submission, which an individual or group may offer another” (Ravuvu 1987: 22; cited in Arno 2005: 54 and Tomlinson 2012: 219). Steven Hooper (1982: 134; cited in Tomlinson 2012: 223) goes even further in his claim that “the essence of all *tabua* presentations is an implicit or explicit request for something which the donor desires, and he therefore elevates the recipient to a position of relative authority and power”. These ideas of submission and relative authority are built in to the basic formalities of *tabua* exchange, inasmuch as the formalities require that a senior member of the receiving group acts the chief during the ceremonies. The entire events are, in other words, structured in a manner that bestows prestige upon the recipient. In this regard, the whale teeth are analogous to the reverence ceded to the “divine guests” described in the preceding chapters; they, too, represent a “bottom-up” ideology of power in which rank is offered rather than seized.

This brings me to the third point I want to make: the particulars of *tabua* exchange emphasise the reception rather than offering of the valuables.
Although people may go through considerable efforts and expenses to obtain the *tabua* they need to present in a ceremony, and although giving the objects is what is required of the performers of a rite, the key moment is nevertheless the reception. Hirokazu Miyazaki (2004) goes as far as to discuss Fijian gift giving protocol as an instance of what he labels “agency in abeyance” (2004: 97–111) in reference to moments where an actor can only hope for a favourable outcome. In Miyazaki’s interpretation, the gift-givers are left open to the risk of rejection, their hope is “placed in the hands of the gift-receivers” (op. cit.: 106). Thus although Miyazaki (op. cit.: 103) is the only Fiji scholar to take note of the custom of reciprocating a *tabua* with a *tabua*, he only mentions this in passing: for him the key question is the risk that the valuable (or the “purpose” it stands for) is not accepted.

My view in contrast is Maussian: in the exchanges I have witnessed, rejecting the gift has never been a real option. Miyazaki, too, sees that both sides involved in such an exchange are committed to the question-and-response format and therefore seek the closure brought about by accepting the gift – that is to say, in his interpretation, too, people feel the obligation to receive, only it is done for reasons of ceremonial syntax. I follow Mauss in considering refusal “the equivalent of a declaration of war, it is a refusal of friendship and intercourse” (Mauss 1966: 11). In my understanding, however, accepting the valuable is almost as obligatory as presenting it, and therefore hardly offers more than an intermediate form of closure. Yet I also see a question-and-response format in Fijian gift exchange, but in my view, it is the counter-prestation that closes the cycle.

The exchanges discussed in this chapter are a special category in the sense that, though the ceremonial transactions are handled in material media – *tabua* and kava – these media typically act as vehicles for much more weighty, predominantly immaterial, things. Indeed, this has lead Andrew Arno (2005) to discuss the *tabua* as “cultural currency” more akin to “gestures” than objects. Miyazaki’s focus on the fulfilment of hope in the context of *tabua* exchange bespeaks of the same immaterial interest, as does my detour though the notions on sau and mana that are key to the persuasiveness of whale teeth. Yet I maintain a focus on the material object because the whale teeth stand alone amongst traditional ceremonial wealth items in requiring full formal reciprocation. Above, I have already noted that kava, when acting as the vehicle for a purpose or function, is also reciprocated, but that the reciprocation is typically refused with a minimal gesture. Miyazaki (2004: 103), writing on Suva village adjacent to the capital city, also mentions in passing the “whale’s tooth [presented] as a return gift (dirika)”, but expounds in a note that “[w]hen the relationship between the gift-givers and gift-receivers was very close, the gift receivers’ offer to make a return gift was often turned down by the gift-givers” (op.
cit.: 163 n. 17). I have never witnessed a counter-tabua refused in Naloto, even amongst close kin, but Miyazaki’s observation coincides with Matt Tomlinson’s characterisation of the Kadavu tabuas as “tokens of exchange and the relationships created through exchange” (Tomlinson 2012: 216, emphasis added). In Naloto village, too, whale teeth are deployed in relations between people, but it is a rare thing to create relations in these events; usually the tabua are required for maintaining old ones. And such relationships appear to be ill-suited for the chiefly implications contained in the tabua.

IN CONCLUSION

The second half of this chapter has dealt with whale teeth that are mainly used in maintaining or “purifying” relationships between social groups: gift items that appear to have almost nothing in common with the “money-like” whale teeth that open this chapter. This chapter began with a discussion of whale teeth as their use has been documented in 19th-century Fiji: as specimens of the type of “foreign” objects whose “provenience outside society gave them the potency to organize and reproduce it” (Sahlins 2005: 5) the like of which are known all over Oceania (e.g. Hooper 2006). Associated with all the power that went with the chiefly paraphernalia and the cosmologically foreign status of political power, the signs of age or “sentimental value” on the objects testified not only that what made the objects valuable was indeed the same “exo-social” quality that was also salient in politics of the day, but also that such value could even be quantified after a fashion. However, as evidenced by the Naloto myth accounting for the origin of the tabua, these items have been transformed from foreign-origin to autochthonous wealth. As a matter of fact, whale teeth are now occasionally referred to as tabua ni Viti – “Fijian whale teeth” – perhaps to distinguish them from the relatively new problem of counterfeit whale teeth (tabua lasulasu, from lasu: “a lie”) made from plastic, cement or animal bones, that the Fijian authorities have tried to take a stand on (without much effect, since there is no legal definition for a tabua). Several Naloto villagers have expressed to me their belief that such items are made by “foreigners” or “some people in Australia”, thereby showing that the value of foreign origin has inflated all the way into being a marker of inauthenticity.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ New whale teeth also sometimes appear in circulation, but villagers remained ignorant of their origin. One of the senior men did hazard the guess that the Ministry of Indigenous (now iTaukei) Affairs buys them from Japan or Norway, these being the only places where whale fishing was known to take place.
This change of polarity has, however, also coincided with changes in the way the items are used; changes that cannot be as easily derived from the foreign or local value manifested by the objects. Where whale teeth once also functioned as trade currency, used in transactions between different ethnic groups in and from beyond the Fiji islands (hence evidencing a wider scale of value conversions), they nowadays function as “the leading yau” in indigenous Fijian exchanges. Having turned into locals, the objects now circulate only among the indigenous Fijian population – itaukei, as indigenous Fijians nowadays designate themselves: the “owners”, “masters” or “hosts” of the Fiji islands. At the same time, the value of whale teeth has been gradually shifting away from the type of general convertibility discussed by Nicholas Thomas, towards being a necessary condition for ritual efficacy. In the ritual modality, they are exchanged in the manner of like-for-like exchanges: a tabua can only, and properly ought to, be reciprocated with a tabua. Indeed, following this line of reasoning, one could justifiably claim that in most instances, tabuas are no longer a “currency” in the sense that they are not consumed or “used up” in exchange (see Robbins and Akin 1999: 4). Even the label of like-for-like exchange does not do full justice to the actual practice, since in roughly one half of the actual exchanges the whale teeth symbolise a number of other things accompanying the tabua; in such instances they constitute only part of a larger exchange, the total of which does not constitute a like-for-like sequence. Indeed, in local terms one does not “exchange” whale teeth at all; rather, one “does” a tabua. The whale teeth are a necessary condition for successfully fulfilling an obligation but are not the objective of exchange in themselves. Yet the objects do move against each other in a manner that can be formally labelled “exchange” (“the act or an instance of giving one thing and receiving another in its place”, according to my Concise Oxford Dictionary), though it is no longer neither monetary nor economic.

Instead of displaying (assumed) history or exchange value on their surfaces, the ceremonial whale teeth are all of equal value. Not in the sense that people would not notice a particularly large tooth or discuss the prices.

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61 This claim needs to be immediately specified: I am actually talking about the ceremonial exchanges. If someone were to follow the actual objects and the paths they take in circulation, one would see them being exchanged for money in the urban centres, in pawnshops that are often run by members of Fiji’s other ethnic groups. From my point of view, however, the fact that one can only convert whale teeth into money under these special circumstances is proof of the notions of impropriety that are associated with selling tabua. The same is attested by the repeated legislative attempts to ban the sale of tabua or restrict such activity to the (former) Fijian Affairs Board (e.g. the Prohibition of Sale of Tabua Act 1997 Bill, the Tabua Act 2005 Bill, or the large-scale confiscation of whale teeth from pawnshops in January 2010 – though the last example has also been attributed to more self-serving motives).
and sizes of the teeth they have seen, or conversely: one of the Naloto men had a tabua that was so small that everyone agreed it was only to be used as an emergency backup if an unpredicted need for reciprocation should emerge. Still, within the ceremonial sphere, one whale tooth is worth exactly one whale tooth. One is obliged to reciprocate a whale tooth just as one is obliged to accept one, and this reciprocation (vakatale, dirika, vakavinaka) can only be conducted with another tabua.

The process, whereby a native currency is restricted to a highly specific sphere of exchange, typically one associated with social reproduction, is often explained with concepts such as enclaving or insulating (see Robbins and Akin 1999: 23–27). Though descriptions of insulated spheres of exchange do not necessarily treat insulation as a purposeful act or functional arrangement, these notions nevertheless imply a degree of directionality or active effort. Whilst I am not opposed to such an interpretation – a 2010 confiscation of seven sacks of whale teeth from Fijian pawnshops by the police (see e.g. Nadore 2010) is a clear enough show of active will to enslave the objects beyond either the commodity sphere or the non-indigenous Fijian agents therein – it provides a point of view that too easily treats the outcome – the insulation of an exchange sphere – as an explanation rather than a thing in need of explaining. What the case of Naloto offers is an alternate approach, one focused on the more extensive value change outlined in the previous chapters.

I again take my cue from Louis Dumont, whose analysis of value is remarkable in seeking to address both the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the concept (cf. Graeber 2001: 16). What Dumont proposes in a brief discussion on Melanesian currencies is that “[w]hen the rate of exchange is seen as linked to the basic value(s) of the society it is stable, and it is allowed to fluctuate only when and where the link with the basic value and identity of the society is broken or is no longer perceived, when money ceases to be a ‘total social fact’ and becomes a merely economic fact.” (Dumont 1992 [1986]: 259–260.) An exchange item that only moves against other, identical objects it seems to be in possession of a particularly stable rate of exchange. But how does this tie up with the cosmology of value that has indigenised the chiefs and the sea people, too?

David Graeber provides us with two points of comparison. Drawing on Irving Goldman and Marshall Sahlins, he distinguishes between two types of political systems: ones where distinctions are made on the basis of descent from a single common ancestor — exemplified by most Polynesian societies, where people keep track of long genealogies in order to show their proximity to the senior lines — and ones with multiple, independent origins — exemplified by the Kwakiutl, whose numerous points of origin deny a single point of reference for political authority. These differences in political
organisation, furthermore, correspond with their media of exchange: where Polynesian chiefs deal in dissimilar objects that act to set them apart from the mass of men with almost similar credentials, the Kwakiutl use a standardised “currency” – the Hudson Bay blanket – to bring their difference to a commensurable state.

The change that has taken place in Fijian cosmology does not correspond exactly with either of these political systems. Yet what Graeber does with the examples helps understanding what has taken place in Fiji: by outlining entire cosmologies leading to different patterns of exchange Graeber is able to (re-)unite qualitative and quantitative value, thereby making it possible to view value – and hence the contexts where it is “of value” – as simplifications or distillations of much more complicated social orders.

The symbols of “sea”, “stranger” or “guest” have predominantly been discussed as signifiers for chieftainship and complementary social relations, but by extension also as expressions of the underlying alterity, fundamental difference or otherness also contained in these notions. From the chiefs’ inhumane dispositions (e.g. Sahlins 1985) to superhuman status (e.g. Hocart 1929), the strangers of old were proof of Lévi-Strauss (1970, 46) claim that “an essential characteristic of man disappears outside the limits of the group”. Standing in binary opposition to the ideas contained in the category of “sea”, what “land” then stands for is, if not the absence of alterity, then at least the disvaluing of difference. That much is implied even by the origin myths of the Naloto groups, all of which seek to fit the same configuration of originality. Would not, then, a valuable acting as the vehicle for the values implicit to “land” seek to undo difference?

If we identify the “land” point of view with the in-group and an ideal or value of “sameness”, then Dumont’s proposition that a close linkage between the basic value of a society and the rate of exchange applied to its exchange media becomes highly appropriate. As Nancy McDowell notes in an essay on what she labels “competitive equality”: “[c]onversions from one economic sphere to another allow more fluidity of power through exchanges, and whatever discourages or prevents such conversions must necessarily inhibit potential hierarchy” (McDowell 1990: 191). She is, of course writing about a particular type of difference, social stratification, but also addresses the necessary condition underlying hierarchy in the context of equal exchange:

If the consequence is to unite, it may be that same or similar items be exchanged; if it is to differentiate, using different items might be more appropriate and effective. And to the extent that hierarchy requires separation, as surely it must, the transfer of disparate items
would allow for more hierarchy while, all other things being equal, the exchange of same items could (but again not necessarily does) foster identity and therefore more equality. (McDowell 1990: 190–191)

“All other things being equal” – of course, under the traditional moiety system, some people in Naloto really are more equal than others. Here I am already anticipating the next chapter, in which I will discuss the full range of traditional exchange items used in Naloto in order to show that it is in fact the differentiating “sea” things that are systematically downplayed. Before going there, however, it remains to answer Mauss’ question posed earlier in this chapter: “What power resides in the object given that causes its recipient to pay it back?” The immediate answer is “none”, in so far as I have here reached the conclusion that tabua exchange is but a “model for” arranging social relations. However, since it is only the whale teeth that are prone to figure in this strict pattern of prestations and identical counter-prestations, I will add that what makes them potent (mana or sau) is their analogy with the chiefs; thence the tabua’s ability to signal authority and power as well as submission and pleading. However, rather than claiming that cancelling the effect of a tabua by giving another (dirika) would signal an outright rejection of hierarchy, I see the exchanges as a rejection of the underlying condition that made the chiefs of old, too, more potent than their present-day counterparts can ever be – difference itself. Indeed, according to a popular Fijian idiom, every man is a chief in his own house; according to an equally popular piece of advice that everyone can recite though only the senior men follow, every man should always have a tabua at home in case one is needed.
The family of Mosese, a man of the sea moiety, had received a message requesting them to attend the funeral of a senior male relative from the Vugalei paramount’s family in Savu village. The Vugalei people are *bati*, which is to say land warriors and honoured allies for coastal Verata, and according to the prescribed rules of Fijian gift-exchange, the ceremonial food gifts from sea to land people should be fish or other salt water produce, even though at present it is not typical for Naloto villagers of either moiety to follow the prescription. Perhaps due to my constant questions about the land and sea gifts, or perhaps simply due to the high rank of the deceased, Mosese’s mother – a daughter of the Vugalei paramount – insisted that we set forth with gifts suitable for sea people. So we bought an appropriate large fish from a neighbour with a freezer. But as it happened, just prior to our departure for the funeral, one of the neighbouring fishermen came in from the sea with a catch that would, in the traditional order, be a particularly suitable “sea” presentation for a recipient of chiefly rank, and so it was bought from him for our party’s *reguregu*, which also comprised some pandanus mats and kava. At the funeral, after our gifts had been formally received, a senior relative of the deceased half-jokingly remarked that he should fetch a *tabua* to reciprocate Mosese’s gift: this caused Mosese to first demur, then get so uncomfortable and ashamed (*mādua*) that he would not speak or raise his eyes from the floor until several rounds of kava had passed.

There are many reasons for Mosese’s abashment: he was in thirties, and though both a father and head of household, he was still not yet considered an adult in all respects. He had also never properly learnt the ceremonial phrases that one needs to master upon gift exchange, so the mere idea of having to take the floor during a major ceremonial event might have alarmed him – though of course someone else would have acted as his spokesman, as is customary. And the senior men sitting around us were his maternal uncles, with whom he should actually not converse at all; even though such avoidance rules are commonly dropped in Naloto, in another village one is always more aware of such requirements, besides which the Vugalei people are known as traditionalists in comparison to Naloto villagers. But there is more to the embarrassing incident.
A whale tooth given in reciprocation for fish is known as *bati ni ika*, “tooth of the fish”, and it is the traditional way to honour fishermen who present their catch to a chief or people of the warrior designation. According to the Naloto sea moiety’s recorded history, their customary duties are to provide fish or turtles for the Verata high chief if so requested, and be compensated by a whale tooth; and to fish for their *bati*, if requested, and be recompensed with food and a whale tooth (Tagicaki n.d.). “We are *Ratu’s* fishermen, he asks us when he wants to eat fish”, I was explained the sea people’s role. However, upon closer inquiry, people would confess that they have never actually witnessed such a thing, though everyone agreed that such practises would have been alive in their grandfather’s time (*kai* – the term is applied to all male relatives senior to the father/uncle generation, joining all preceding generations). One young man told me the ceremonial exchange relations with the Verata paramount are no longer practised “because of Westernisation”, but the others were content with explaining themselves as the *Ratu’s* fishermen.

Not only had the custom of taking fish (or turtles, now protected by law) to the chief fallen into disuse, many among the Naloto *bati* (*Kai* Naloto) complained that the sea moiety was not living up to its responsibilities in the village either: the fishermen ought to bring fish to the *bati*, who would award the fishermen with a *bati ni ika*. I heard the complaint several times during my fieldwork, but my attempts at finding out why a practice that both parties involved apparently find appropriate does not take place were answered with explanations that obviously fail to address the underlying issue: the fishermen claimed that there are not enough fish in the Naloto waters anymore, or blamed a lack of fibreglass boats and outboard engines required for reaching the more remote reefs; a few of the more argumentative land people claimed the fishermen are just lazy. But since there obviously still are fish in the Naloto waters – though undoubtedly less than there once may have been – and since in my opinion, neither of the moieties in Naloto village are particularly lazy, I am inclined to seek for a different solution.

