

Alofa – Expressions of Love

Change and Continuity in Tuvalu

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Photo: Walking towards the village in Nukulaelae

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IV

Abstract

This thesis is based on seven months of fieldwork in the Pacific nation of Tuvalu. The first four months of the fieldwork was spent on the outer island Nukulaelae, while the last three months of the fieldwork took place in Funafuti, the country's capital island. The objective of this study has been to discover how, and why change and continuity of custom and culture happen in Tuvalu. In recent years, several groups have had a focus on Tuvalu in regards to climate change. Some have claimed that the Tuvaluans are "losing their culture". The inhabitants have, in some cases, been portrayed as helpless victims in regards to changes resulting from outside influences. Through this thesis, I aim to discover how people govern their own vulnerability, and if they themselves have any control of the changes taking place in their community.

By using empirical descriptions of specific situations, I discuss how expressions of love is connected to change, family, nature and personhood. Through a recollection of the country's history, I discuss how change and continuity has happened in the past, and how it is taking place today. Tuvalu, being a small and isolated nation in the South Pacific Ocean, have for several years been affected by outside influences. Today, these influences gives birth to conflicts between the younger and older generation. Facing expectations behave in accordance to what is regarded as traditional customs and good Christian values, this can be difficult to live up to for the younger generation of the islands. The conflicting expectations faced by young people in their day to day life, as well as regarding important life decisions, will be of interest to this thesis.

Some of the questions asked in this thesis are; how do people respond and adapt to changes in their community and surroundings? Do they themselves have any influences regarding these changes? How do people act in situations that differ with what is regarded as being in accordance to "traditional" social custom? What steps do they take to ensure social continuity? By applying theories of moral reasoning, generalization, place and personhood I shall discuss how change, love, family and nature are all interconnected aspects of the Tuvaluan way of life.

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List of words ¹

Alofa – Love/empathy

Fakaalofa – Pitiable

Fatele – Traditional dance

Famau – Sweetheart

Fekau – A mission

Fekei – Pudding, sweet traditional dish made from swamp taro

Gali – Beautiful

Kaleve – Coconut sap toddy

Kaleve kula – Red, sweet syrup made from toddy

Kao – Fermented coconut sap toddy

Kaupule – Council of elders

Lolo – Coconut milk

Maneapa – Community Hall

Manuia – Good/cheers

Palagi – Foreigner

Pulaka – Swamp taro

Ssai - Bind

Sului – Local cigarette

Spuun – Flirt/sweetheart

Taina – Sibling of same gender as ego

Tuagaine – Sibling of different gender as ego

Tuisi – Dance/party

Umaga – Human dug swamp taro pit

Umu – Kitchen hut

Vai laakau – Magic/sorcery

¹ Translation of words used in this thesis. Based on how the words were used by my informants during my stay, in regards to the situations described below. For further translations of the Tuvaluan language, see also Besnier, N. (2000). Tuvaluan a Polynesian language of the Central Pacific. London ; New York, Routledge.

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Introduction

Lima and the Card Game

A group of five young adults was standing around a table inside an open kitchen hut in Funafuti. Two of them were newly married to each other, while the rest of them were unmarried relatives. Their older relatives were away, leaving them free to joke and laugh with each other. The conversation was happening partly in English for my benefit, and partly in Tuvaluan. «Yes!» exclaimed Max and jumped happily around the kitchen hut. His older brother Leupena was showing them a so-called magic card game, where one could ask questions about one's love interests. He was laying out cards on the table while asking different love questions. Max had received the answer that a girl he liked was going to sleep with him, and was very happy. «OK, it's my turn!» said Lima and walked over to the table. «OK, who are your boyfriends then?» asked Leupena, while laying four kings from the deck of cards on the table. “This is Kiliasi!” said Lisa, Leupena's wife, naming one of Lima's boyfriends while pointing at the king of hearts. Lima nodded and agreed to this. “And this is Mark” said Leupena and laughed while pointing at a card, earning a “Tee!” and a dirty look from Lima. Mark and Lima are cousins; this makes it fun for others to jokingly refer to them as being in a relationship. There was a lot of laughter and joking while they discussed which names to give the four card kings. They ended up with two present time boyfriends, one ex-boyfriend and one crush. As having more than one love interest being the common practice for unmarried people, this card game could help them choose which partner would be the best match for them.