As far as acts of giving and receiving can be regarded similar to acts of recognition, the data presented in this chapter seeks to make a simple point: that under the prevailing, land-dominated ideal, to participate in exchanges from the “sea” position is to frame oneself as an outsider vis-à-vis the insiders or originals. In order to argue my point, I will outline the practices and substances involved in the ceremonies already discussed to some degree in the previous chapter.
CEREMONIAL WEALTH

The *bati ni ika*, whale tooth given in exchange for fish, would be (if it still practised) a highly formal way of honouring the sea people in their capacity of hereditary master fishermen. In practice, it falls under the now inexistent exchanges where whale teeth move against dissimilar substances already discussed in the previous chapter. But as already argued with regard to food prohibitions, fish is also emblematic to the sea people more generally: it is the ceremonial meat (*sasalu*) given by the sea people. Correspondingly it is the ceremonial food of the *bati*, forbidden for the sea people to eat under ceremonial conditions, or in the presence of land people. The analogy is mirrored on the land side: land people are not supposed to eat pork or plantains in the presence of sea people. In addition to the emblematic role of pork as the *sasalu* of the warriors, the sea people’s original status as “guests” – which is also to say as landless dependants – is reflected in the fact that the traditional staple foods are strongly associated with the land people. Among the Tunidau clan there is a custom of organising a small family feast to celebrate the time when a one-year-old child touches taro for the first time – before this, taro is (said to be) forbidden for Tunidau children and their mothers. The hereditary division of labour is also – again, supposedly – reflected in domestic eating habits: in traditional idiom, “eating like sea people” (*kana vaka kai wai*) means eating just fish with no root crops. The hereditary specialisation is sometimes also assumed to guide the sea moiety members’ career choices; at least farmers from the *bati* clan were often complaining that the sea people are encroaching on their territory by spending more time on farming than fishing.

The root crops vs. fish opposition is, however, only a weak form of the dichotomy expressed in the opposition of fish to pork. This is an element of Fijian tradition that any adult Naloto villager could unhesitatingly describe to, say, a visiting anthropologist – and quite a few did, phrased something like this: “We are land/sea people, it is forbidden (tabu) for us to eat pork/fish with the sea/land people.” Nor is the significance of pigs and fish restricted to Naloto village: the same prohibition on eating fish applies to all Veratans vis-à-vis their traditional allies beyond the chieftom of Verata. As a matter of fact, the opposition is salient throughout eastern Viti Levu (Hocart 1924) and the smaller islands east of it, such as Gau (Toren 1988: 716 n. 8) or, further South-East, Moala (Sahlins 1962: 300, 360) and probably beyond.

Hence all of Naloto village – as part of the chieftom of Verata – would be considered “sea” in relation to allied chieftoms (*bati balavu*) of Verata, such as Vugalei where the incident related above took place. Indeed, as a rule, one can expect a higher degree of formality with allies from beyond
the village, since both the *bati* relationship and geographical distance (i.e. less frequent contact) tend to increase the demand for decorum. Yet the eating and exchange imperatives are not restricted to *bati* relations alone, but express a generalised dual order within which the exchanges of pork and fish have been analysed, for example, as “balanced reciprocity” (i.e. “not hierarchy”) by Toren (1988: 716 n. 8) on Gau, or “the co-operative, reciprocal aspect of the supposed division of labor between ‘sea people’ and ‘land people’” by Sahlins (1962: 360) on Moala.

In addition to appearing as feast food on festive occasions, these food items are important gift items in ceremonial exchange. On such occasions, the prestations in their entirety can be divided into a “leading valuable” (*tabua* or *kava*) that tends to be reciprocated with a similar item, and ceremonial wealth represented or encompassed by the former. In the formal presentation speeches accompanying ceremonial gifts, the gifts encompassed by the “leading valuable” are further divided into six categories. These categories are only used in ceremonial language, just like the term *kamunaga* that replaces the word *tabua* in ceremonial orations. The use of these categories gives ceremonial language the feel of an avoidance style (see e.g. Dixon 1980) insofar as an orator should use broad, general categories instead of naming the particular varieties or quantities of things given and received. The categories of gifts acceptable in *vakavanua* events are:

1. *kamunaga* (“the valuable”): ceremonial term for *tabua*. Other dialects may use *tovuto* (“whale”) or *vatu ni vanua* (“stone of the land”); the word *tabua* is not used in ceremonial speech.
2. *yau* (“wealth”): this category includes mats, bark cloth as well as other indigenous exchange items that are considered particular lands’ traditional wealth and are hence only rarely seen in Naloto, such as the woven fans (*iri*) of Daku village; the basket (*voko*) characteristic of Vugalei, the bark cloth (*masi*) of Vatulele or the wooden kava bowls (*tanoa*) of Kabara and Fulaga islands. Inedible store goods that are accepted as traditional exchange items, such as kerosene, print cloth, mosquito nets, pillows, blankets, soap and washing powder are also glossed “*yau*”. (Cigarettes, I believe, are also glossed *yau* though they are, grammatically speaking, considered edibles.) Furthermore, on the rare occasions that money enters ceremonial exchange, it is enclosed in an envelope and designated under “*yau*”. Some speakers prefer to list pandanus mats separately as “*daliga ni ibe*” (“mat ears”) or just “*ibe*” (mats).62

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62 Kava is designated as *yau* when part of a larger presentation. When presented by itself in an unprepared state (dried roots, as a bundle or pounded, or as a fresh, uprooted plant) it
3. *magiti* (“food” or “feast”): taro, cassava, and less frequently plantains.

4. *i coi* (“course”, “dish” or “relish”): ceremonial meat. On mortuary exchanges, this means beef, pork or fish; on rare occasions also turtles. On less formal occasions, the category may also include frozen chicken, canned meat or tuna, mussels, etc., and vegetables or noodles purchased from the urban market for feast food such as *stiu* (stew) or *soposui* (chop suey). Some speakers use the categories *wai tui* (lit. “salt water”) for sea produce and *uro* (lit. “fat”) for pork (see below).

5. *wai katakata* (“hot water”): tea, milk, bread, butter, crackers, sugar and flour. Some speakers prefer to label such items as *ti* (“tea”).

6. *kamikamica*, “sweet”, is only used in small, informal kava sessions for sweets or salty snacks brought along as an accompaniment to the kava.

People almost always present gifts from several categories at once. A typical Naloto funeral gift, for example, would consist of a “valuable” (*tabua*) representing “its wealth” (*na kena yau*), “its feast food” (*na kena magiti*) and “its relish” (*na kena i coi*). To a degree this reflects the fact that ceremonial gifts are given by groups rather than individuals: *tabua* and *kava* are usually treated as predominantly male items (kerosene more markedly so); pandanus mats, bark cloth and print cloth are female wealth; root crops and pigs are farmers’ goods, fish are brought by the specialist fishermen, and the category of “hot water” is particularly made use of by townspeople who have no gardens, livestock or time for fishing. But in practise, any group’s gift usually combines the same categories: at funerals, for example, people almost always bring a whale tooth, mats, root crops, pork or beef, and cabin biscuits, bread, milk or the like if someone has been to town recently. That is to say that regardless of the group composition or their relation to the kin group of the deceased, the standard gift comprises mats, staples, meat and a “leading valuable”.

The use of fish in ceremonial exchange has grown rare, while the land-associated pork remains a valued ceremonial gift. Indeed, pork often appears as the preferred form of ceremonial value, expressing a type of commitment to tradition that beef lacks. When giving cooked pigs to the *bati* would be completely inappropriate, beef – an unmarked alternative – is still preferred over the use of fish.

During my fieldwork, I was for a long time so preoccupied with an absence of fish in ceremonial exchanges (after all, everyone insisted the pork may also be referred to as just *yaqona*. When it is prepared and served during a formal ceremony, it is usually referred to as *wai ni vanua*, “water of the land.”
vs. fish exchanges are the prevailing practise) that I kept on pestering people with questions about the subject. Probably partly due to my insistence, my adopted mother brought up the issue in a mataqali Tunidau meeting called up in preparation for the funeral of Makereta, a 79-year old Tunidau woman married to Nadaro village in Vugalei. My mother – herself married to Naloto from Vugalei – pointed out that the proper reguregu to be taken to Vugalei, who are bati to Verata, ought to include fish rather than the bull that the clan elders had already decided to request from an urban relative. Everyone, including the clan chief (turaga ni mataqali) agreed with this, though with apparent lack of enthusiasm, and two young men were ordered to go fishing on the next tide. No plans were made to abandon the request for a bull from the urban clan member, and I got the impression that the two men were never expected to bring in any fish. They never did. They could have, I should point out, requested or bought fish from one of the professional fishermen in the moiety; frozen fish is acceptable on ceremonial occasions. Instead, on that same day I happened to mention the funeral to one of Naloto’s most skilled fishermen, a member of the Tuivaleni clan (also of the sea moiety). Though not formally requested along, he felt obliged to attend, being both related to the deceased and having a daughter married in Vugalei. Since he had no daylight hours left before to visit his farm before the funeral, he opted for a large fish from his freezer: taking an early morning lorry to town, he sold the fish and bought some taro for his share of the funeral gift before joining the Tunidau group at the roadside just outside Nadaro.

Not to give the wrong impression: fish is still used in ceremonial gift exchange. Like pigs, it can be used by anyone regardless of moiety; only the emblematic relationships between the kai wai and the bati would require adhering to the prescribed ceremonial meat. However, whereas pigs appear frequently in gift exchange, fish is used but rarely. Not only does beef seem to have largely replaced fish as the ceremonial i coi alongside pork; some villagers also claim there has been a change, that it used to be the custom in Naloto ceremonial presentations to designate ceremonial meat either as “fat” (pigs) or “salt water” (fish, turtles) instead of labelling any gift of meat “i coi”. Though I am not convinced that the current designation “i coi” is a recent innovation, the fact that people would report this usage as a

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63 By far the majority of orators prefer the generalising term i coi, “relish”, over the more particular sub-categories “salt water” or “fat” – even when presenting fish or pork. I do not want to read too much recent change into this practise, though, since I have no proof of a generalising development here. On the contrary: Sahlin’s 1950s material recognises only the general label “relish” in Moalan usage (Sahlins 1962). Yet the existence of these “sub-categories” points toward these objects’ particular importance in traditional exchanges. I should here further point out that in Moala Sahlins reports the same assumption of stricter adherence to the food prescriptions by bygone generations, voiced
conceived deterioration of custom is significant in itself. Likewise, I once heard the complaint that in old-time (read: “proper”) gift exchange, sea people only brought fish and no staple foods.

It seems evident that beef has eclipsed fish as a ceremonial gift item. For one thing, hauling a slaughtered ox into a funeral is more ostentatious than an offering of fish. Beef is also “soft”, as the villagers would point out, and as feast food it has already beaten pork, too: together with root crops baked in an earth oven, the quintessential feast food in Naloto (and at least very important in the other eastern Viti Levu villages that I have visited) is the soposui (chop suey) made from beef strips and vegetables. For one thing, hauling a slaughtered ox into a funeral is more ostentatious than an offering of fish. Beef is also “soft”, as the villagers would point out, and as feast food it has already beaten pork, too: together with root crops baked in an earth oven, the quintessential feast food in Naloto (and at least very important in the other eastern Viti Levu villages that I have visited) is the soposui (chop suey) made from beef strips and vegetables. As a food item, one would also be tempted to point out, beef is conveniently free from the eating taboos, unlike fish and pork – except that only a small minority of Naloto villagers actually observes the food taboos.

Beef is also the main substance of the burua, a raw-meat reciprocation of the mortuary gifts received before the interment, that is sometimes subsumed into the funeral feast (thence served as beef soposui) and at other times organised separately. In large funerals, there may be two types of meat shared out as burua: both beef and pork, but the latter in smaller amounts and specifically reserved for groups that are due to receive pork. Here I only want to point out that pork, and pork alone, can be used to acknowledge a particularly esteemed relationship or to single out one or two high-ranking funeral guests – one never gives or receives fish at the burua while beef, an “unmarked” substance, makes up the majority of these raw-food gifts, too.

Looking at the emblematic ceremonial gifts of the land and sea people, the pattern falls too neatly under the general argument of this study: with the common origin of the land and sea groups emerges a more uniform exchange pattern that affirms relationships by the use of similar media. However, the binary categories of land and sea are crosscut by the partly overlapping roles by Naloto villagers too. Most of the time Moalans do not follow them, though the moiety system “has few functions at present. To a slight extent it influences the division of labor and distribution of food at feasts. Apparently, in the aboriginal days these were the major functions of the moieties, and they were perhaps more effectively carried through.” (Sahlins 1962: 300)

64 The attitude towards these food taboos is a bit similar to the way people treat the taboo on eating the totem animal of one’s clan: “we do not believe in these things any more now that we have been civilized”, as one of the older men put it. The animal and plant totems nowadays function as a bawdy reference to the genitals of any member of a given clan, and consequently serve as a running joke between cross-cousins.
that participating groups assume as part of the rituals, of which the exchanges form but one part.

An easy way to portray the overlap is to point out, that in the ethnographic literature on Fiji, the opposition of fish and pigs has also been discussed as expressive of another relation: that of wife giver to wife taker. In Hocart’s analysis, for example, the same food restrictions that apply in a bati relationship were also to be found between people related as veitabani – a relationship that would translate as a generalised cross-cousin relationship between two groups. Hocart, claiming to have “almost invariably traced the relation of veimbatiki to intermarriage”, concludes that the food restrictions in a bati relationship are the same as those between two intermarrying groups. (Hocart 1924: 186.) In a similar vein, Sahlins states that on Moala island (in the 1950s) pigs were associated with the husband’s side, just as fish was the duty of the woman’s side (Sahlins 1962: 182). With a strong virilocal preference in the residence pattern, the husband’s side correspond to the “land owners” (taukei) vis-à-vis the “foreign” woman’s group (indeed, women are often described as foreigners – vulagi – in their husbands’ villages: e.g. Nabobo-Baba 2006: 44). Furthermore, in what is considered the proper marriage protocol the husband’s group are the “hosts” – taukei – of the actual wedding feast.

In Naloto, the pattern only applies to the husband’s side, who are expected to give a pig (live or cooked) to the bride’s mother upon taking her daughter away. But in Naloto the reciprocity in such exchanges is conceived as a personal “compensation” or acknowledgement for the bride’s mother, not as a differentiated food exchange between two groups. Hence there is no requirement to reciprocate one type of food with another. But then again,

65 I have once witnessed an event where the two demands conflicted: a woman from a nearby village was married by a Naloto man, whose relatives gave the bride’s mother a cooked pig – in compensation for her work in bringing up the girl, I was explained. The bride’s mother, however, was originally from a Vugalei village, and therefore bati to Verata. Consequently she refused to eat any of the pork and gave it all away. The imprudent behaviour of the husband’s group was disapproved of by my adopted mother, married into Naloto from Vugalei, but thought nothing of by most of the villagers. But then again, the Vugalei people are known for their strict adherence to tradition. Two of my Naloto brothers exemplified this claim with a story of one of their earliest visits to their mother’s village during a funeral, where they had entered the mortuary feast unaware of their presence bringing in effect the taboo on pork: one of their maternal uncles had immediately collected all the pork available – including the meat on people’s plates – and brought it over to the two brothers, who were baffled with was happening (they were, in addition to being Veratan, also nephews to the Vugalei paramount’s family).

The “relationship-specific” gifts in the context of weddings are the pillows, blankets, mats and mosquito nets that the wife’s side are expected to provide for the bride, whereas the husband’s side remain responsible for the couple’s housing. Strictly speaking, though, the items provided by the wife’s side remain her “property” – they are not redistributed
it appears customary marriage protocol itself has gone through a far greater change – at least in comparison to what people say constitutes a “proper” marriage. The majority of marriages nowadays are elopements that are usually compensated to the wife’s kin only once it is time to present one or more children to their maternal kin; “proper” vakavanua marriage is conducted by a low-key proposal and exchange of whale teeth (duguci), though usually followed by a feast at some later date coinciding with the church formalities. In order to outline the difference, I will leave the subject of exchange media for a while and outline the pattern of ceremonial relations before resuming the materialist focus.

VAKAMAU (WEDDINGS)

Just like with the exchanges between land and sea, with weddings there is also a significant difference between what is considered proper and what people actually do. Any adult Fijian can describe the basics of a traditional Fijian wedding: the boy’s relatives take a whale tooth to the girl’s family; if accepted, the couple are as good as married. Though there appears to be a bit more variation and detail to this practise known as duguci (a word also used for “deposit”), the basic procedure is both simple and, as particularly older people are wont to say, cheap: all one needs is a whale tooth and a few relatives to do the talking (though there often is a wedding feast to organise later on). Yet the majority of marriages are realised through elopement (drotaka, lit. to run away with something: to steal); this was certainly so during my fieldwork, and seemed to apply to most of the Naloto marriages in the previous generation as well.66

Elopement is considered an improper act, even though “stealing” a girl does seem to earn a young man some respect among his peers. At the individual level, it causes ill will in the girl’s family, which in some instances has even left the young man in fear of supernatural retribution. More importantly, it makes a relationship between two families “dirty” (duka) and hence in need of purification (sasasa); the ceremony of “burying” (bulubulu) the ill that was done requires much more help in terms of people and material resources than a “proper” proposal, so much so that it typically takes years to arrange, particularly as any unforeseen crisis – typically a funeral – saps a group’s resources and often causes even a scheduled bulubulu to be postponed to an unknown future date.

(66) Solrun Williksen-Bakker (1984, 1986) similarly reports elopement to be the prevalent practice among the urban youth of Suvavou. Capell’s Fijian Dictionary suggests a different causality by claiming that the duguci used to be practised only in chiefly marriages.
In the meanwhile, at least in theory, the relations between the two families are non-existent. In practise, this means that the girl often visits her natal home regularly, but the boy less so. Their families would have little contact with each other, though if both come from the same village, especially with prior intermarriage between the families, they would be likely to ignore the “unclean” state of affairs. The relationship is finally “cleansed” by holding a bulubulu, the atonement ceremony discussed in the previous chapter. I was on several occasions reminded that the girl’s kin, hosts (taukei) of the event, are under no obligation to provide anything to the guests (vulagi): no kava or feast food – “because they have wronged us”.