“Do people really believe in this game?” I ask. “Some people believe it's true. But most people just do it for fun” answers Leupena while starting to lay out the cards. Above the four kings he places three single cards with the face down, they are for later. “Ok, first question?” He asks. “Who is Lima's true love?” Lisa wants to know. Leupena put down four cards underneath the kings, with the faces down. Then at the end, he puts a card with the face up. It is an ace of spades. That means the king of spades is Lima's true love. There is an excited sound of “ooh” from the group. They laugh and jokes as the questions go on. “Who did Lima sleep with?” “Who loves Lima the most?” “Who does Lima's mother want her to marry?” As the deck of cards comes to an end, Lima has gotten an answer to each of the questions. Underneath each king lie eight cards with the face down. “Now we will see how Lima's relationship with Kiliasi will be if she marry him.” Leupena says as he takes the cards underneath the king of hearts. Each of the card symbols means different things. Ace means children. Heart means love. Diamonds means money, and cloves means the husband will hit the

wife. “Ohh, plenty money!” says Leupena and puts down three diamonds. “But too bad because your eyes will be blue” he laughs while putting down four cloves. “But you will have a little bit of love” he say and puts down the last card, which is a heart. “No children.” Lima laughs, and then shakes her head looking disappointed. She tells him to check the other ones. After all the cards underneath the kings have been turned, they move on to the three cards above the kings. “Ok, now we will see who Lima wants to marry” Says Leupena, turning the first card. Lima laughs happily when Kiliasi’s card shows. “Oioioioi!” The others excitedly cheer. The second card is whom her parents want her to marry. As Leupena turns the card Lima shakes her head when it is not the same boy as she wants to marry. Leupena turns the third and final card that represents the one she is really going to marry. Lima watches as he turns it, and laughs with the others at the result, her ex-boyfriend. After all the cards are turned, they count the cards at the end. If the cards underneath the kings have more than ten cards of the same sign, the cards are true. Lima waits for him to count the cards, and smiles when she is told that this time, the cards were wrong.

The problem

As shown in the example above, love, family and marriage are important subjects to the inhabitants of the islands of Tuvalu. The small and isolated nation in the South Pacific Ocean have for several years been affected by outside influences. Today, these influences gives birth to conflicts between the younger and older generation. Facing expectations to live up to what is regarded as traditional customs and good Christian values, can be difficult for the younger generation of the islands. In this thesis, I wish to explore how changes have affected Tuvalu in previous years and to this day. How do people respond and adapt to changes in their community and surroundings? Do they themselves have any influences regarding these changes? I wish to explore how conflicts regarding change, love, nature and family affect people, both in their day to day life, and also regarding important life decisions.