![bulubulu gifts](image)

**Figure 4:** Kau mata ni gone/bulubulu gifts (taro, kerosene and print cloth) divided in two piles: one for the girl’s mother, the other two her kin group.

However, in practise holding up this moral superiority is hard, if not impossible, due to fact that the bulubulu ceremony now always blends into another: the kau mata ni gone (“carrying the face of the child”) held in order to introduce a child, particularly a first-born one, to his or her maternal relatives. The overlap is so complete that the terms bulubulu and kau mata ni gone are used interchangeably, though it is typical to hear a “stolen” girl’s family talking about a group arriving to bulubulu, while a group of a young man’s kin heading out of the village would be more likely to be on their way to a kau mata ni gone. It is equally common to hear people describe the upcoming event simply as a wedding (vakamau). During my fieldwork I attended many such weddings, including one that took place between two closely connected Naloto families whose children had been living together
for years but had no children; they postponed the wedding until the couple had adopted a child to introduced to the girl’s family in a bulubulu/kau mata ni gone ceremony that was followed by a church wedding and a wedding feast.

As stated in the previous chapter with regard to the whale teeth, a bulubulu places a heavy material burden on the man’s side: they ought to arrive with dozens of drums of kerosene (men’s wealth) and bolts of print cloth (women’s wealth) and a pig as a present to the mother of the bride. All of this should properly be presented with one or two vulo (sets of ten) of whale teeth, though I have never seen more than two used for this purpose. The kau mata ni gone, though not quite as one-sided an affair as the bulubulu, has a completely different objective. Where the bulubulu is an act of humility and making amends, the kau mata ni gone traditionally establishes the uterine nephew’s vasu rights over his maternal kin. One cannot use the vasu’s privilege to seize his maternal kinsmen’s belongings if one has not been ceremonially introduced to them: this has traditionally been the key reason for holding the kau mata ni gone, although it may now be at least as important for securing the child potential residential and land rights in his or her mother’s village. In the island of Lakeba (the Lau Group, eastern Fiji) – where the two ceremonies remain separate from one another – the hierarchical element inherent in the kau mata ni gone is pronounced, as Simonne Pauwels has pointed out:

The ritual is called vakalutulutu, “to make fall from a height” and was described to me as “to drop your child like a parachute with everything you bring” or matanigone, “to bring the face of the children to the mother’s brother or mother’s people”. Usually it’s only performed for the eldest child of an eldest sister. That day the father and his people bring the child, all dressed up with tapa, and a lot of valuables to the house of the mother’s brother. The person who carries the child let it come down on a mat in front of the mother’s brother. This gesture tells the assistance that the child is of higher status. The amount of valuables tells the same. The father and his people have to give as much as possible because “the more you lose the higher you are, my child is higher than you, that’s why I bring a lot”. The mother’s brother and his people will also make gifts, but less, “it should not be an exchange, otherwise we become equal again”. (Pauwels, personal communication 2010)

While the combined bulubulu/kau mata ni gone ritual is not an equal exchange either, the combination of two functions cancel out the hierarchical implications of the constituent rites. The goods brought by the guests are
both compensation and a challenge; the hosts’ demand for placating turns into a reception of gifts that is reciprocated with a feast. And, as shown in the previous chapter, the “heaviest” of all ceremonial wealth, the whale teeth, are in balance. More importantly, the presentations were never explained to me in competitive terms; the contrast with Pauwels’ description above is striking in this respect. Only once did I witness a marriage exchange conceived of as a challenge; the presentation of ceremonial wealth by a visiting Wainibuka group, discussed in the previous chapter, whose mode of gift presentation was interpreted as a privilege made possible by the veitabani relation between the villages: on the occasion I was – in joking tones – asked not to report the mode of presentation. The villagers were also well aware that it is the custom of other “lands” in Fiji to display overt generosity. On the occasion of a Naloto ladies’ committee visit to see the village school headmaster’s grandchild, I was told that this is particularly an east Fijian trait, that Moalans – where the headmaster was originally from – are famous for generous giving. Over the course of the evening, the man dispensed a weighty amount of his belongings to his guests, including his spare shirts, home decorations, toiletries and so forth. Such gifts are known as fakawela; even the letter “f”, foreign to most Fijian dialects, attests to the eastern (Tongan) origin of the custom, I was told.

Back to the marriage ceremonies. What happens in Naloto weddings after the gifts have been dispensed with is also telling. Most of the men sit around a kava bowl while women, children and those men who so choose to do enjoy the feast food prepared by the hosts. This arrangement is in no way particular to weddings, I should add; what is, though, is the buoyancy expressed by the women whilst waiting for the feast and afterwards. It is up to the women to provide the comic songs, jokes, talcum powder and dancing (taralala) that is not just customary for, but also affirmative of the equal relations between classificatory cross-cousins (see Toren 1990, 1994). The men’s kava group, in the meanwhile, may be internally divided by an

67 Furthermore, Naloto villagers do not practise the vasu right beyond a degree of favouritism among children: they recognise the custom and report instances of people vasu-ing things, but always in conscious contrast to the Naloto custom (the nearest people known to vasu-ta ceremonial gifts and the like are Uliloli villagers, some five kilometres from Naloto).

68 Visiting a “properly arranged” (duguci) marriage in Naloto in September 2010, Chris Gregory pointed out that the gift exchange on that occasion had been highly competitive. As I witnessed no wedding gift exchanges during my fieldwork, I can either put this difference down to the difference in the type of wedding (of the two duguci marriages in Naloto during my fieldwork, the wedding gift exchange was cancelled on the first occasion and the second had not proceeded to wedding feast by the time it was time for me to return home). Both of the families involved in the wedding described to me by Gregory are particularly closely affiliated with Vugalei, and it is also quite likely that the wedding would have incorporated some Vugalei protocol along with visitors from that chiefdom.
invisible line separating the eminent from the rest (see Toren 1990), but it allows no trace of the two sides – guests and hosts – that were represented in the gift exchange. I believe this is a feature shared by ceremonial events elsewhere in Fiji, although I have attended a bulubulu/kau mata ni gone ceremony in the Mamanuca group, west of Viti Levu, where sides were kept distinctly apart: there were two separate canopies for the two sides, and with the ceremonies concluded, both parties drank their kava separately around their own kava bowls.

The final exchange that ends the ceremony is required in order to break the communion. Usually presented in the form of a whale tooth, the tatau – translated by Naloto villagers as “asking for release” – breaks up the company gathered round the kava bowl, and once the hosts have granted permission, the participants are free to head back home. This final formality is required only once, even in events where there are actually numerous participating groups. Once the hosts have presented a vakatale (“in return”) in reciprocation to the tatau, the communion is formally dissolved. What takes place over the course of the ritual in terms of relations between the participating groups is yet more evident in mortuary exchanges.

SOMATE (FUNERALS)

Funeral gifts, known as reguregu, are presented to the family of the deceased on the night before the interment, while young men and women are preparing the following day’s funeral feast. The proceedings always start with the mataqali of the deceased bringing their funeral gift to the family: a presentation of pandanus mats, bark cloth, taro, cassava, raw meat (typically a slaughtered ox or pig), cabin biscuits, bread, tea, sugar, milk and the like, previously combined into a collective gift in a low-key ceremony called vakasoso yau. Once the gift has been received, the adult men of the clan stay with the taukei ni mate, the funeral hosts (family of the deceased) while the young men and women of the group re-join the task groups preparing the funeral feast.

The same is repeated with each subsequent group, of which there are many. The senior men of the hosting clan receive the funeral guests (vulagi) at a canopy built for the purpose, or in the meeting house, or sometimes in several locations including the house of the deceased or the house of the clan chief. Typically, gifts of condolence are presented by clans when the deceased is from their village; by moieties, entire villages, even chiefdoms when people come from another village to present their reguregu. Sometimes a clan is divided into smaller groups, either on the basis of sub-lineages (as often happens with the conglomerate clan Kai Naloto), residence (i.e. ‘urban’ clan members arriving as a separate group – for example due to their late
arrival) or an individual household takes independent action (separately from their clan) due to a particularly close (and therefore more demanding) connection with the deceased. In short, the level of social division that a group represents varies from household level to chiefdom (vanua) level during any given event.

Each group presents its gift separately. Often root crops and slaughtered animals are left outside the meeting hall or canopy, or even taken directly to a cooking shelter prior to the formal presentation, but it is equally possible that they, too, are carried into the place where the event is held, in order to make a particularly impressive display. (Sometimes there is even an element of competitive play involved, like during two or three reguregus held at the Naloto meeting hall, situated at the top of a hill in the middle of the village: a visiting village’s young men decided to show off by carrying entire slaughtered bulls all the way into the meeting hall, thereby forcing the village youths to an equal feat in order to get the animal back to the cooking shed at the bottom of the hill.)

The proceedings always follow a fixed protocol. The guests begin by presenting their sevusevu, kava offered in greeting to the hosts. After accepting the presentation the hosts, in turn, offer a sevusevu. It is a typical practice for a group hosting a funeral to have a cardboard box for kava bundles standing by, so that they constantly have a number of appropriate items standing by. In a majority of the cases I have seen, the guests’ spokesman quickly gestures that they wish to waive the bundle received in reciprocation; the hosts’ spokesman accepts the kava with a quiet cobo (a respectful clapping with cupped hands: see Arno 2005). After the exchange, the visitors’ spokesman presents their reguregu: the gifts brought to the family of the deceased. The hosts respond by presenting a tabua to thank for the gift received.

Once the exchanges are over, the adult men of the group take their place among those already gathered in the canopy or hall, thus becoming part of the hosts vis-à-vis the next arrivals. The hosts receive often more than twenty such condolence parties during the day. A kava bowl is brought out sometime in the afternoon and more and more people take their places around it over the course of the evening, till well past midnight, while the gathering gradually incorporates all who arrive to present their reguregu. In Naloto, this part of the funeral typically culminates with the arrival of the body that has previously been taken to the mortuary in town; due to the difficulties posed by the often nearly inaccessible gravel road leading to the village, this often takes place only late at night.

Up until this point, the ever-increasing group of hosts incorporates every new group of guests. Having presented their funeral gifts, theirs is added to the list of titles presented at the following exchange of tabua (sa
dabe tiko e na vanua: “sitting in this place are...”); they now join in on the 
tama and other exclamations as part of the hosts and negotiate the 
appropriate seating order with those who arrived before them and those who 
follow. Upon the arrival of the group who bring the deceased home from 
the mortuary (weka ni mate, typically a man’s maternal relatives or a 
woman’s natal kin) the group in waiting crowds to one side (the “land side”)
of the hall or canopy in order to leave the other side empty for the guests 
who bring home the coffin.

The weka ni mate are presented with a tabua immediately at their 
arrival. This tabua, called vakasobu (from sobu: to exit a vehicle, canoe etc.) 
is presented outdoors, often with the car headlights lighting the event, as 
soon as the weka ni mate have arrived. Only a small group of the deceased’s 
kinsmen go out to meet them while others gathered at the hall or canopy all 
move to one side of the oblong space, leaving the other side for the arrivals. 
The group bearing the coffin deliver it, along with their reguregu, to the 
hosts. The weka ni mate present the corpse with one tabua (called yago ni 
mate, “body of the deceased”), then offer their reguregu and receive a tabua – 
incorporating some taro and often a live pig, while also acting as a sign of 
food prepared by the taukei ni mate for everyone who have come to present 
their reguregu. Once the coffin has been carried from the hall, the weka ni 
mate collect the mats upon which the coffin was temporarily resting, roll 
them up into a bundle which they carry away.

If the weka ni mate have arrived early, there may still be a number of 
other groups who arrive after them to present their condolences, but often 
after the body has been transferred to the kin group of the deceased, 
participants gradually head off. Most of them go to the deceased’s house to 
kiss the coffin, and then to eat the food prepared by the women and young 
men in the mean while; others stay up drinking kava until at some stage the 
kava bowl is allowed to go empty, at which stage most of the men go to 
sleep. This sequence is known as the gauna ni reguregu, time of the kissing, 
and judging by attendance, is the key part of a funeral. Many who have come 
to attend the funeral from nearby villages do not stay for the next day’s 
formalities: the memorial church, the burial, the funeral feast, the burua and 
smaller family rituals like re-opening the house of the deceased after the 
burial, or the lakovi, the whale tooth presented in offer to take a surviving 
widow back to her natal kin.

In temporal sequence, the day preceding the funeral (gauna ni 
reguregu) is predominantly “about” gifts and other displays of solidarity to 
the hosts. The burial day reverses the flow, showing an emphasis on 
reciprocation: a feast is formally presented to the senior men attending the 
funeral, after which the food is served for everyone (even if, in practice, a 
great number of men prefer the kava to the food, in which case women often
pack them some “takeaway” from the feast). The raw meat reciprocation (burua) is probably the most contested part of the proceedings: some hosts present the feast as their burua, others organise a separate distribution of meat – and everyone agrees that proper custom is being breached by some.

The kava drinking goes on for some time after the feast, until it is time for the tatau – asking permission to leave.69 This is often performed by the small group of “ultimate” guests, the weka ni mate, whose task it is thus to break up the company. Even after the request has been granted with a vakatale, they linger in the company for a while before departing, after which the other constituent groups, too, gradually break company with the hosting group. The local kin groups from within the village may continue the kava session late into the night. Notice, however, that contrasted with the deliberate protocol with which a unity is compiled out of the constituent groups over the course of the preceding day, the dissolving of that unity is lacking in decorum. The same pattern is even more clearly evidenced in the distribution of funeral gifts among the local groups whose help the taukei ni mate had to enlist prior to the event in order to build the shelter and cooking shed, and to prepare the feast food and the preceding night’s dinner.

DIVIDING AND DIVISIBILITY

As mentioned above, the ceremonial prestations – whether funeral, wedding or other events – are preceded by low-key events where each group combines the contributions of individuals or individual households. These kin group rites may be performed either directly before going to attend the ceremony proper, or on the preceding evening. They are sometimes performed in a matter of minutes, at other times the group is united around a bowl of kava for the vakasoso yau. The proceedings are always the same: the goods are piled on the floor or, as is customary with foodstuffs and some store goods, declared to the group and delivered later from somewhere along the way. Pandanus mats have to be rolled up for presentation, though they are later gain folded up for transport, taro is tied to neat bundles. Once everyone’s contributions are in, the group’s spokesman presents the gift to the clan chief or senior male present, who “touches” (tara) the pile to acknowledge them and briefly thanks the group, thereby declaring them to the group’s collective offering. On rare occasions, the vakasoso yau may even take place several times as a group’s gift is subsumed into that of a larger group; the

69 I should point out that the request may be declined as well as granted. That, however, happens mainly on smaller, less formal occasions. On some joyous events (weddings) I have also seen the tatau granted, but with a sly wink and the added condition: “after a few more rounds”, after which the drinking may go on for a few more hours.
higher-level events tend to be more formal in nature, also involving whale

tooth exchanges between the groups.

What happens to the things thus presented is that they lose their
quantifiability in the process. All the things presented by a group are, first of
all, encompassed by the tabua (or kava) that acts as the hand-held symbol of
all the things given in the ceremony: everything presented by a “chief
valuable” is subordinate to it similarly to the way people are considered
subsumed into their chiefs in a model of “heroic” reckoning (Sahlins (1985;
cf. Rumsey 2000). Secondly, the ceremonial linguistic categories —

kamunaga (whale teeth), yau (ceremonial wealth), magiti (staple foods), i coi

(meat dish) and wai katakata (tea and accompaniments) — are generics, and

as such they tend to obscure the differences in the kinds of things presented:
pigs, bovine or fish are simply “relish”, just as ten sacks of cassava and one
bundle of taro are both listed magiti, and since it is often customary to
either leave the dirty foodstuffs outside the meeting hall or shelter, or take
them directly to the cooking shed before the presentation, it may well be
that no-one beyond the donating group knows precisely what they gave.
What originally brought this aspect of ceremonial exchange to my attention
was the way people would describe the presentations outside the ceremonial
context: when I was trying to calculate the things given in some part of a

ceremony that I had not personally witnessed, people always used
deliberately vague expressions in answering my queries: “some roots”, “some
taro”, “maybe two sacks of cassava”, “maybe one pig”, and so forth.  

70

The indefiniteness of ceremonial exchange is further emphasised by a
special calculus used for certain articles of ceremonial value: when a
presentation comprises a set of things of a kind, they are bundled as a single
unit: a set of mats is a sasa, a set of tabuas is vulo, a set of fish is i vua. A set
is typically “about ten”, which in the case of mats is the average number of
mats in a set, in the case of fish obviously varies according to the type and
size of fish, and in the case of whale teeth, hardly ever reaches ten in Naloto.
Most people consider these terms part of an old Fijian mode of reckoning,
now more or less out of use, and at least the older people have memorised
long lists of wiliwili vakaViti (“Fijian counting”) at school: “ten coconuts =
one qali, ten sharks = one laca, ten pigs = one rara, ten turtles = one bi”,
and so forth. But while the majority of these terms are never used in Naloto,
those applied to items that are salient in ceremonial exchange — namely
tabua, mats and fish — have retained their usefulness as units of ceremonial
gift-exchange. They are not, however, terms used in ceremonial presentation

70 This practice was particularly stressed when using English, wherein the adverb “maybe”
was combined with precise expressions, such as “they gave one pig, maybe one pig”. The
Fijian equivalent “beka” clearly plays a prosodic function and, I suspect, is used for polite
effect as well.
speeches, where no quantification takes place, except for the compulsory belittling of one’s offering; rather, they are the appropriate amounts for particular purposes. One ought to compensate a “stolen” wife with one or two vulo of whale teeth, for example, so that the amount of valuables given and received would not cancel each other out. For giving and receiving pandanus mats, a sasa is a standard unit of calculation used both by the givers in preparing their prestation and the receivers who keep account of what they have received. For fish, an i vua (a number of fish bundled with a string) is a matter-of-course, since most of the fish caught and presented in Naloto are too small to make a presentation by themselves. I do not claim that the use of these terms is restricted to just ceremonial exchange; I suspect that a “set” would be an appropriate unit for a villager selling fish in the urban market (though people prefer selling for example coconuts by the dozen [doseni] rather than by qali). My claim here is that the use of this calculus agrees particularly well with the logic of ceremonial exchange. Pandanus mats are a prime example.

FIGURE 5: a formal pooling event, where 2 sasa of mats, bread, crackers, margarine, kava and a whale tooth (not pictured, see Fig. 3) are presented to the group elder.

Mats, as noted before, are women’s wealth. Together with food items, mats make up the chief substance of ceremonial exchanges – during the course of a normal-sized Naloto funeral, for example, the hosting group would receive from 50 to 100 pandanus mats. Some of these are presented as individual mats rolled up and piled together – typically when a group presents a quantity of mats not enough to make up a sasa. But as soon as the
number and selection of mats allows for their presentation as a single set, the mats are carefully layered into a stack that follows both a standard arrangement (see Riles 1998: 383–385; Ryle 2001: 10) and aesthetical considerations that may be debated for hours under the supervision of the senior women of the group. The finished product is then rolled up, tied to a bundle and – in most cases – not opened before the ceremony is over.

As Annelise Riles (1998) also notes, these bundles are exchanged without knowledge of how many mats and of what type they actually contain. Some sasa are, for example, markedly smaller, containing no more than five mats and a bark cloth, while a large one may contain up to fifteen mats topped with a bark cloth, but for ceremonial purposes, one sasa is always worth exactly one sasa (exemplified in Vugalei funerals, where bundles are reciprocated with other bundles; this is not customary in Naloto). But more importantly, as Riles (op. cit.) points out, even though a set contains a carefully arranged pattern formed by the frilled edges of all the mats put together, in most cases it is kept bundled out of view until the moment of its undoing: redistribution. In Riles’ analysis, it is precisely the unknowable content of the rolled-up set of mats that defines it; once the ceremony is over, the bundle is opened and the arranged set is quickly and unceremoniously divided into concrete, countable objects that are distributed among the group of women.

Riles’ insight applies to the Naloto practise, too, even though at any given ceremony there is also a group whose task it is to provide a set of mats placed on public display (for the coffin to rest upon, to seat the married couple or to seat the ritual grandmothers to whom a child is introduced, for example).\footnote{It sometimes also happens that another group may either add a mat or an entire set of mats on top of one already unfurled for use, or replace it with one of their own (for reasons I never came to inquire).} But throughout any major ceremony the greatest part of mats exchanged always remain in tied-up bundles. The recipients often keep records of the sasa received for future reciprocation, just as the givers of mats prefer the bundled sets over numbers.\footnote{Riles (1998: 383) describes a practise where the number of sets (known among her informants as vivivi) presented is situation specific, noting that “two vivivi on one occasion might actually contain ‘fewer’ mats than one on another occasion”. In Naloto I have only seen several sasa presented by a single group when the number of mats became too great to be wrapped into a single bundle and the sasa got too heavy for presenting.} A similar practise applies to print cloth – another form of women’s wealth – as well. Though easily quantified as big or small bolts – the typical units of purchase in the urban centres – print cloth is always unrolled for ceremonial presentation and the individual 20 and 40 ft. lengths of cloth tied to one another to form a long train of bright-coloured cloth. This obviously makes for a more flamboyant presentation: a pile of unrolled cloth is more impressive than, say, ten...
tightly-wrapped bolts of print cloth. Yet the effect is the same: the cloth becomes one long set of connected pieces reeled in to the ceremonial space by a procession of women; it can only be numerated and broken into individual pieces once the ceremony is over.

![Figure 6: Print cloth brought in during a wedding ceremony](image)

The manner in which the eventual distribution is carried out speaks volumes. While the preliminary pooling events preceding the main event are supervised by senior men who formally receive and acknowledge the things brought in for the group’s presentation, the redistribution events (wase: “to divide” or “portion”) held after ceremonial events lack all this formality. In the event of dividing the goods received in a bulubulu/kau mata ni gone ceremony, the portioning out of shares is overseen by the senior men and women who, maintain approximate lists of what the group received in preparation for the ceremony. In correspondence with the fact that in marriage or compensation events, the hosting group has to “borrow” whale teeth from other groups, these are probably the most formal of distribution events. Yet even these are unceremonious affairs: once an allotment has been piled for each participating group, the things are roughly grouped or piled together and marked by a piece of paper or cardboard that states the name of the group it belongs to. Even the whale teeth are now left casually lying on top of the allotments for the recipients to collect. A messenger is sent to notify the parties involved that their things are in this or that location, waiting to be collected, but unlike the pooling events, there are no rites to be observed in division, and it is typically left to the women and young men of
any group to go and fetch a group’s portion, destined for further redistribution within the group. This, in turn, is often left for the women to sort out in curt, strictly-business events where the goods are tossed into piles, mats folded and distributed and, once the portions have been divided to everyone’s satisfaction, again carried away without formalities. Indeed, representatives of individual households often skip the redistributing so that once the division is final, children or youths are called in to carry away portions for those who were not present. Men of rank are absent even from redistributions that require male presence – such as portioning raw meat, which is conducted by junior married men and youths. Even men’s ceremonial wealth of lesser prestige – such as kerosene – is usually left for the women to portion out.

CONCLUSION

What these Durkheimian moments of ceremonial collectiveness highlight is a concern for unity. Not just in the sense of showing solidarities in ritualised moments of heightened intensity, though, but in a sense that also displays an ideal for the composition of society. With this in mind I have drawn attention to two tendencies that work in tandem in events where ceremonial exchange takes place: the elimination of difference between the participating groups and the “collectivising” overall design of the ritual sequences. In this chapter I have, to begin with, continued analysing the dichotomy of land and sea in order to show that a difference in the exchange media used in Naloto corresponds with the weakening of the dichotomy. This is a simple confirmation of the case presented in the previous chapter dealing with the whale teeth, showing that the change in the assignation of value to ideas of origin has, on the hand, produced a like-for-like pattern of reciprocation in the use of tabua and, on the other hand, steered the ceremonial exchanges in Naloto towards the use of similar instead of differential media. The emblematic exchanges in fish and pork have become a rarity mainly replaced by exchanges in beef, or sometimes beef moving against the land people’s ceremonial meat, pork, but hardly ever utilising the sea people’s distinctive exchange media: fish. Even the distinction between raw and cooked is blurred, though Naloto villagers consider the custom of reciprocating funeral gifts with cooked rather than raw meat a deterioration of custom (although it may well be that the term burua has, in the past, referred to a feast instead of a gift of raw meat: see Capell 2003, buru 1).

At the same time, fish is also absent from Naloto marital exchanges where, in comparative Fijian ethnography, it features in a manner similar to the land–sea exchanges, except that instead of the fixed identities of land and sea, the exchange media are context-specific, tied to the man’s and woman’s
side respectively. Whether or not this difference in exchange media has anything to do with the prevailing preference for elopement marriage that reverses the ceremonial relations of guest and host around, I cannot say for certain. What I can say, though, is that the overall structure of ceremonial events from marriages to funerals emphasises the unity produced out of the oppositional positions of “host” and “guest”; categories largely overlapping with, and signified by the same terms as those used for natives and foreigners — taukei and vulagi. What, in the rituals, emerges out of the initial opposition of guests and hosts is an undifferentiated whole; this whole, however, is brought about by the subsumption or encounmpassment of the guests by the hosting group.

In Lévi-Strauss’s (1967) terms, the ritual evidences a transition from diametric opposition to a concentric arrangement: the communion of ritual participants around the kava bowl. This is, of course, an oversimplification insofar as Fijians themselves describe the kava drinking as veiqaravi – “facing each other” or “mutually looking after each other” (see e.g. Toren 1990). Yet the need to ceremonially request permission from the presiding taukei when it is time to break company is an indication, not only of the supremacy of the hosts (a concentric duality is inherently hierarchic, Lévi-Strauss [1967] points out anticipating Dumont), but of the formal arrangements safeguarding the unity achieved. Indeed, this is again reminiscent of Joel Robbins’ (2007: 297) claim that in such hierarchical arrangements the “valued elements tend to be more elaborately worked out […] and to control the rationalization of less valued ideas”. This comes out particularly strongly in the gradual formalised build-up to the valued moments: the preliminary combining of people and ceremonial wealth as well as the time-taking, repetitious presentations that accompany the inclusion of individual groups to the ritual communion. In contrast, the moments of division and distribution are distinctively lacking in decorum and senior participation.

To be precise, I am talking about two different tendencies while maintaining a primary focus on exchange. Hence there is the already-discussed emergence of uniform media of exchange — beef. But the exchanges involve a range of other things too. The pattern of exchanges for these favours a mode where each gift is compiled out of men’s goods, women’s goods and food (raw food items are predominantly male goods); out of the range of ceremonial food items only salt water produce are considered “sea”; beef has no designation in this respect, while root crops and plantains are, in a less formal fashion, understood to be “land” produce, too.

At the same time the collectivisation of ceremonial gifts displays another tendency that might not have anything to do with the first one. Exchanges that are considered vakavanua – “in the manner of the land” – are predisposed towards an indivisibility or indistinctiveness: the use of generics
in the language of the presentations, the preference for non-disclosed sets, the studied non-specificity in reporting the aforementioned to the nosy ethnographer and the fact that the distribution of ceremonial wealth falls distinctively outside the ceremonies.

The unspecificity that marks ceremonial exchange is not just a show of indifference. Once, swapping fieldwork stories with Tuomas Tammisto who has conducted fieldwork among the Mengen of New Britain, we came across a difference that speaks volumes: Tammisto recalls a moment during fieldwork when he realised that the participants of ceremonial exchanges were not only producing multiple lists of the things exchanged similar to his, but that their lists were actually more accurate than the ones he compiled. I was similarly preoccupied with listing things given and received on ritual occasions, and my lists were occasionally even used by the ceremonial hosts – not, however, to check the things that I had carefully calculated and my hosts marked out in imprecise generics, but to make sure that the participating groups were all accounted for. The difference in the methods adopted by the two peoples, both displaying a keen interest in equal exchange, highlights the Nalotan mode of achieving undifferentiation not only through the use of similar exchange media, but also by dispelling quantity from traditional ceremonial exchange. It is with this notion that I want to conclude the chapter with before I finally move to what was my initial research topic: the meaning of money.
Money

Introduction

In a 1989 article, Christina Toren has called attention to Sawaieke villagers’ need to “purify” the money that enters the village. As an example, she discusses the gunu sede (gunu: “drink” + sede: “pay”), a distinctive small-scale fundraising event where money is, as Toren points out, cleansed of individual profit-making associations through community events held around a bowl of kava. Though the gunu sede is no longer practised in Naloto – the practice was banned by the Methodist pastor (vakatawa) in Naloto some time before my fieldwork (apparently the events became too frequent) – there are other fundraising practises, well-known throughout Fiji and frequently practised in Naloto, such as curry nights and cake raffles. What these, not to mention the formal fundraisers (soli), reveal is that although money is in many respects considered foreign to the village, there are also well-established practices for handling money. Indeed, money seems to be quite “elaborately worked out” or “rationalised”, to continue with Robbins’ (2007) idea – as long as one keeps in mind that in indigenous Fiji, money did not make an initial impact through the market economy, for reasons that will be made clear in this chapter, but rather through church practices and subsequent colonial taxation. Hence to understand the rationalisation of money, one ought to look at the conditions under which it took place.

In the following I will also double up on Toren’s argument: that money is considered contrary to the village ideology, according to which one “does not need money in the village”. Indeed, need is a key constituent of the village tradition while money, in its best-known capacity, entered Fijian villages as a means of providing the unnecessary luxuries that are not subject to the need-based ideal of sharing which constitutes the cornerstone of tradition. Strictly speaking, though, there is “Tradition” and there is “tradition”. Money only rarely enters the most hallowed modality of vakavanua exchange – the formal rituals where relations between groups are made and maintained under the supervision of the traditional chiefs. But as pointed out in a previous chapter, there are other administrative domains in the village in addition to the vanua apparatus: the church (lotu) and the “village” (vakakoro) administrations. These are not independent of the vanua apparatus; the church and the vanua, for example, are intertwined to the degree that any major event organised by one requires the senior participation of the other. In this respect, Naloto differs significantly from Tomlinson’s (2009) description of Kadavu, where a tension exists between...
the two; in Naloto, the Methodist and Catholic churches are accepted as
traditional, though a tension may, at times, appear in relations with the other
Christian denominations. Likewise, as laid out in a previous discussion on
the organisation by “sides”, the vakakoro organisation not only incorporates
features of the vanua, it is also under the traditional chief’s power, whilst
often also attending to the earthly needs of the Methodist church. I am
pointing this out to show that in addition to what is considered The
Tradition there are other, by now traditional, activities in the village and
these do involve money.

Though money only rarely enters the formal exchanges labelled
vakavanua, it nevertheless does so under conditions that are perfectly
compatible with the undifferentiation discussed in the previous chapter.
However, money is also used – and to a much greater extent – in the
traditions of church or village administration, and in these it takes on a very
different look. In short, it could be said that before money entered Fijian
traditions as a means of exchange, it did so as a colonial-era instrument that
paid particular attention to individuality, measure and accountability. One
could go further and look into the emergence of the village-level trias
política of vanua, lotu and koro to see how money came to be dissociated
with the “high” tradition in Fiji. I do this only in a cursory manner in order
to show not so much the history of money in Fiji but its meaning at the
village level, to Nalotans living in the village and to those who trace their
origins to the village.

MONEY IN EVERYDAY USE

As already illustrated in the opening chapter, the notion that one does not
need money in a Fijian village is an ideal which, though upheld discursively
by most villagers, does not strictly speaking correspond with their lived
realities – as the villagers were ready to admit. There are technicalities which
tone down the apparent contradiction: the ideal represents a “possibility”,
not a state of affairs (“one could live in the village without money”), for
example, while most of the villagers’ purchases are also strictly speaking not
done in the village but outside it, in town. There is also the fact that money
acts in a different register or modality (Robbins and Akin 1999: 9–16)
within the village: in Naloto, money is both an instrument of commerce and
a medium of sharing. Yes, people also give small, informal gifts of money in
the village, particularly the visiting townspeople, but more frequently, money
is used in commodity exchanges that are not conceived of as commerce.

Since the custom of kerekere has been discussed elsewhere (e.g. Sahlins
1962: 203–214; 1993; Thomas 1992, 1993), I will simply describe it as
requesting that is based on the requester’s need and therefore should not be
refused. These are everyday matters, far too informal and inconsequential to be quantified. The overwhelming majority of requests concern food items. *Kerekere* (and other similar acts of sharing) involves a general ideology of future repayment, though nobody would keep a record of the transactions. Nevertheless, it does leave open a “path” for a future request. However, whilst most of the ordinary food items — everyday foodstuff not intended for the urban market — are subject to requests of the aforementioned type, other everyday utilities such as disposable diapers, instant noodles or canned tuna, are requested with money in hand. The use of money does not turn these transactions into “business” (*bisinisi*), which in the Naloto classification comprises a different modality of exchange. People are generally unwilling to part with items that have been time-consumingly brought from town at the requestee’s expense, even in exchange for money. Hence a request to buy a diaper for $50 from a neighbour is also an act of ‘*kerekere*’, even though the requester holds money in her hand while making the request in order to assure her intention to pay for the goods.

This is not the only capacity in which money is used in the village. In addition to the shop at the edge of the village (owned by the village co-operative), it was typical for individual households to have their own “canteens” (*kenitini*) — shops that sold a limited variety of everyday goods from noodles and canned tuna to cigarettes and washing powder. Since a canteen is considered a business (*bisinisi*), it was acceptable for canteens to charge increased ‘village’ prices for town goods, and refuse credit when the customer has no money. The difference between *kerekere* and *kenitini*, however, is not about the price but the nature of the transaction. A *kerekere*, even one where money is given in exchange for the goods requested, leaves the requester in debt, albeit one much lessened by the immediate compensation. This is visible in the fact that the monetised variety of *kerekere* nevertheless follows a logic of kinship proximity: the further one has to go with one’s requests, the greater the risk of ill will — all the way to acts of witchcraft — from the requestee. Even with money in hand, one should make one’s requests to clan members or other close relatives, members of one’s religious denomination or in some other way closely connected villagers: “with others, you can never know what they hold on the inside”, I was explained on an occasion. “If you buy the fruit from someone else than your close relatives, you may end up sick [*kania na tevoro*, lit.

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73 The scholarly preference for objectifying a generalised obligation into a formulaic request gives a slightly inaccurate picture of the actual practice. In Naloto the verbalised act of requesting something, particularly the reduplicated form *kerekere* rather than just *kere* — “to ask” — applies only to the most formal part of the informal reciprocities in the village. It is just as typical that villagers recognise another’s need and act upon it so that it would be difficult to show where an actual request was made.
‘eating a devil’], I was instructed on another occasion. In other words, items requested but consequently compensated with money nevertheless retain something of their givers – to resort to the Maussian logic. This changes when dealing with “canteens”: though one generally prefers buying from one’s close relatives (who are also typically one’s closest neighbours), there is nothing to prevent one from buying goods from a canteen all the way at the other end of the village.

Indeed, the “business” logic is considered contrary to kinship as reflected in the popular piece of Naloto wisdom “business and relatives don’t mix”74 – or if they do, “lusi na bisinisi”: the business loses. The “canteens” consequently often make no distinction between proximity of kinship: even household and nuclear family members are treated in “business” terms. In the words of a fledgling Naloto businessman: “Nobody comes to ask us for noodles or Sunbell [tuna brand]. Only small things: onion, cooking oil… If people asked us for tuna or noodles, it would be like asking money from a money lender.”