Chapter 1

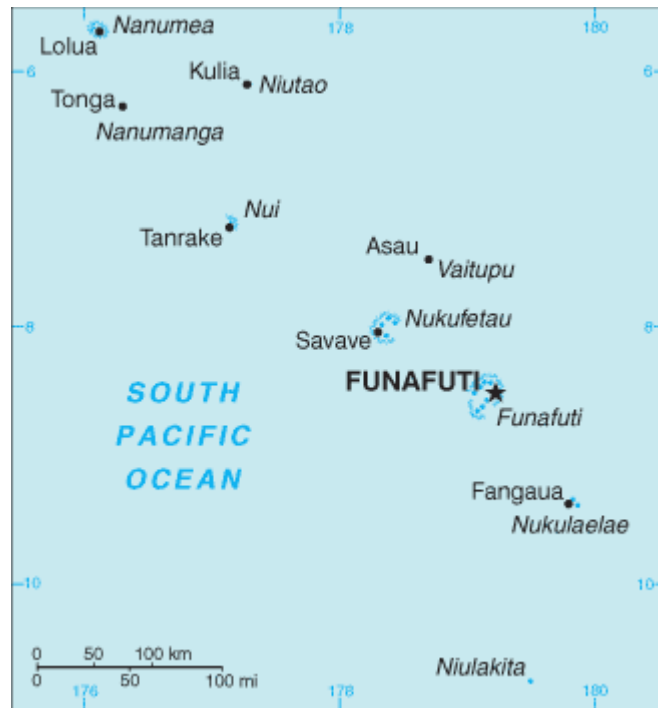
Change in Tuvalu

Introduction

In this first chapter, I shall begin by describing Tuvalu as an ethnographic and historical area. While doing this I stress that since Tuvalu consists of eight unique island communities, Niulakita not included, it is important to recognise the differences between each island culture.¹ This being said, the country as a whole has a lot of shared history. My fieldwork was mostly done in the islands Nukulaelae and Funafuti. My main focus will for this reason be on these islands, but also on Tuvalu as a whole. What has happened before, and what is happening here now? It is necessary to start with a recollection of the history of Tuvalu. These previous events has helped shape Tuvalu in to the country and the community that it is today. To place Tuvalu in the anthropological field I will also introduce some of the anthropological research done in the region.

Tuvalu as an ethnographic area, has over the years been well documented by different researches. Some of this research will be mentioned here, to explain what has driven scientific discussion in the region. The anthropologist Niko Besnier will be particularly relevant, as he also spent most of his time in the island Nukulaelae. Lastly, I will look closer at what research is taking place in Tuvalu today, and how I saw this research be received by the people of Tuvalu. With the prominently growing focus on climate change, several scientists have been to the atolls to interview the residents about the situation. It is my goal with this chapter to connect the past to the present, and also to give the reader an understanding of Tuvalu's background, as well as some of Tuvalu's nature as a society.

¹ Niulakita is an island under the governance of the Tuvaluan island Niutao.



1.1 The islands of Tuvalu

The history of Tuvalu, then and now

With only nine small coral atolls barely reaching above the water surface, Tuvalu is the world's fourth-smallest independent nation. Palm trees cover the most of these coral atolls. The reef surrounding the islands makes it difficult for ships to find entrance to the lagoons, except in Funafuti and Nukufetau where the passages are deep. This results in the necessity of canoes or small lightweight boats to go ashore safely. Today Tuvalu is known as a conservative religious country, where the church has a central role in the community. Around 10 500 people live here, with over 6000 inhabitants in Funafuti, the island capital. On the smallest island, Niulakita, only 28 people lived during my visit. In Nukulaelae, the main island of my fieldwork lives around 330 people. The people are of Polynesian descent, except for Nui, where the people are mostly of Melanesian origin. The country's two ships, the Nivaga II as well as the Manu Folau travels between the islands on an irregular schedule, bringing people and supply's to the outer islands. The plane to Funafuti arrives twice a week from Fiji, being the main contact to the outside world. Cargo and tuna fish ships also find shelter in the big lagoon of Funafuti. Even today, Tuvalu is a remote place. The contact with the outside world is becoming increasingly important. Music, television shows and movies are brought in, either by travellers, the internet, or imported by one of the many Chinese shops in Funafuti.

The remoteness of Tuvalu has played its part regarding the country's early history. The islands of Tuvalu were discovered as early as in 1568, but the first contact with the outside world happened as late as 1781 when Francisco Antonio Mourelle of Spain is said to have visited Niutao. As the navigation technologies of the area was rather primitive, there has been discussion of exactly which island captain Mourelle arrived at. (Munro and Chambers 1980) The islanders used canoes to bring coconuts to the sailor's ship, and tried to help them tow the ship ashore. After six hours, they had to give up and continue their journey. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:102-103) Elekana brought the first introduction of Christianity to the islands in 1861. Before this, the people of Nukulaelae lived according to what is regarded as the old beliefs. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:98)

The period before the arrival of Christianity is regarded as a dark era of their history by the people of Tuvalu. Under the rule of their *aliki* – chief, they worshiped spirits and their old ancestors, who according to Nukulaelae legend saved the people from a children eating giant. I witnessed this story during my stay, in the performance of a children's play in the *maneapa* – the community hall of Nukulaelae. Nukulaelae's first meeting with the outside world was through the traders travelling the region. Before the arrival of Christianity, traders and whalers passed the islands. Some attempted to trade with the islanders. Some of the ships crew decided to settle on the islands as so called beach combers, while some Tuvaluans joined the ships as crew. The meeting with traders and missionaries have contributed to shaping the Tuvaluans perceptions about the *palagi* - foreigners. (Besnier 2009:44)

The first traders arrived Tuvalu in the 1850's. These were mostly interested in the production of coconut oil from copra. Of known traders, Jack O'Brien was settled in Funafuti at the time. He came to Tuvalu as a deserted whaler, who later turned to beach combing and eventually trade. Several people in Funafuti still date their lineage back to O'Brien. These early traders helped shaping the Tuvaluans view of the Europeans. In the book *The lives and times of resident traders in Tuvalu: An exercise in history from Below* Doug Munro describes several of the hardships faced both by the earliest traders and the people of Tuvalu. The Tuvaluans got a first impression of Europeans as being greedy, drunk and dishonest people. The Europeans were often unwilling to give the Tuvaluans a fair price for their goods. It is described how the Tuvaluans at the bottom of the trading chain tried to apply restrictions to the traders' activities to better their prices. One example is from when the *kaupule* – the council of elders, in Niutao banned all trade, claiming the traders were acting arbitrarily and unfairly. (Munro 1987:82)

During his stay in Funafuti, O'Brien destroyed many religious relics of the old religion, reportedly because he believed the religion took up too much of the people's time. He would rather see them spend time collecting copra for him. The failure of the traditional Gods to give retribution to O'Brien might have made the people more open to the coming of Christianity. (Munro 1987:78) During his later years, O'Brien had seen the changes in Tuvalu going from a pagan to a Christian community. He used to complain that in the old days, Funafuti was a much livelier place. The people used to have feasts, dances and arrange games. Something the pastors had put an end to. (Munro 1987:96) Peter Laban was another trader stationed in Nukulaelae in the earliest times. Many other traders are reported to have been stationed on other islands. (Munro 1987:77) These traders started the early missionary work before Christianity reached Tuvalu, making the job easier for missionaries to follow. However, when the missionaries did arrive, the traders and missionaries did not get along well. The traders were, according to the European missionaries "trashy whites", drinking and causing trouble on the islands.(Munro 1987:83)

Elekana and Christianity

The coming of Elekana is to this day seen as one of the most important historical moments for Tuvalu. In 2011 Tuvalu celebrated the 150th anniversary of the coming of Christianity and Elekana to the country. Nukulaelae, the island he arrived at is reported to have had the largest celebration of all the islands. (2011) Elekana was a Samoan man who stranded on Nukulaelae after a storm. The miraculous discovery of unknown people on the beach, who had survived a great storm at sea and drifted ashore, is a story still told in Tuvalu. It is said that Elekana discovered that no missionaries had previously been to the island. He then decided to teach the people himself. By handing out pages from his own private bible, as well as teaching them hymns, he laid the groundwork for missionaries to come.

Elekana left Nukulaelae after only four months. While leaving, he promised to send a teacher to the island, to learn them about Christianity. According to the story, the people of Nukulaelae was more than willing to learn about the new religion. They had gotten word of the religion from the traders, and had been waiting for someone to teach them. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:109-110) As the first of the islands in Tuvalu to have encountered Christianity, the Nukulaelae people feel a certain pride in this. This is something I also noticed during my stay, as they to me seemed more concerned with maintaining their reputation as good Christians than people from other islands. On one of the outer islands around the atoll stands a stone monument. This monument marks the point where Christianity first arrived in Nukulaelae.