It is in the business capacity that money is generally depreciated in Naloto, as evident from a plethora of negative expressions used in the village, such as “money face” (uluniilavo or ulusede) for a greedy person, “eating money” (kana ilavo) for wastefulness, “business people” (tamata ni bisinisi) for unreliable people, and so on. Indeed, within the multi-ethnic state, indigenous Fijians tend to identify themselves with kinship, sharing and often an inability to cope with money – thereby also regarding money as the province of other ethnic groups: Westerners (valagi), of course, and particularly Indo-Fijians. In Naloto, too, many people believe the “Indians” (kai India) “only look after themselves” and are “clever people who know how to make money”. Itovo ni Idia – Indian custom – is a negative label used in the village to describe an immoral profit-making scheme, such as buying cigarettes in order to sell them during a ceremonial event. It is in this line of reasoning that money finally also becomes “unclean”, even a sign of witchcraft. Accusations of money held in the bank are muttered behind people’s backs when they fail to contribute to communal projects; people who have relatively steady supplies of money – due to remittances, for example – are often afraid of their fellow villagers’ envy (kocokoco), which is to say are afraid of supernatural attacks. For the cause of witchcraft is envy: some have more money, things, cars, better houses and so forth. Consequently it is also a belief shared by many villagers that people who have succeeded to make a living in town would return to the village one day if it was not for their fear of “envy”. In the village gossip, occurrences of

74 Also widely known in as “don’t mix business with oga”. Oga actually means something like being busy or occupied, but with particular reference to the busyness caused by ritual obligations.
death were sometimes attributed to witchcraft, and when so, typically assumed to be done by a relative with a higher standard of living — several consecutive deaths in a family have apparently even resulted in one accused recently fleeing the village. Indeed, differences in income and corresponding standards of living were the most typical reason for witchcraft accusations during my fieldwork, though I do not want to make too much of this — witchcraft accusations were hardly a common occurrence in the village; they surfaced mainly as gossip behind people’s backs.

What I do want to point out is the ambivalent nature of money. Though predominantly discussed as a negative phenomenon, it has also been incorporated into that most emblematic of Fijian traditions, kerekere, within which it functions in accordance with the reciprocal ideal contained in kerekere (cf. Belshaw 1964: 121). As a matter of fact, Sahlins also mentions a “tit-for-tat” variety of kerekere in Moala (1962: 207–8), though one that worked with traditional valuables (bark cloth, mats, whale teeth, kava) whereas in Naloto this only works with money. (Furthermore, rather than accompanying a particularly great request or being considered necessary when addressing a request to person of high rank, the practise in today’s Naloto rather resembles a separate sphere of exchange comprising store goods and items produced for sale.) I point this out is to illustrate that Fijian state money, like other currencies studied by anthropologists “exhibits a unique combination of properties that sets it apart as worthy of special analytical attention”, as Robbins and Akin (1999: 28) put it in an edited volume dedicated to the study of monies. However, rather than continuing with the mundane uses of money, I want to show that just as money can appear in different capacities in everyday exchange, so it also does during the ceremonial occasions where the key attributes of money are foregrounded. In the following, I will therefore describe money first as it appears in the vakavanua rituals on the rare occasions that money is used in the capacity of yau, ceremonial wealth, and contrast this with the appearance money makes in church and village fundraisers. Through this comparison, I will show that just as the change that has occurred in the “semantic” value of whale teeth and salt water produce can be traced from the way they are used in ritual, so the ritualised use of money can reveal a significant component for understanding a local “meaning of money”.

75 In addition to the affluent, the most typical objects of accusations were “the old ones” — seniority, of course, sets people apart as hierarchically superior.

76 On kerekere’s emblematic position, see Thomas 1992, 1993; Sahlins 1993.
One typically sees money only in the less formal preliminary events where groups combine the individual-level contributions into collective gifts. As a rule, money is not presented in the capacity of money in these events; instead of standing for its full range of possibilities, it is always given for a particular purpose. Such money is carelessly tossed across the floor while the donor announces what the money is: “a supplement to the travelling costs” (na i kuri nei vodovodo) or something similar. At informal events like family visits, it is also possible to use money as a “substitute” (sosomi) for the appropriate type of greeting gift, such as a five dollar note used as a stand-in for kava. In neither case, strictly speaking, does the money represent itself: rather, it stands for some specified other purpose or thing. But there is another way to use money in traditional events, one that is employed when an event requires a degree of formality. I will present two examples, both relating to the “cleansing” of a debt incurred by the Verata circuit of the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma when a year’s worth of church collections had gone missing before they were handed over to the church organisation.

In order to settle the church district’s debt to the Methodist Church, the Verata paramount had requested men to take up a prearranged contract planting pine trees in the Nadi highlands. When the men returned in July 2007, a ceremony was held in the chiefly village of Ucunivanua, where the work force brought in the money they had earned and were rewarded for their service by all the villages of the Verata district. The day began first with a smaller ceremony conducted in the paramount’s house, Sanokonoko, where the spokesman for the group of returning workers presented a tabua that encompassed an envelope containing 10,000 FJD to the paramount chief, on whose request the work had been done. This was followed by the ritual proper, where the “the valuable with its wealth” (kamunaga kena yau) – a tabua and the envelope – was presented in the paramount’s name to the steward of the Verata church district (tui raralevu). The church steward thanked the work force for “the valuable that stands for the great wealth in front of our eyes” (kaciva saka tiko mada na kamunaga sai vakaraitaki ni yau levu sa tiko e matai keimami) before it was the Verata district’s turn to respond with a presentation comprising a vulo (five or six whale teeth), 17 pandanus mats (presented as individual mats probably because there was no time to combine them into a sasa before the rite), 250 kg of flour, 150 kg of sugar, 19 canisters of kerosene, approximately 10
bolts of cloth and 20 small packs of cigarettes. (The Nadi workforce responded with another tabua in thanks, one that was left unreciprocated.)

The job in Nadi did not raise enough money to extinguish the debt in full. It was therefore necessary to organise a Verata-wide fundraiser, where all lay preachers (dauvunau) of the circuit were asked to contribute 100 FJD each. In addition, a number of Veratans living abroad were contacted and asked to make contributions. One of the Naloto women, a US resident, announced that her American husband, James, was willing to help. Most of her family, the American husband included, being Pentecostal Christians, the event expanded into an ecumenical affair, where the other denominations came in to assist the Methodist Church. As the event expanded, it also came to assume a vakavanua character, including gift exchanges, a feast, traditional dances, and so forth. The actual solevu ritual, held in Ucunivanua in December 2007, was opened with a prayer and a scripture reading. After these, the hosts – the Methodist Church – presented the guests of honour (vulagi dokai, a group comprising James, his wife and her kin group from the Naloto land moiety) with a tabua. qaloqalovi, a whale tooth traditionally presented to a visiting chief upon disembarking a canoe. This was followed by customary formalities: the hosts’ sevusevu (kava prepared for the senior personages), the guests’ sevusevu (kava roots) and the guests’ reguregu (tabua); then James and his wife both gave a speech before the exchange got underway. The guests were presented with a tray where James placed an envelope (containing a cheque for 10,000 FJD) and his Naloto affinal kin all added cash on the tray. The guests of honour then proceeded to present the envelope, the added cash, and a pile of soap and “cabin cracker” boxes brought in prior to the event. The hosts responded by presenting three tabuas (one from the church, one from the vanua and one from the paramount chief), approximately 30 mats (again presented separately; they were never formally presented to the hosting group) and 20–30 bundles of taro. The guests of honour responded with two separate whale teeth: the first in thanks (vakavinaka), the second to tatau. The hosts responded with a vakatale. Meanwhile, the locus of activity was moved from the ritual space – a shelter constructed for the purpose – to the lawn next to it, where it proceeded as a large-scale fundraiser (see discussion below). At the end of the day, the church had received a sum of 19,794.50 FJD. Upon the announcement of the sum total, the activity resumed in the shelter where the steward offered a bowl of kava and stated the day’s
accomplishment: the dirt (dukaduka) has been washed clean (savasava).

I want to draw attention to two features in the events described above. The first is that when money enters vakavanua events, it consistently does so in envelopes – typically the brown “salary envelopes”, though any other variety will do as long as there is one. I was also advised to put my yau for the village in an envelope before presentation (by a whale tooth) on the event of my departure, and – though nowhere near as formal – the same principle was followed in “paying” a carpenter who had overseen the repairs of a boat belonging to one of the fishermen in Naloto, a job that was broken off some four or five times due to several funerals. The carpenter was the boat owner’s classificatory father, and the request for his help had been made to a kinsman rather than to a professional (as kerekere rather than bisinisi); yet the boat owner felt that the services of the village’s best-known carpenter ought to be paid for with money. We therefore gathered appropriate items – kava, some fish, a bag of sugar, soap, washing powder and money (50 FJD). The money was again placed in a brown envelope so that none of the people present, including the recipient, knew how much was given, and presented as “wealth” (yau) encompassed by the kava.

The second one of the descriptions above is an anomaly in the sense that money was actually handled openly during the ritual. Yet this was clearly done in order to accomplish another key attribute of ritual events – collectiveness. Members of the donor’s group would have had the opportunity to participate in the fundraising part of the event, but it was obviously a higher priority to transform the individual donation into a collective one. To put it bluntly: when used in the vakavanua ceremonial context, money is subordinate to the logic of the ceremonial context. It is placed in a hierarchy of gift types, just below whale teeth and kava that act as the “head of the wealth”, and becomes an unquantifiable substance, hidden in an envelope. Such usage, however, stands in stark contrast to the role money takes outside the vakavanua ceremonial sphere, in fundraisers (soli, “giving”), to which I will now turn my attention.

FUNDRAISERS AND CHURCH COLLECTIONS

The first thing that needs to be pointed out about fundraisers (soli) is that there are a lot of them in Naloto: there are fundraisers for the school, the meeting hall, footpath maintenance, village preschool, women’s committee, Methodist gentlemen’s association, youth groups, village council, general village fundraisers for unspecified future needs and countless other, more specific ends. These fundraisers vary in extent and volume: some are held by
specific local groupings within the village (and groups of villagers in the urban centres), some by committees or religious groups, while others are tied to particular utilities, some of which apply to all villagers. The series of fundraisers held for the construction of the village meeting hall some years prior to my fieldwork, for example, applied to all Naloto villagers including individuals and kin group segments outside the village itself. These absentees are regularly contacted, though in a smaller scale, prior to most mid-to-large-scale fundraisers in the village. Fundraisers are, in short, a crucial part of the village’s socio-political organisation: they are the prime means whereby collective projects are funded when money is required. As such, they constitute a mode of organisation utilised by villagers outside the actual village. “Club Buretu” in Lautoka town is a case in point: the Naloto sea moiety members in Lautoka gather typically on the first Friday of every month and raise money towards future ceremonies in the home village. I have also seen the fundraiser formalities taught to Naloto children in the Sunday school – which is to say that fundraisers are present in villagers’ lives from a very early age, and always follow a definite protocol.

There is a heightened sense of festivity the bigger a fundraiser gets, evidenced by festive clothing, decorations and flower garlands. But there is also a protocol to be followed even in the smallest of fundraisers, even though in the village classification fundraisers are not considered “vantua stuff” or “custom”. Most fundraisers are, first of all, held around a bowl of kava: this gives a “focus for conviviality” – as Brenneis (1984: 492) has put it – to the less formal events that have no fixed schedule. These events typically combine a relaxed pastime with the money collecting, and participants often hold on to their contributions for hours before giving them simply to prolong the event. Yet even at the most informal pastime-fundraiser (and numerically these are the most common ones), a money donation is always announced for everyone to hear: “Matti, five dollars”, accompanied by a quiet thanks from the other participants before the conversation is resumed. All donations are also always recorded in a notebook, an exercise book or at the very least a piece of paper.

The same applies to large-scale fundraisers: kava is also served in these events, but it adds a degree of formality rather than relaxation to the events. Mixed under the supervision of senior men and served in the proper hierarchical order, it sets a protocol that hardly differs from the vakavanua ceremonial occasions. The proceedings, however, follow a logic of precise quantification and personal (or household) accountability: on the formal occasions villagers are called up to the collection bowl one by one and their donations are announced out loud – even when everyone’s donations are exactly equal. Indeed, this tends to make fundraisers long-winded affairs as each participant is called out in turn, upon which he or she walks up to the
money collectors who write down the sum received, announce it out loud to
the public who sometimes voice their thanks to the donor before it is the
next donor’s turn to repeat the same. At village-level fundraisers, the typical
order is to proceed mataqali by mataqali so that a head of mataqali (or his
spouse, or their house name) is called up first, then the rest of the mataqali
one by one, in an alphabetical order, followed by the head of the next
mataqali, and so on. Upon hearing one’s name called, people then either
walk up to the collection bowl, or send out a child, or some other
representative, to take up the money. Bringing up the requested money
personally is of no importance, but hearing one’s name and the sum received
is: first of all, possible mistakes are set right straight away so that the correct
amount of money is announced and accounted under the right name.
Secondly, non-attendance is shameful, and most villagers would rather try
and borrow money from their friends and relatives than have to go empty-
handed. Usually people skip the entire event rather than attend it without
the required cash. As for people who cannot attend for other reasons, they
always have the option of handing in their money in advance, in which case
their contributions are announced at the appropriate time.
There is usually a previously agreed-upon sum collected at fundraisers,
which the great majority of participants provide exactly as requested. There
are always also some who cannot meet the sum, but who bring what they
have, just as there are those who surpass the mark – the latter being,
statistically speaking, principally done by senior personages of the village. In
some fundraisers there is also the possibility of getting an added sum of
money under one’s name as “help” (veivüke) from someone else: when a
name is called out, anyone can follow the person called up and place an
additional sum of money in the collection bowl. A typical instance of this
would be a men’s fundraiser where the wife of a man of rank would add a
sum to her husband’s payment, thereby initiating an informal contest amidst
the ladies to match her offering. Typically, visiting urban relatives also step
up to help their close relations, sometimes even outdoing the actual payment.
In other words, though not particularly emphatic in most cases, there is a
competitive element to fundraisers nevertheless.
There are some instances where the competitive aspect of fundraisers is
brought into the foreground, the most evident competitiveness coinciding
with fundraisers where groups are matched against each other. A good
example would be Naloto’s part of the school fundraiser in May 2007:
rather than holding a common fundraiser for each of the villages maintaining
the local school (Naloto, Sawa and Uliloli) as customary, Naloto held an
early fundraiser due to the school’s pressing need for equipment. The
Naloto committee organised the fundraiser as a contest of sides, where the
north and south halves of the village collected their money separately, so that
the respective results were unveiled in a festive ceremony held in the meeting hall. Though it escaped no-one’s attention that the north half won (2150 FJD to 1950 FJD), the result was received with polite applause: there was no celebration. Indeed, if there was a “winner” to the event, then it would have to be a minister of the recently-ousted government and a known advocator of indigenous land rights, who came to the north half’s fundraiser as a guest of honour, for it was his contribution that tipped the scales to the north side’s advantage. More importantly, perhaps, this gave him a chance to hold several lengthy addresses first to the men in the north side fundraiser, then to the entire village, and at the end of the day everyone was convinced of his personal qualities and, by extension, political agenda. Similarly, I might add, I made a reputation with my donation: after the results had been announced, I received repeated thanks for my contribution and was later on told that it had made people see me in a different light (I had only been in the village for a week at the time); villagers “saw that my donation came from the heart” and proved that I wanted to help.

In other words, the communal ceremonies that utilise money are also a venue for making individual reputations. This is so partly because, unlike other ceremonial events, money ceremonies give credit for donations to individuals rather than groups. But, importantly, this is made possible by the public and strictly accounted nature of money in Naloto: it is a major part of the protocol of any event involving money to always publicly announce the sums received and to always write them down. Indeed, these requirements of “transparency and accountability” are followed strictly at any event involving money – even at recreational fund-raising events set up to earn the organiser a couple of dollars. A case in point are events known as kati (“cards”), cake raffles usually organised by an enterprising teenage girl or two. The game is simple: up to thirteen players can enter a round, each buys a card (from one to thirteen), usually for 50 cents (though the price often goes down towards the end of the kati); the “croupier” draws a card from the remaining deck and the number drawn wins a cake. The detail that makes me take this up is that in a kati, too, every purchase of cards is called out (“Matti, 50 cents”) and written down in a ledger – even though the sums are identical, coins immediately exchanged to playing cards and there is no-one to check the records after the event. Similarly, tithes are recorded and

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77 Another example would be the mataqali-based church collections in the Methodist church. Once a month church collections are collected from each mataqali as a group (vakamataqali) so that they walk up to the front part of the church, each clan member leaves his or her tithe on a collection plate and they sing a hymn to the rest of the villagers. Afterwards, a nominated scribe announces the sum raised by the group. It is typical in these events that members of other groups may accompany the clan in turn to “help” them with money and with the singing. (See also Tomlinson 2009: 59–60.)
announced publicly, down to the last penny, in the Methodist Church money collections (except when conducted by a bowl passed round in the church).

FIGURE 7: Counting and accounting at the women’s committee fundraiser.
The fact that money ought to be handled and announced in such a public fashion is ultimately proven by the religious groups who dissent from the common norm: the Pentecostal churches in Naloto. In the Naloto taxonomy the Christian denominations are divided into “old” and “new” on the basis of their arrival in Fiji: the Methodist and Roman Catholic churches have been active in Fiji since the mid-19th century and are hence known as the old churches, whilst the Pentecostal and Adventist denominations are believed to be more recent arrivals. They have gained ground within (or often right next to) the villages very slowly, and are consequently classed together as the “new” churches. As members of both the Methodist and the Pentecostal All Nations Christian Fellowship congregations explained to me on a number of occasions, the difference between the “old” and the “new” churches is that the old denominations allow the consumption of kava and cigarettes, the new ones do not. This seemingly superficial difference actually marks a social divide in the village, since the majority of communal events – from common get-togethers to major rituals – take place around a bowl of kava. Although many Pentecostal villagers have found it possible to participate in kava-centred events without participating in the kava itself, they join in on the gatherings much more infrequently than members of the “old” denominations, and many never do. To a great degree, kava drinking constitutes a model for all social activities, and banning the drink cuts a section of villagers off from other village activities too. In addition, the new denominations often openly criticise the traditional chiefly system and villagers’ communal obligations in their sermons, and looking at the forms of worship, it is fair to claim that many of the adopted church practises of, for example, Naloto’s two Pentecostal denominations stand in opposition to those adopted in the traditionalist or “old” churches. Thus the Methodists’ traditional choir hymns are in marked opposition to the Pentecostals’ (often electronically amplified) North-American-styled gospel music. The Methodist church looks sombre; the AOG church has abundant glossy, colourful cloth ornaments (the ANCF, at least in 2008, had no physical church building). The Methodist church sermons (vunau – “to admonish, harangue” [Capell 2003]) are fiery diatribes delivered in Fijian, in a severe style; the Pentecostal preachers always include humour in their sermons, both verbal and non-verbal, and use English phrases, terms and exclamations in their sermons.78 The sobriety of the Methodist service is further

78 The foreign point of reference of Fijian Pentecostalism became particularly evident over a week in September 2007, when Pentecostal groups from all over Verata gathered daily in the Naloto Assemblies of God church. Many of the visiting preachers and gospel musicians from Suva regularly wore shirts and ties depicting the US flag and American Eagles. Also, while Methodists and Pentecostals share ideas of the Sunday Sabbath, including a prohibition to listen to secular music on a Sunday, in 2007–2008 it was
contrasted by the English-language interjections, exaltation and hand clapping of Pentecostal church services. The last element, furthermore, stands in marked contrast to the traditional cobo, a clapping performed with cupped palms, which is part of Fijian respectful behaviour and ceremonial protocol while the other variety of clapping (vakasausau) is considered a sign of happiness or admiration. Similarly, the Assemblies of God denomination – the larger one of the two Naloto Pentecostal congregations in 2008, and the only “new” denomination to make regular money collections in the village – has adopted a mode of collecting money that stands predictably in contrast with the Methodist practise.