Slave-traders

Before the teacher promised by Elekana arrived, a ship of Peruvian blackbirders came to the island in 1863. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:106) Tom Rose, a coloured American trader who lived in Nukulaelae, has gotten the blame for helping the Peruvian slave traders trick people aboard their ships. Having survived a shipwreck in 1860 he had lived on the island for four years. Before the arrival of the slave traders, Rose held Christian services on Sundays to help the people learn about Christianity. (Munro 1987:78) Here he collected people at 8 AM and read a portion of the Bible to them in English. He later explained in Tuvaluan what he had read. (Besnier 1995:39) The slave-traders were successful in tricking 250 people on board their ships, leaving only 65 people ashore. Tome Rose had told the slave traders about the inhabitant's interest in religion, something they used to their advantage. The islanders were promised a feast, as well as an opportunity to get teachings about Christ. This is said to have made people so desperate to get on the ship, that some of those who could not get room in a boat swam to the ships in desperation. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:107) Once they got aboard the ship it was impossible to get off again, and none ever returned to Nukulaelae.

The blackbirder's also went to Funafuti, where they took a slightly smaller part of the population. 171 people were taken this time, leaving 146 on the island. By the time the slave traders reached the other islands of Tuvalu, the islanders had possibly been warned of the dangers. They were now unwilling to venture on to the ships. The blackbirder's were only able to get three people in Nukufetau, two of whom reportedly managed to escape. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:108) The slaves from Nukulaelae and Funafuti were brought to Peru. Only old and sick people, as well as children were left on Nukulaelae. (Besnier 2009:48)

In 1865 Rev. A. Murray arrived in Nukulaelae with his ship. He had been notified by Elekana of Tuvalu's need for missionaries. He took with him three people, one of them being Elekana, with the intention of leaving them to teach Christianity in Tuvalu. He found that the population was less than a hundred inhabitants, contrary to the three hundred Elekana had seen in 1861. Even if their numbers were small, Murray reported that the people were eager to learn about the Christian faith. He decided to leave Ioane, a Samoan pastor in Nukulaelae to teach the people about Christianity. Even if Elekana had expressed a wish to stay in Nukulaelae, Murray decided that Elekana would be of most use in introducing Christianity to the other atoll islands. (Faaniu and Laracy 1983:110) To this day, the practice of having a pastor from outside of the island still applies in Nukulaelae. During my stay, the pastor was originally from Niutao. There are several advantages for the community when the pastor is not a native to the island he preaches. He is treated as an honoured

guest, and is not involved in most daily life conflicts or politics. Because of this, he can be useful as a peace counsellor in times of conflict. By having no blood relations with access to land in the island, he cannot favour his own family. (Besnier 1995:42) I was informed during my stay, that the priest's wife was outside of the normal chains of gossip. She was often unaware of the conflicts going on between the other women.

To this day Christianity has a strong vantage position in Tuvalu. In Funafuti, churches from all over the world are found. As the different Churches all want a church community in every country, Tuvalu has a lot of churches considering the size of this small independent nation. I was told that some of the outer islands of Tuvalu have forbidden new church communities to settle, fearing it will cause an unnecessary splitting of the island community. In Nukulaelae, the Tuvaluan church was the main church, a place that most people attended. Some of the people I knew belonged to one of the other Christian communities of Tuvalu, such as the soldiers, having been recruited on their visit in Funafuti. Other religions are small in Tuvalu, but there are some Ba'hai in Nukulaelae, and a few Muslims living in Funafuti.² Even with this variation, protestant Christianity is the religion practised by the majority of the islands inhabitants.

From Ellice Islands to Tuvalu

After the slave raiders, the remaining inhabitants of Nukulaelae decided to give the rights to run a coconut plantation on one of the outer islands to a German based coconut plantation company. The coconut plantation was based in Niuooku, the biggest island of the Nukulaelae group, a place where the people previously used to live. After the contract was signed the inhabitants of Nukulaelae were forbidden to venture there, something they found surprising. As Niuooku was one of the most fertile of Nukulaelae's islands, this resulted in lack of land for food gathering. This dramatic reduction of land to gather food from left several people to starve. (Besnier 2009:48-49) This demonstrates how important land and the access to land is in Tuvalu. A person with no land is regarded as a poor person even today. He can be referred to as *fakaalofa* – pitiable.

In 1892 the British claimed a protectorate over Tuvalu, which at these times were called the Ellice Islands. During the colonial rule, British ships infrequently visited Nukulaelae. When Captain Davies visited Nukulaelae in 3 August 1892 on behalf of the British colonial rule. He wrote in his findings that a conflict regarding the movement of the church was taking place, and causing a lot of

² The oldest person of the family I lived with in Nukulaelae was a Ba'Hai, although the rest of his relatives were Christians.

uproar in the island. Of all the islands in Tuvalu he visited, only Nukulaelae had this type of conflict at the time. It would be unfair to blame the Nukulaelae community for this conflict, as it was taking place because the former Samoan missionary wanted to move the village back to Niooku island when the contract with the coconut plantation company expired. This caused a lot of conflict in the community, as the Samoan missionary started taking the roof and windows out of the existing church, insisting that they move the village right away. The captain told the Samoan missionary to leave the island, and bid the people to put a new temporary roof on the church. He also told them to wait for the new missionary to arrive before they decided if they should move the village back or not. (Davis 1892)

Nukulaelae has, as many other islands in the Pacific, been a place where outside influences through history has had an important impact on peoples day-to-day life. This is still the case today, and how Tuvaluans cope with these influences will be a part of this thesis. I will not say that Nukulaelae has had larger or lesser problems than other nations in the Pacific. The slave traders raided several islands in other nations as well during their time, and missionaries have made their influence on most of the Pacific islands. However, according to Niko Besnier, the terrible trauma Nukulaelae went through by the black birders on the island has continued to affect the community in-to modern times. When talking about their ancestors the Nukulaelae people again use the word *fakaalofa*, expressing their feeling of sympathy for what their ancestors had to go through. First, their ancestors were unaware of the existence of Christ, and then their society was taken advantage of by slave traders and coconut plantations. Now their islands are feared to be in danger due to rising sea levels. The people of Nukulaelae became aware of how vulnerable they were to influences, which they had no control over. According to Besnier, this has become a part of the country's self-representation, in the meeting with for example climate changes.(Besnier 2009:51)

During the Second World War American troupes were placed on different islands in Tuvalu. Even to this day, it is possible to see old war relics, such as an old tank and a sunken American marine war ship in Funafuti. Tuvalu reached its independence in 1978, and was thus renamed from Ellice Islands (in the Gilbert and Ellice Islands Colony) to Tuvalu. To this day Tuvalu is a constitutional monarchy, recognizing Queen Elizabeth as the official head of state. In later times the tradition for young Tuvaluan men to join international ships as crew has continued. Several Tuvaluan families depend on the wages sent home to them by their sons or husbands who work abroad. Many Tuvaluans have also migrated to other countries such as New Zealand, Fiji and Australia. Tuvaluans who have moved are generally thought to be better off economically than the ones still residing on the islands. I observed this when families still residing in Tuvalu would ask their relatives in in

other countries for money or other things they might need.

Changes and development

By giving a brief introduction of Tuvalu's history, I wish to explain how outside influences have affected the islands in previous years and up until today. Like Besnier, I note how vulnerable Tuvalu has been to outside influences. However, each island's unique way of coping with these influences will be of interest for this thesis. People travel more than they used to, and in both New Zealand and Fiji the Tuvaluan communities are growing. When I asked people what happened to the people who moved, a typical reply I would get was "Oh, they lose their culture. They become like *palagis* – they forget what it is like to live in the islands." Tuvaluans who come back after having spent a lot of time in other countries will have to adapt back in to the Tuvaluan way of life. There are also local variations. What kind of social behaviour is accepted depends on which island one finds oneself physically.