The Methodist congregation actually has several collections every week: a collection bowl goes round at every service conducted in the church, and people contribute cash when they can; usually everyone carries a dollar or a similar small sum to the Sunday church, on weekdays giving is not considered mandatory. In addition, each mataqali holds its own service on Thursday evenings, and conducts a separate collection among the mataqali members (the results of the ordinary church collections are usually not announced to the congregation, but the sum total raised in the mataqali service is counted out and announced to the kin-group members present). But the church also organises more formal collections twice a month (in addition to the first Sunday of every month, when the collection is carried out by the mataqali, see above). The soli vakatawa and the soli vakamisoneri take place on alternate Sundays; the first is collected for the Methodist pastor’s salary, the second for the Methodist Church of Fiji and Rotuma. The manner in which both of these are carried out is the same, and corresponds with formal fundraisers in general: the church steward sets up a table in front of the pulpit, and calls out the names of each Methodist households in the village in turn. Upon hearing the name of his or her household, a member of the household walks up to the table (or sends someone) to hand in the cash. The appointed sum is four dollars for the soli vakatawa and two dollars for the soli vakamisoneri, though some people may give less or more, and people are at liberty to hand in several weeks’ tithes at once. Each sum given is announced out by the tuirara, and the congregation members give thanks to each contribution. Once the tuirara has gone through the entire list of households, the congregation sings a hymn during which the steward and his assistant count the money received. After the hymn, the collection result is announced and the collection is concluded by a prayer.

The Assemblies of God congregation, in turn, only collect money with plastic basins, usually more than one at the same time. Collection results are

acceptable in Pentecostal households to listen to country & western artists like Kenny Rogers.
never announced out loud and, as if to underline the difference, there are small brown envelopes available for collection money. The envelopes, handed out in advance by the preacher, are marked by the Verata stamp and a list of three alternate purposes for the donation, one of which the donor must choose by ticking the appropriate box: “ka tini” (tithe), “madrali” (translated to me as a “thanksgiving gift”) or “soli raraba” (approx. “wide soli”: in this instance, the congregation building fund). The donor also writes her/his name on the envelope, and the sum/s (one may participate in more than one of the options) placed in the envelope. But nothing is announced; no one is singled out in public.

The differences between the Methodist and Pentecostal churches, or their practises, or even between the “old” and the “new” churches turned out to be something people do not comment on, at least to an inquisitive ethnographer – even though some villagers’ tone of voice when discussing the different denominations revealed that there are tensions at the religious dividing line. All my questions were answered with the explanation that certain denominations allow kava, others do not (and that Adventists do not honour the Sunday Sabbath). Trying to ask questions beyond that, I would usually be replied with the conversation killer “there is only one God” (dua ga na Kalou) – meaning that despite the differences, in the final analysis all Christian sects worship the same god. In the absence of Naloto commentaries on the subject, I therefore turn to the disseminators of the dissenting creed to explain the different practices.

Right at the beginning of my fieldwork, in May 2007, I was asked to join members of my Naloto household to a large Pentecostal rally in Suva. The service held at the FMF Dome (today known as Vodafone Arena) was the finale of a week-long series with overseas guest preachers and “Good News Buses” bringing in villagers by the thousands from the countryside. The event included a professional gospel band, youth group dance performances, enthusiastic hand clapping and people waving their shirts above their heads in exaltation, running in place, and other elements typical of Fijian Pentecostal services. However, here I concentrate on the English-language sermon given on that day by a guest preacher with an American accent. Since the full sermon lasted closer to two hours, allow me to condense two major themes of the sermon:

1) Blessing: when you have it, your internal blessing will be transformed into external wealth, meaning “financial blessing”, family unity and children’s welfare. When God gave man control over nature, he actually meant all of creation: a truly blessed man can command money just as he can call fish into his boat: “Money, you come to me!” The lack of money equals misery; therefore, when “the
enemy” comes to request your money, you must stand up to him and say: “this is my money, I have earned it, keep your hands from my money”. “Blessing will make you rich.”

2) Seed: the Devil is afraid of growth, but the seed you sow may change your financial situation for good. (“Everything you sow belongs to you! Everything you sow belongs to you! Everything you sow belongs to you!”) If you decide that the seed you sow is a seed of money, then it will grow into your money; do not let other people’s greed take away what you have sown.

The sermon was followed by a money collection, in which 15 ushers circulated the venue with bright red plastic buckets that were finally emptied into a large basin which the preacher blessed “so that it would increase”.

In short, the lesson of the day was about prosperity, with an emphasis on individual ownership. The message was clear (and delivered in simplified English to make it as unambiguous as possible): personal accumulation is God’s will and communal sharing contrary to it. I doubt whether too many of the thousands of people gathered to hear the creed were actually able to live up to it in their respective villages, but the differences between the values promoted by the Pentecostal and the “traditionalist” denominations finds an obvious expression in their respective ways of handling money. The Methodist practice, similar to the profane fundraising practices in Naloto, emphasises communal involvement, but also accountability, through the public nature of their rites, the announcement of sums received, the meticulous accounting of even the most mechanical transactions in money. The Pentecostal practice removes money away from communal control – makes tithing an individual responsibility.

I am not particularly concerned with which of these hybrid traditions provides the closest approximation of authentic tradition. The key point of the present chapter is to show the contrasting ways that money is employed in village ceremonies, and from that point of view both Methodist and Pentecostal denominations stand in equally stark contrast to the way money is used in the received tradition of chiefly rituals. Where one religious community does what according to Toren (1989: 146) represents an absurdity in Fijian tradition – making anonymous donations – the other stands in equally stark contrast to the vakavanua rituals by singling out the donators and meticulously assessing the donations. It is, however, interesting to see the Pentecostal doctrine’s opposition to the chiefly and customary practices extended to fiscal obligations, to the degree that reveals the deep-seated placement of money concerns at the heart of the received tradition.
ACCOUNTABILITY

So far, I have shown that the frequently-occurring formalities associated with money contain elements that are contrary to the ritual practises where relations between groups are at stake. A comparison between the ritual sphere, where money is concealed and collectivised, and the administrative sphere where it is enumerated and singled out reveals a concern that goes beyond the question of money’s purity or acceptability. But where does this preoccupation with singling out come from?

The phenomenon can, to a degree, be explained by looking into the background of the fundraising system in colonial taxation wherein soli, the Fijian term now used for fundraisers, once served as the translation for “local rate” – a mode of native taxation under colonial administration. This is certainly where the obsession with ledgers can be traced back to: the Native Regulations passed by the colonial authorities always emphasised the use of cash books in all dealings with money. Here are some examples of colonial-era legislature regarding the proper handling of money, just to give a sense of the phenomenon:

all moneys received by the Roko [colonial administrative chief] or Vakatawa [Methodist pastor] of a province, or the Provincial Scribe on account of a vessel, boat or punt of any sort or kind, or on account of a church, or a water supply, or any other matter whatsoever shall be paid into the Provincial Fund and shall be entered up and passed through the books of the Provincial Fund of the province [...] All moneys received as above shall be posted in the Cash Book within a period of one week from the time the money is received (A Regulation to Amend Regulation No. 2 of 1891. *Fiji Royal Gazette* 17/1899: 139–140).

All moneys received on communal account by any person duly appointed to be the receiver thereof shall be recorded by the said receiver in a book to be kept for the purpose (No. 5 of 1899: A Regulation to Amend Regulation No. 2 of 1891. *Fiji Royal Gazette* 46/1899: 352).

6. Moneys of the kind described in the fourth subsection of the second section of this Regulation received by any person appointed

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79 This is a detail learnt from G.B. Milner’s *Fijian Grammar* (1990 [1956]). See e.g. Exercise 10, I:10 “Eratou a sega ni sauma na nodratou soli e na yabaki sa oti” (“They did not pay their local rate last year”). Sometimes using outdated study material works to the student’s advantage, too.
to do so shall be entered by the receiver in a book to be kept for that purpose and immediately paid by him to the provincial scribe, who shall thereafter forward the same to the Secretary for Native Affairs by the first opportunity. 7. All moneys received by the provincial scribe on account of the provincial fund shall be entered in a book to be kept for that purpose, called the provincial cash book, a copy of which shall be transmitted to the Secretary for Native Affairs six monthly (No. 16 of 1912: A Regulation to Provide for the Collection of Provincial Funds. Native Regulation Board 1926: 35).

All such moneys received by a Buli [administrative chief] shall be entered by him in a book to be kept for that purpose, the form of which may from time to time be settled by the Secretary for Native Affairs (No. 14 of 1927: A Regulation to Provide for the Collection of Funds. Native Regulation Board 1936: 41).

Indeed, by 1931 the Secretariat for Native Affairs boasted a revised system of accounting for Native Funds and a “trefoil receipt system” used in their safeguarding (Secretariat for Native Affairs 1932: 1). I present these examples to show that laying out the particulars relating to the native population’s pecuniary affairs was, for a long time, an important point to the Native Administration, and hence the continued presence of cash books only follows an established tradition. However, where the cash books witness only the maintenance of a specific practice relating to money, it is also possible to seek the origin of the preoccupation with individuals that is characteristic to Fijian money from the colonial-era Native Regulations – Native Taxes, to be precise.

After a short unsuccessful experiment in collecting taxes in the form of communal labour, the Native Taxes Ordinance of 1876 set up a system of collective taxes paid by each Fijian village under the supervision of a district chief (buli). The author of the ordinance, Governor Arthur Gordon, strongly opposed any scheme based on individuality: “Among natives, the individual invariably acts as part of a family or village, and the traditional feeling of centuries will only slowly change under the influence of altered times and manners. As yet no alteration has taken place in this respect, and it is necessary accept the fact, deal with it as we may.” Due to the general absence of money among the native population, it was decided that Fijians were to pay their taxes in kind (copra, cotton, candalnuts, tobacco and maize). Though the system of taxation, and more generally the entire native policy based on communality, was heavily criticised in the following years (see Thurston 1886 for an overview of the criticism and responses), the
colonial administration nevertheless held that native Fijians were not ready for individualism, yet. In the words of Acting Governor John B. Thurston

There are subjects of the Crown who prefer the rights and obligations of their family or commune to that of the individual – a social status beyond their comprehension. What, it may be asked, would be the value of individual rights and privileges [...] to a Fijian whose stone axe is still lying about his house, who regards marriage between cousins on the agnatic side with horror, and on the cognatic side as an obligation, whose uncles are termed fathers, and whose aunts are mothers, and who, only yesterday, worshipped some even in name forgotten chief as his ancestral god? To such persons individual freedom, as understood in another state of society, would not be freedom but the reverse. (Thurston 1886: 123–124)

From the benevolent evolutionary “relativism” of Gordon, Thurston and the other first-generation administrators, the tide turned to a more “reformatory” spirit of administration around the turn of the century. For example, Sir Henry Moore Jackson, appointed Governor in 1902, named “the encouragement of a spirit of individual effort and self-reliance” as the “first and most important” task set before the Native Administration (Fiji Legislative Council 1903: 392) – though in his view

Clear as this object is, it is equally clear that it cannot be attained at once, and that the communal system must continue for the present in its essential features, but with the steady intention of using it to educate the natives, so that it shall become less and less necessary to them. It is obviously impossible, without producing anarchy, to sweep away the traditional framework of Fijian society, by inviting each man to go his own way before he has learnt to stand alone. (Fiji Legislative Council 1903: 392–393)

The problem, as it appeared to the administrators, was that although a money tax would have been preferable to natural produce, this would have left the native population at the mercy of the settler population, for whom it would have presented an ample supply of cheap produce and labour. The alternative, a personal – rather than communal – poll tax was likewise seen as “an engine for forcing men into involuntary servitude”, as Gordon had phrased it (quoted in Thurston 1886: 107). However, the converse also applied: by nominating village-level collective duties the government had to admit that the community had the right to make demands to its members. Hence another debate issued over local chiefs’ right to demand communal
labour (or “social work”, as it was sometimes called in the colonial administrative language) from their subjects and such subjects’ right to take employment outside their villages, since this removed them from their local labour force.

The Native Taxes Ordinance 1890 solved the problem by making the Native Tax commutable to a money payment by people in long-term employment. The commuted fee, later familiarly known as “the absentee tax”, was in other words a system whereby a member of community could “replace by money the services lost to the community when they are not performed” (Roth 1951: 6). Thereby the absentee tax turned money into an exit option for communal obligations. Not just that, for a while money only served as the exit option vis-à-vis a communal tax paid in kind – though the practise of collecting taxes in kind came to an end by 1914, causing the Native Commissioner Sutherland to comment that “[t]he old system has served its purpose; money is now in free circulation throughout the group and everywhere there is keen competition in trade. […] I may here venture to express the opinion that the Fijians have now reached a critical stage in their existence. […] The transition stage had to be won through; it is not yet ended, but the conditions have materially changed and improved and the feeling of individualism and independence is gradually maturing” (Native Department 1913: 2). But even after money had replaced natural produce as the currency of native taxation, the absentee tax retained its role and was even reduplicated in the form of a fee payable in order to commute non-tax-related obligations:

Regulation Number 6 is the regulation which lays down the customary obligations (called social services) which the Fijian villagers must carry out. They are the making and maintenance of certain roads, building and repairing of houses, planting and upkeep of food crops, supplying Fijian visitors with food, transporting Fijian administrative officials, assisting in surveys, conveying sick persons, and the carrying of Fijian administration letters or messages. Fijians may, with permission, commute all these social services by paying a commutation rate of £F1 per annum. A fairly large number of Fijians do this in order to take up employment in the towns. Regulation Number 13 prescribes the customary obligations, in the form of personal services (lala), which the Fijians must render to chiefs. These services comprise house-building, planting of food crops, making mats and bark cloth and any other article manufactured exclusively by Fijians, cutting timber for and building canoes, supplying visitors with food, taking part in yaqona ceremonies and mekes for the entertainment of visitors, and
supplying turtle. These services may also be commuted, with permission, by an annual payment in money or in kind. (Knox-Mawer 1961: 645)

Just as the absentee tax was mainly an option used by the urban employed, so I suspect the option to forego the remaining village obligations would likewise have been used by people in a similar situation: away from the village and/or in possession of money. However, later, when the collective Native Tax was transformed into a personal poll tax, the commutation of other village duties (lala) remained inexpensive (pound a year) for those who could prove that the person commuting his services into a money payment was either a wage earner or made more than £100 a year as an independent farmer (e.g. Belshaw 1964: 84).

In this respect, money has in a very tangible way been assigned a role that is in stark contrast with the village-based social organisation – or its current ideal formulations. Looking at the negative understandings of money expressed in Naloto and reported elsewhere in Fiji, it is easy to see that the symbol value of money is, at least in part, an inheritance of the way in which it has been deployed in the past – as a counterweight for tradition. “We Fijians know our duties. Europeans have money; Fijians have custom” as it was phrased to Henry Rutz (1987: 545); I have heard several variations on the theme, including ones where “Indians” replace “Europeans” in the dichotomy. However, the negative valuation of money, or its counter-traditional role, can also be seen in part as consequence of Fijians’ large-scale denial of the capacity in which the Colonial Administration used money. This is why I have here taken the detour into colonial-era discourse: to show that Fiji’s Native Administration utilised money first and foremost as a vessel for the promotion of (a western brand of) individualism.

“EATING MONEY”

“The verb moneo means to remind and, like Muse (as in museum, music, etc.), is derived from the root men-, mind. Thus, for the Romans and implicitly for all those European cultures that take their word for coinage from them, money was at first a store of collective memory”, Keith Hart (2000: 15) reminds us. There is no need to assume that money’s mnemonic powers only work in the old continent. That money was deployed in colonial Fiji not just as a measuring device in need of constant accounting but also as an exit option for communal obligations is well attested by countless colonial-era documents (see also Belshaw 1964). That there is a connection between the colonial decrees and the present usages remains for me to prove.
There is an often-used, somewhat ambiguous Fijian metaphor for indulgence, excess or wastefulness that addresses the point I am getting at: “eating money” (kania ilavo). “Eating money” is a disapproving expression that, during my fieldwork, was applied equally to people who used money on unnecessary things, to big spenders and to urbanites who are forced to “eat money” due to the expenses of urban living. Asking people to explain the expression to me, I was provided with a range of meanings from simple “wastefulness” to “everything costs money”, to particularly inapt use of money (“the current school board are eating money”), but also “using money that does not belong to you”. In this last sense, “eating money” is in obvious contrast with the ideal of self-sufficiency that is the main constituent of an ideal village life: it means admitting needs that go beyond those the village can provide for, and withholding something of value that ought to be shared on request. Consequently, it also shows that the value of money is subordinate to the prevailing ideology of good life: if everything necessary is always already available in the village, then money – just like the things it can buy – is surplus to requirements, and surplus – at least on an ideal level – is something one ought to share.

What comes across as withholding common good on the individual level is also addressed by the salient juxtaposition of “business” versus “kin obligation” that finds expression in the popular belief that one cannot mix businis with oga. As briefly mentioned above, “oga” refers first and foremost to ritual work; Solrun Williksen-Bakker (1986: 196) defines it as “something which keeps people busy, occupied, engaged, worried”. But oga also serves as the generic term for traditional rituals: it is the Fijian equivalent for the dismissive pseudo-English “vanua stuff” that is used for explaining one’s unexplainable engagements to an outsider. Fijian state officials, for example, have for some time now been instructing villagers to divide their farm land into three equal portions: one for household consumption, another for business and a third for oga. This reflects the term’s emphasis on the hard work leading up to the ritual moments, the obligations that are more time-consuming than business would allow for. Being concerned with meeting one’s obligations, with oga “nobody wins” (Williksen-Bakker 1984: 24), which is yet another way to point out the concern with equivalences in traditional ceremonies. It is against this conception of money as wasteful and disobliging that I propose the emergence of yet another dichotomy, one that reflects the ceremonial emphasis on divisibility and singling out displayed by money.

The distinguishing power of money becomes evident when viewed against the undifferentiation of both ceremonial exchange and the levelling practises described in the opening chapter. The adverse, the differentiating power of money, is most saliently displayed in the formalised context of
fundraisers, but can be viewed beyond fundraisers, too, though here money has to be converted into prestige goods for said effect. Already in *Moala*, Sahlins noted a growing demand for “goods that are not particularly useful but cannot be solicited, such as ‘European’ housing” (1962: 213); this, as I see it, is the essence of what Naloto villagers criticise about “eating money”. In a system of generalised reciprocity based on need (i.e. requesting) – and a limited number of needs, at that – the option of investing surplus into “luxuries” becomes a means of distinction that goes against the general opinion. Though the “European” houses singled out by Sahlins 50 years ago are now actually considered necessities, they are also a reflection of their owners’ socioeconomic status: there is a clear hierarchy of house types from brick to wood, corrugated iron, and all the way down to reed or bamboo houses. Size matters, too, and it is obvious that the native Fijian maxim according to which the biggest house in a village should be the chief’s does not currently hold for Naloto, where the traditional leader of the village (*Komai Naloto*) lives in a house that is above average in size and quality, but no more. The biggest and most prestigious houses belong to households with an access to the money economy: households with overseas family members, families of urban civil servants, former state employees with provident funds, and so on.

But where houses can still be considered utilities, furniture cannot. In 2008, I estimated that more than half of the Naloto houses had a set of furniture comprising a sofa and two armchairs that were very rarely or never used, and in many houses these items are used merely for decorative purposes. A much lesser number, the Naloto “upper middle class”, had tables, often with chairs: these were typically used for nuclear family meals. In addition to sofas, tables and chairs, a growing number of Naloto households were acquiring light shelves for small ornaments and memorabilia. Often such items were brought in by offspring employed in the urban centres. But even when purchased by the owner him/herself, they are not considered an indicator of their owners’ good taste – if it were a custom to complement such things in Naloto, it would not be in the lines of “that is a nice sofa you have there” but rather “that is a sofa you have there”: the furniture bespeaks of market capital, not of social capital. Neither are these items used for creating or increasing domesticity or cosiness. One of

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80 Both sets of furniture actually go against village proprieties: the sofas and armchairs because sitting on a higher level, vertically above others, violates the norm that prohibits one from even reaching for items that are above someone else’s head, let alone standing, walking or sitting; the tables also because they set a physical limit for potential hospitality – whilst the traditional arrangement of spreading a cloth on the floor can be extended to any length in order to accommodate unexpected guests (a point made by Christina Toren [2010], who also reported an increasing number of Gau families actually using tables).
Fiji’s leading furniture retailers, Home Maker, had a radio advert that ended in the jingle “Home Maker – making your house a home”; every time I heard the jingle in (male) company, it evoked joking and laughter that made it evident the slogan simply made no sense.

While these items have relatively little use value, they provide an air of respectability – perhaps this is why they are also among absentee offspring’s favourite gifts to village-based parents. This respectability should not be confused with rank, though: even an illustrious career in the national rugby team or the military does not make one a chief, let alone a nice house with a sofa. If one is not from a chiefly lineage, no achievement can elevate one to chiefdom. Yet a successful career in the outside world does distinguish one beyond the levelling of peers: the young man who returns to the village as the owner of a lorry is greeted with celebration and gifts, an evening gathering with the visiting resort worker who owns (and provides for ceremonial purposes) cattle in the village is – by default – a particularly joyous event; a soldier returning from overseas is a man of renown whose stories will be recalled for weeks and whose gifts are displayed for much longer. Likewise, being a member of the professional elites earns one a respectful form of address due to policemen and women (oviṣa), teachers (masta, qasenivuli), priests (vakatawa, qase) and so forth. This is the reverse side of the previously-mentioned distrust for people who differentiate themselves from the rest of the villagers: the senior men, the wealthy and the...
loners who are more likely to get accused of witchcraft. But the obvious difference between the positive and the negative type of distinction is that whilst the act of distinguishing oneself is fiercely opposed in the village (recall the discussion on “spoiling” in the opening chapter), distinction, once achieved, is looked upon with respect. The latter, however, typically requires success outside the village.

In this respect, the differentiating wealth sought outside the village is not that different from the “creative and destructive powers coming from beyond the society” discussed by Sahlins (1994 [2000: 378]) in relation to Fiji’s pre-colonial politics. Recall that Sahlins regards the vulagi part of a structural arrangement that has, for a long time, given transcendent legitimation to Fijian chiefs and thereby offered resolution to the “dialectical opposition of force and lineage” (1994: 75 [2000: 399]). And true enough, the representatives of the urban market seem prone to receive the tag of “stranger” in the village discourse: the Indo-Fijian population, often regarded by villagers as “only interested in money”, are commonly designated as “vulagi”, but so are even urban Naloto villagers who return to the village for events like weddings or funerals: they are people who pay their obligations with town-acquired wealth and then just socialise, expecting to be looked after by relatives while other members of their kin group are performing the labour necessary for an upcoming feast.

The work of kinship obligations – oga – is always characterised as “heavy” (bibibi), but heavy in the added moral sense of obligation and worry reminiscent of the Orokaiva notion of boka discussed by Ira Bashkow (2006: 74–79). Heaviness is also a capacity of the tabua. Some of the experienced ceremonial orators told me they liked to hold the object in their hands, feel its weight, to find the right words to say. One of the widowed ladies in Naloto explained to me that the dirika presented on her behalf at the funeral by her late husband’s clan was a “heavy thing” (ka bibi) that would keep her in the village though she would have preferred returning and one day being buried in her natal village. Marika, a Naloto man working in Lautoka, likewise emphasised the heaviness of kinship relations (veiwekani), pointing out that they are always heavier than relations between neighbours, colleagues or friends. Money, however, lacks this quality. But when villagers were discussing money, it had another attribute: strength (kaukauwa).

Indeed, where “heaviness” lacks further qualification – obligations are simply heavy, or sometimes “very heavy” (bibi sara) – the strength of money seemed to have an uncanny tendency to grow with distance: New Zealand Dollars were stronger than Fijian but weaker than the Australian ones, which were considered inferior to US Dollars, in turn outdone by Euros, with the UK Pound sitting on top of the scale. The “strength” or conversion rates of currencies were a recurring topic that was constantly speculated in
conversations: “how strong is the Euro? How many Fijian do you get with one Euro?”

Strength, Sahlins reminds us, is also the quality of the usurper. “Verata, Fijians say, is a ‘kingdom of [the] blood’ (matanitū ni dra), by invidious contrast to Bau, the notorious ‘kingdom of force’ (matanitū ni kaukauwa)” (Sahlins 2004: 67). But I am not contrasting the ruthless ways of moneyed individuals to the obligations of living the hard life according to kinship. While discussing the differences of town and village life – the healthy variety of town foods in contrast to the “heavy” monotonous diet of the village, to be precise – Marika, the Lautoka resident quoted above, concluded that in town, everybody earns money: “we are similar”. The villagers, in contrast, do not earn money; they are different. That is why giving money for the village is the proper thing to do: because “we earn a lot, they earn little”. Here, then, we encounter the organic or complementary exchange relations in correlation with “sides”.

THE TWO SIDES OF MONEY

In late April 2008, roughly a year after the school fundraiser described above, it was time to hold the next one. Where the previous one had matched the two halves of the village against each other with visiting urbanites joining the halves they were affiliated with, this one was to be held in a single shelter constructed for the purpose rather than divided into sides. This decision was made in response to a request from urban Naloto, Sawa and Uliloli villagers. The daring request not to divide the fundraiser in two had itself
caused an amazed commotion in a village meeting some two weeks earlier – “This is a big change!”; “Yes, a big change!” – but had finally been accepted all the same.

The fundraising day opened with the turaga ni koro crying out the day’s schedule from the top of the hill: the soli is to start at ten; each gentleman should bring $30, each youth $20, each adult woman should bring a pot of food and some tubers, and each head of mataqali should bring half a kilo of kava. At ten o’clock, we had tea with the school committee at the Headmaster’s place before we moved to the shelter built on the school grounds, where a separate collection table had also been set up, complete with roofing and loudspeakers borrowed from the Assemblies of God congregation. There the head of the school committee offered a sevusevu of pre-mixed kava to the school headmaster, the church representatives and the gentlemen of Naloto, Sawa and Uliloli villages, who were thereby subsumed into the “hosts” of the event. More men arrived at the shelter while the women were preparing food in the school dining hall.

At midday, two lorries arrived from Suva carrying 20 or so urban Naloto, Sawa and Uliloli villagers. The seating order in the shelter was rearranged – just as is done during major vakavanua rituals – so that one side was left empty for the “guests” who made their sevusevu first and then received one from the “land”. The sea moiety chief arrived with the guests: weeks earlier he had taken offence at his clansmen’s tendency to make decisions on practical matters without consulting him first, and consequently had moved to live with his son in Suva. Now he took his seat “up” close to the top end of the visitor’s side of the shelter, dressed in what is manifestly considered “town clothes” – a rugby shirt and long trousers. Many villagers found this highly amusing.

After a few rounds of kava, the soli began – this time, however, following an atypical arrangement that saw “them from the place of work” (eratou mai na vanua ni cakacaka) walk up to the collection table as a single group, regardless of their village affiliations. They handed over the money they had collected in Suva on a previous occasion where many others besides those now present in the village had donated money for the school. Everyone in the group also put some money into the collection bowl in addition to the bag containing the previous fundraiser’s yields. The money was counted and announced as a lump sum: 1211.78 FJD. After that, food was served to those among the visitors who wished to eat – most men did not, but preferred the boisterous kava drinking instead, where
town-based villagers received challenges (big cups) from their village-based cross-cousins.

Meanwhile, the event proceeded following normal fundraising protocol: first, each of the Naloto “gentlemen” (turaga) were called up in turn to donate $30 each, then the youths (cauravou) were called up to donate $20 each. Every man’s donation was, as usual but unlike those of the urbanites, announced from the loudspeakers and each – by and large identical – donation was thanked politely, often also applauded. The names of no-shows were repeated several times, besides which villagers’ accountability in front of their fellow villagers was also otherwise more pronounced than on average, because only two days previously men from the Fiji Electricity Authority had visited the village to remunerate villagers for trees cut down and taken away as part of cyclone repairs. Thus everyone in the village knew who had received and how much, and the men who failed to match the expected sum were publicly ridiculed (many had taken the first transport to town following the FEA’s visit – they were jokingly labelled “gentlemen of money” [turaga ni ilavo] by their fellow villagers). The Naloto men were followed to the collection desk first by the men from Sawa and then Uliloli villages, after which food was served, though most men again declined the opportunity.

After everyone had made their payments and the money had been counted, the results were announced first for each village and “Suva” separately, then the sum total of 4462.98 FJD collected that day. Almost immediately after the results were announced, the visitors requested permission to leave. The hosts responded with a vakavinaka na yau – a bundle of kava and an accompanying speech thanking them for their “time and their yau” – and the two lorries departed back for the Suva–Nausori conurbation. The Naloto, Sawa and Uliloli residents stayed on drinking kava till late night with the Uliloli village band playing; anyone trying to head home early was press-ganged to stay on.

What happened at the fundraiser was, to begin with, that having been asked not to follow the dual organisation of symmetrical sides, the organising villagers reverted to type: the guest–host dichotomy of traditional ceremonial organisation. But receiving the urbanites as “guests” creates yet another permutation of the elements discussed throughout this study. For while it is the resident villagers who now get foregrounded as the singled-out, money-donating “individuals” vis-à-vis the urban guests whose contribution is treated as a collective gift, we now also see the fundraising
guests – ceremonially receiving the general title of “them from the place of work [vanua ni cakacaka]” – receiving all the honours for their prestation whilst the villagers’ fundraising proper displays all the hallmarks of levelling. This fundraiser is, in other words, a combination of two types: the guests arrive with a previously pooled sum, which is ceremonially received as a collective prestation, referred to as yau as is customary in ceremonial exchange, while the hosts perform a typical fundraiser wherein every adult male is accountable for fulfilling his duty in front of the entire community and, indeed, often ridiculed should he not match the expected sum. After the fundraising is over, the guests formally request permission to leave (tatau); the hosts respond by giving them a bundle of kava roots offered in thanks for their yau and for their time. I believe this was the first time I heard anyone in the village discuss time as an alienable resource, by the way.

On the occasion, the three villages welcomed their urban relatives in the manner appropriate for vulagi dokai, “honoured guests”. The contrast between the group arriving to present a collective lump sum of money and the village residents each making their own under the watchful eyes of their neighbours may have been a practical compromise devised by the school committee in response to the urbanites’ request, but a highly illustrative one. Particularly since it was hardly the first time I came across this juxtaposition: in December 2007, for example, I was sitting with Ilisaveci, one of the north side ladies, discussing the tasks and obligations preceding an upcoming wedding feast, when suddenly she broke out crying: “They [kai tauni: people from town] come here and bring some food and sit drinking tea as honoured guests [vulagi dokai]. But we do all the work: weave the mats, bring the feast food, make the earth oven, cook…”. By then I was also familiar with the flip side of what distressed Ilisaveci. In late June, the village-based men of the north side of the village had gone against explicit orders and built a shelter for an upcoming funeral which their clan elders had already decided to hold at the village meeting hall instead. The work was carried out with the approval of several senior villagers, though while the clan chief of the clan in charge of the funeral was away in town. At that time my interest was (a Firthian one) to try and understand the rules of group formation, but all my inquiries were answered with the simple “us gang here”. I tried to point out that there were men from the south side, too, working with us; that I wanted to understand who feels compelled to join in. Finally, one of the men explained to me that it is “those who have no money to give” who want to contribute their labour instead.

Obviously, the honoured guests of the ritual order are different from the “immoral” guesthood of the national-level discourse, the latter being a representation that has been created as an antithesis of traditional indigenous
virtues. But as I have argued here, these levels of guesthood remain connected all the same. One can observe the negative qualities contained by the category of guest in the characterisations of honoured ritual guests, too. But the key issue goes beyond guesthood, to the values it stands for.

Above, I have used Joel Robbins’ (1994) dissection of the contradicting ideas contained in the notion of “equality” to clarify the issue. Robbins identifies “the right of persons to differentiate themselves” or “a valuation of difference over similarity” as the key ideological component in Western individualism (Robbins 1994: 30–32). At the other end of the continuum – Robbins uses Bryan Turner’s 1986 distinction between four logical varieties of equality – he identifies another model for equality, completely at odds with Western individualism: a widely-documented egalitarianism of the Melanesian type. The latter, he points out, is more in tune with what Turner has classified as the equality of outcome – “the equality of leveling, of making people actually equal in concrete terms” (Robbins 1994: 33). Starting with the Wagnerian/Strathernian viewpoint of relationality, Robbins argues that Melanesian persons and social groups are best regarded as products of the relations they are embedded in rather than as individuals or self-referential groups. Which is to say that Melanesians, as a broad generalisation, do not share the western ideal type of the individual as a person who would remain him or herself even if removed from his or her web of social relations; rather, someone without the relationships that constitute a person is less than a person – a “rubbish man”, perhaps (Robbins 1994: 38). Likewise, just as relationships with others turn people into persons, so it is relationships that define or maintain the type of social whole that elsewhere could be labelled “society”. From this viewpoint, Robbins proceeds to review the primary means by which relationships are maintained and transformed: exchange.

“What Melanesians value in exchange is equality”, Robbins (1994: 39) claims and backs up his claim with a review of exchanges carried out in equal or identical media. Furthermore, he goes on to review not just the cases where breaking even is the expected outcome, but also the equally numerous instances where social inequities are achieved and where the end results do not break even. But, he points out, these outcomes are achieved against an underlying – or encompassing, in Dumontian terms – value of equality: the typical temporal order of uneven exchanges among the people of Kalauna (see Young 1971, 1985), for example, is that of “giving the same ‘and then some more’” (Robbins 1994: 45); in a further discussion of Young’s material Robbins also notes that whatever the outcome of a competitive exchange, the public opinion is predisposed to treat it as a tie. And, finally: regarded against the dominant value of (“Melanesian”) egalitarianism, Robbins points out, even the inequality personified in
Melanesian Big-men manifests the effect of the encompassing value of
egalitarianism: the superior status of Big-men is regarded contrary to the
prevailing norm: “Big-men produce their superiority only through use of the
idiom of equality”, whether by “having more equal relationships than
others” or being “beyond the moral sphere” – “bad men” (op.cit.: 42).

Let me spell out the parallels with Naloto. I have already discussed the
preference for similarity in exchange: the exchanges carried out in whale
teeth, other exchanges in similar substances (absence sea goods) as well as
practices that effectively blur out both qualitative and quantitative
differences from public view. All of these effectively obscure any imbalances
that are within the bounds of normal exchange events and thereby give
almost any exchange the appearance of equity, whether this is a
quantitatively accurate estimation of the case or not. In this chapter, I have
 contrasted these with Fijian ceremonial use of state money which is precise
and quantifiable. Money also has a personalising capacity to it, an
accomplishment of the church and state practices which introduced money
in Fijian villages. In what amounts to a reversal of the history (recapitulating
Dumont) of modern Euro-American, Judeo-Christian individualism –
starting with “equality” as the underlying value and followed by the
emergence of distinct spheres for first politics, then economy – the
administrative plan for Fiji was to clear out a distinct sphere of economy for
the indoctrination of economic individualism: politics would follow suit,
and once freed of the chiefs, equality be achieved.

On these matters, the colonial administration always frankly stated
what it was they aimed for. “A spirit of individual effort and self-reliance”;
“the feeling of individualism and independence” – the expressions used in
the colonial discourse are unambiguous. Likewise, the measures taken to
ensure this “state of society” were often similar enough in the sense that
economic activity was regarded as the field wherein Fijian communalism was
properly combated: legislation against excessive ceremonial consumption
(Sahlins 1962: 202), the 1948 regulation (No. 10) banning all requests
(kerekere) exceeding five shillings, the subsidiaries offered for Fijians (or
nuclear families) who would take up life as independent farmers outside the
village proper, the “absentee tax” relieving an entrepreneur from communal
obligations, and so on. In the Euro-American tradition, “[p]rivate property
appears, not as a social institution, but as a logical entailment of the
individual’s self-sufficiency”, as Dumont (1992 [1986]: 81) puts it – in Fiji,
the administration sought to establish individual self-sufficiency as an
entailment of private property. It is hardly a surprise that the project failed,
just as it is no surprise that in Fiji the outcome gets articulated as a
dichotomy.
Over the course of this study I have argued that the traditional power base of the chiefs appears to have waned to the degree that people do not follow the chiefs’ commands while the chiefs themselves also avoid situations where they are set up as chiefs. The traditional village chief refuses the chief’s place on both church and ritual occasions, having been disregarded in the villagers’ decision making too often. The sea moiety chief left the village altogether, though not permanently it turned out, on similar grounds. Both are kindly men whose seniority is respected but whose authority is not. The most influential man in the village, however, is the chief’s spokesman (*matanivanua*). Adopted by a lineage without descendants, people often reminded me that he is not the “real” *matanivanua*. As the owner of the only lorry operating in the village, he was also criticised by the villagers for charging high prices, keeping villagers waiting on his whims and for “eating money” in town. The owner of several other lorries operating in nearby villages, he had started out as a truck driver until eventually being able to run his own business. The business keeps him busy enough to have little use for the large tract of land belonging to his clan, so he lends it to people in exchange for occasional assistance. Using these resources as well as the authority of *matanivanua*, he had the leverage to command people: for example, he once requested a large party of Naloto villagers to perform a *roqoroqo* (a greeting ceremony for the first-born child) accompanied by abundant gifts to one of his employees in a nearby village. Indeed, this was the only time the villagers set out with a prestation containing predominantly “sea” gift items: the 25-strong delegation presented a large bundle of thirty or so fish, well over a hundred kilograms of clams, two sacks of coconuts, 15 bars soap, 3 packets of washing powder, clothing, canned food, rice, and kava. On another occasion, he mobilised a number of villagers to a potentially dangerous, party-political expedition while emergency regulations were still in force and the army was still maintaining order in post-coup Fiji. At least on the latter occasion, the *Komai Naloto* simply washed his hands of the issue, once it had been brought into his attention, stating that those who wish to go are free to do as they please. The *matanivanua* was also responsible for inviting the politician who tipped the scales in the north half’s favour in the fundraiser described earlier in this chapter.

Comparing the two political figures, you could say that the *matanivanua* stood for gravitas vis-à-vis the *Komai Naloto’s celeritas*. Not, however, in a way that would indicate in any way a permanent reversal in political predominance; rather, the village politics tended towards an overall emphasis on personal, achieved status – combined with ascribed rank. The traditional chieftaincy remains ascribed to the chiefly clan, despite some talk of it alternating between the two halves of the village, but the potential
successors to chieftaincy were actively showing off their achievements to the villagers. The candidate esteemed the most likely successor to the current Komai, a man with good income in government employment, was halfway through building an enormous two-storey house next to the current Komai’s house. The unfinished building was completely out of proportion with all the other residential buildings in Naloto, built on log stilts to allow for a new downstairs meeting hall for the southern half of the village. The other men named as potential successors to chieftaincy were all young and had good jobs in town, too, whereas the village-based seniors of the current chief’s generation were never even listed as candidates by the villagers.

As already stated in a previous chapter, the chiefs now find themselves in a situation where they have to distinguish themselves in some way: the chiefly clans are recognised as title holders, but no longer considered different from “the people”. As Kaplan (1995) has pointed out, the inland chiefdoms where the Land–Sea dichotomy never pertained were more subtle in the distinctions they made, incorporating a greater range of ritual specialisations and other modes of authority – much like the Baruya great men that Godelier (1986) has immortalised – the remnants of which are also still found in Naloto’s “priest”, “kingmaker” and other rite specialist designations. But where the Baruya, and other present-day big-man – or bad-man – societies of New Guinea were left with the sole choice of winning renown in exchange, indigenous Fijians were left with a “parataisi” of limited wants and means. Using the prestige bought with money to rise above the competition in a Fijian village is simply the most obvious route to recognition. Not because of some inherently immoral quality or foreign exoticism possessed by money, but because of the long history it shares with the indigenous taukei and the synthetic dual signification it has attained over the course of that history.
CONCLUSIONS

“Let us suppose that our society and the society under study both show in their system of ideas the same two elements A and B. That one society should subordinate A to B and the other B to A is enough for considerable differences to occur in all their conceptions.” (Dumont 1992: 7)

“But a system in which fish could be exchanged only for fish, or yams for yams, would be remarkably impractical, unless there was next to nothing in the way of division of labor, or economic necessities could be distributed entirely through other means.” (Graeber 2001: 222)

Over the course of this study I have argued that the categories of land and sea, overlapping the notions of host and guest, have witnessed a gradual paradigm shift that affects not only the valuation of indigenous and foreign origin, but also exchange practices wherein these dichotomic relations have traditionally been articulated. I have, furthermore, argued that these key characteristics of said exchanges can be observed in contrast to the formal or ceremonial practices relating to money: the undifferentiation of the former in contrast to the personal accountability and quantifiability of the latter. But in typical Fijian fashion even the distinctive qualities of money appear in a dichotomic relation, embedded in a pre-existing system of values.

I have conducted my analysis using the notion of value as a key comparative tool. The threefold meaning of “value” – used here approximately as “meaning”, “worth”, and “morality” – has provided the focus and, to a large extent, the method of this study as well. Consequently, my argument has combined evidence from all three domains to present a case where systematic transformations in all three ways of conceptualising value ultimately form a coherent motif, or from Naloto villagers’ point of view, motivation for preferring certain available categories or actions over others.

Contrasting the prevailing Naloto myths to a number of widely-occurring themes in the existing corpus of Fiji ethnography has made it possible for me to, first of all, foreground a change in the meaning of the two categories used primarily for the ceremonial classification of people into two sides: land and sea. The symbolic category of “sea”, typically applied in reference to nobility and the distinctive alterity of 19th-century coastal chiefs and their dependants, has lost both its distinctiveness and prestige, now connoting mainly a presumed occupational specialisation. “Presumed”,
because de-emphasising the immigrant origins of people glossed as “sea” coincides with an emphasis on occupational instead of ritual specialisation. Regarded mainly as a difference between what people do – or don’t do, as it happens – rather than where they came from reveals the underlying shift from structural strangers to indigenes: all groups present themselves as “originals” regardless of their designation in the land–sea dichotomy.

A minor village like Naloto has obviously only rarely acted as the scene of high dynastic politics, and it would therefore be pointless to expect signs like the foreign regalia of old-time kings to figure in the village. Yet the practices which once expressed the encompassing superiority of the sea designation are found in Naloto, too, if only as an unused potentiality. I specifically refer to ceremonial prestations which, in Hocart’s (1924) testimony, used to declare the donors “sea” vis-à-vis the recipients in a manner that he proved to be analogical with geographic relations. In north-eastern Viti Levu, at least, the exterior was to the interior as sea is to land or noble to warrior-ally. These veibatiki relations are still highly valued, but in Naloto they are not relations wherein difference between the constituent parties would be expressed in a distinct way. This does not mean that the bati relation has lost its meaning: obviously the distinctions between people retain significance even where they are not particularly strictly upheld or utilised in key contexts. Likewise, the mytho-practical choice of emphasising the motif of originality rather than the equally available motif of external origin shows a preference for the “land” affiliation, not the complete disappearance of its opposite.

This choice, however, generates practical results that make the symbolic shift more than just a case of reversed polarities. These further consequences fall under exchange value or “worth”, here designated under economic rather than symbolic value largely on historical grounds: once used for exchange outside the ritual sphere, too, the demarcation of various Fijian exchange goods into the ceremonial sphere alone is part and parcel of the process described here. Hence the Naloto ceremonial exchanges show a systematic preference for exchanges in “land” rather than “sea” items – whether it be things practically redefined as local, such as the tabua, or the disuse of things glossed as “sea” such as fish. The outcome of this preference is exchange in similar media; the tendency to exchange whale teeth to other whale teeth or, more generally, ceremonial gifts comprising similar media. This, in the broadest terms, denotes a radical change in the composition of society: from society understood as two complementary sides to society made up of two identical halves.

This all ties in with wider concerns articulated within the broad contexts of New Guinean and Polynesian ethnography respectively. A significant part of New Guinea research has been concerned with relations
between cosmologically identical groups or the expression and reproduction of identical relations through analyses of similar-media or identical exchange, competitive equality, and related phenomena. The Polynesian tradition, on the other hand, has emphasised a cosmological concern for establishing distinctions and expressing these distinctions within the political organisation and on ritual occasions. Fiji, it appears, has always contained both potentialities. Indeed, this is even written on the ritual-political topography of the islands: the coast-interior spatial sequence not only entails the land-sea relation, but even rivers can metonymically stand for these hierarchical relations, as evidenced by the inland chiefdom of Naloto. Hence it is even more telling that in Naloto village myth, land is made to encompass the sea; even seemingly permanent natural phenomena are reversed in accordance with the temporal values.

The breakdown of the analogy between chiefs, foreigners and the sea presents another juncture where the shift can be observed. It is, of course, more than likely that Fijian chiefs would have lost much of their superhuman potency nonetheless in consequence to indigenous Fiji’s large-scale conversion to Christianity in the 19th century. But the indigenisation of foreigners has accentuated the process by removing a political resource that used to underline the difference between chiefs and people. It has been argued that historical Polynesian polities were constituted on a dual notion of power; one side displaying virtues attributed to the indigenous moral order – passivity, wisdom, peacefulness – the other marked apart by qualities alien to it, represented by things brought from beyond the local community, that stood for activity, potency, or even violence. Furthermore, while the magical creativity of the ruling chiefs was often conceived in terms of the latter, it was ultimately the tension and alteration between the two that maintained the chieftaincies. But just as the power attained from beyond society served to establish sovereignty beyond rival claims, so did the fulfilment of foreign status facilitate a check on chiefly power. By virtue of not being of the original order of things, the Fijian chiefs lacked what the people had. They were guests by definition: landless dependents whose wellbeing depended on their subjects. It is due to this dynamic that the land-sea dichotomy still functions in analogy with the notions of “host” and “guest”, but also contains the opposition of egalitarianism with hierarchy. And it is, likewise, this principle that is manifested in the practice, known widely throughout Fiji, according to which the people of the land choose and install the ruling chiefs into power.

Widely known but not widely practiced: the last installed chief – Ratu – of Naloto died in the 1960s. The current Komai Naloto, traditional chief of Naloto, is “just a komai”, the villagers say: he has received his title from the members of his own clan and his position is obviously not as strong as
that of his predecessors, neither with regard to his kinsmen nor to his other subjects. Similar developments seem to have occurred elsewhere in Fiji, too. On Gau island, likewise, chiefs have not been installed for a long time (Toren 1994), while in 2008 Ratu Josateki Nawalowalo, acting as a Great Council of Chiefs taskforce chairman under an interim administration, claimed that over 80 per cent of chiefs in Fiji had not been traditionally installed (Vunileba 2008). This came out in March 2008, when Fiji’s acting Prime Minister, former army commander Vorenqe Bainimarama had announced that membership in the Great Council of Chiefs should be limited to formally installed and registered. But it is highly revealing that even those who disagreed with the decision did not contest the figures quoted but rather the very status of installations; the paramount chiefs of Bua and a number of other provinces came forth to claim that they have never even seen an installation take place, and therefore it should not be even considered customary in their provinces (Fiji Times April 2nd 2008 and April 3rd 2008). In 2008, even the Vunivalu of Bau, Fiji’s highest-ranking chief, had not been installed; the same applied to the Ratu of Verata, Fiji’s senior chiefly lineage, as well as a number of other title holders. Furthermore, according to 2008 statistics, more than 70 per cent of Fiji’s chiefs have not been confirmed as traditional leaders in the Native Lands Commission register (Fiji Times 8.5.2008: 5) – this is a formal registering procedure that takes place when a new title holder has been agreed upon. The statistics, in other words, show a non-continuation of installations paralleled, potentially, by either a disinterest in officially registering traditional leaders or widespread difficulties in identifying the customary title holder – a task that, by tradition, belongs to the sauturaga, the installing group of land people. But why?

In this study, I have argued that from a symbolic viewpoint, the installations no longer make sense. When all Fijians were, during the colonial era, made both “taukei” in name and juridical land owners, two key distinctions of the dichotomy were invalidated at once. Add to this the fact that just prior to the cession of Fiji, Euro-American interests in Fiji required it to be settled just exactly who had the power and obligation to settle the debts of Fijian chiefs and who, as a matter of fact, had the authority to cede the archipelago to a foreign power. Consequently, the ranking Tongan chief in Fiji – Ma’afu – was made to renounce all Tongan claims in Fiji in 1859. Accepting responsibility for all Tongans in Fiji and renouncing all Tongan land claims in Fiji, he was also made to sign “[t]hat I have, hold, exercise, and enjoy no position or claim as a chief of or in Fiji” and that “no Tonguese in Fiji shall exact or demand anything whatever from any Fijian […] but they shall enjoy the privileges and rights accorded to other nations in Fiji” (Derrick 2001 [1949]: 143; Seemann 1862: 250–251). Which is to
say that it became illegal to dress power into Tongan clothes — though whether or not the law made much difference in 1859 is a different matter.

But while the foreigner-chiefs were given direct access to land, they were also simultaneously stripped of their cosmopolitan powers. Making the chiefs taukei did not remove the constraint on power discussed above; it did not make the chiefs all-powerful, as evident in today’s Fiji, except later in relation to the landless Indo-Fijian population who truly became the vulagi in the 21st-century sense: landless guests who are tolerated as long as they do not appear authoritarian and who are thought to represent a foreign moral order but gain not prestige by so doing, and whose guest status is inherited by their descendants. In this latter-day, xenophobic usage the value contained in the taukei–vulagi dichotomy becomes increasingly moralistic: while taukei status, and the inseparable notion of vanua (land) as birthright, tradition and a traditional moral order, now connotes a kinship-based lifestyle and the ideals of sharing, respect and mutual love, its conceptual opposite, the status of vulagi, now stands for a negative moral order: self-interest, gain, and of course money. The final point also throws into relief the double status enjoyed by money, as both a vessel of antisocial values and an instrument of communal accountability.

Throughout this study, I have engaged with Melanesian ethnography in order to highlight the very particular brand of “egalitarianism” that emerges in conjunction with identical groups and exchanges: a type in which the moral overtone of the exchange events, regardless of their actual outcome, is based on an ideal of equality. What this means is that in the comparative Melanesian examples, the outcome of exchanges may not always be equal but an uneven outcome, too, is evaluated in terms of the balanced ideal. Even the inequality personified in political power is articulated against this backdrop of equality, so that power and rank, too, may attain a negative valuation: become something immoral or “bad” achieved through activities that go against a community’s prevailing ideals. Or, as in the Naloto case, are attained beyond the local community, the “us here” or in-group. Indeed, such boundaries — self-made or otherwise — also highlight the wider theoretical point that this work has to offer. For the value shifts outlined in this study — in exchange patterns, in signification and in what is considered proper in moral terms — are all also marked by the closing or raising of boundaries: from 19th-century xenophilia to 21st-century taukei-ism; from the domestication of foreigners to disassociating with them; from holding up foreign relations as value to creating it autochthonously. All the diachronic comparisons here presented — the “before and after” portrayals of value — can also be regarded as value shifts that coincide with the change from a “between” to a “within” relation. Once internalised to a moral community of “us”, the meaning allocated to the opposed sides, the morality of the
exchanges and the proper use of the media therein utilised are all re-evaluated correspondingly.

Such is, in the final analysis, also the manner of the esteem enjoyed by the urban “guests” of Naloto rituals; a difference, in short, that remains or reverts back to being a quality brought in from the outside. Here the old dichotomies once again resurface: the active, accelerated external domain where other villagers make careers, secure provident funds, serve in foreign armies, play for the national rugby team or simply earn enough money to buy livestock before retiring back in the village. “The village just sleeps”, was the criticism of urban Naloto villagers who thought their home village is withering away in the absence of any conceivable “development” to move it forward. All this does not necessarily make urban money particularly “creative”, let alone “magical”; yet money does come across as potent and immoral against the prevailing form of the dual classification in Naloto, one concerned with matching exchanges, identical sides and common origins. The villagers’ positive counterpart to the image of the “sleeping village” is their proverbial ability to “waste time in the Verata way” or do things slowly in the Veratan manner as this expression (solosolo vakaVerata) could also be translated; for if there are places in Fiji associated with the passive and peaceful qualities of seniority, Verata surely ranks high among them.
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