Lin Poyer and Jocelyn Linnekin say in the book *Cultural Identity and Ethnicity in the Pacific* that there is something unique about identity in Oceania. They argue that it is not only biology and kinship, which are the crucial factors in defining one's identity and belonging in the West. A common identity in the Pacific Ocean however, comes to those that share the same external factors, such as food, water, land, knowledge and work. (Linnekin and Poyer 1990) Location and nature have an impact on defining who you are as a person. Watson writes in Linnekin and Poyers book that "other people do other things" because they live in different physical and social worlds. This expresses itself in the above observation that by living in the same place, one can construct a shared identity. It is expected that a person behaves differently in Funafuti than he or she does in Nukulaelae. The same is the case for those who move out of the country. However, they are generally expected to adapt and abide by the islands social customs when they come back to the place.

In Nukulaelae, especially the girls are under pressure from their families to be well behaved. However, when they are in Funafuti the rules change. They get slightly more freedom while staying there. In Funafuti, if an unmarried girl arrives home late, this will usually be met with more understanding than if the situation took place in Nukulaelae. However, these rules vary from family to family. A girl I knew in Funafuti, who had spent time studying abroad complained to me about her lack of freedom. She had spent the last several years managing on her own, so why was it such a big deal if she did not return home before eleven o'clock in the evening?

Climate and environmentalists

Changes in culture, climate and migration are issues, which in later times have inspired different scientist and journalists to visit Tuvalu. I myself intended to spend time in both Tuvalu and New Zealand when I first left for my fieldwork. I wanted to see how culture changes when people move from the small island community to an industrialised country. Instead, after having spent some time in Tuvalu, I decided to spend all my time there. The first four months were spent in Nukulaelae, while the last three months was spent in Funafuti, mainly with the Nukulaelae community here. I also had one short trip back to visit Nukulaelae before I left. This is a decision reached because I started to care greatly for the people I got to know. I came to view them as my friends and family, rather than as informants only. I also became aware of a great deal of changes happening in the islands themselves, and was motivated to spend as much time in the country as I possibly could.

The discussion of movement and identity is an ongoing topic in the pacific. As many Tuvaluans are now moving to New Zealand or other Pacific countries, several environmentalists have had a focus on Tuvaluans “losing their culture”. Ingjerd Hoëm criticises that these studies tend to see movement as something disruptive and destabilizing to the island culture. (Hoëm 2004:119) By analysing the atoll environment as a social space, she describes how people from Tokelau brings stories and notions of their life on the Pacific islands when they move to New Zealand, and how they through narratives and theatre expresses the meeting between the *palagi* and atoll life.

When it comes to the challenge of climate change, Tuvalu , being a low lying country with the highest point only 5 meters above sea level, has ended up at the centre of this discussion. If the sea were to rise, it will be one of the first counties to disappear. This is something Tuvalu's politicians have had a focus on in the global political scene. (Besnier 2009:62) Other atoll island also have the same problem, but Tuvalu has gotten international attention regarding this matter. Why is this? The book *Anthropology and Climate Change* by Susan Crate and Mark Nuttall discusses anthropology's position in regards to climate change. By looking at both global and local adaptations to climate change, the authors wish to illustrate how anthropology can be used to make a difference in societies affected by the problems. One of the chapters in this book is about Tuvalu and is written by Heather Lazrus. By interviewing Tuvaluans in Funafuti and Nanumea, the author aims to show how a local community governs their vulnerability in a global environment. She wishes to point out that people perceive vulnerability and natural threats differently, depending on the cultural context in which they are perceived. By doing this, she demonstrates that changes in the high tides in Tuvalu will mean different things to a Tuvaluan than it would to a person observing the statistics in

Australia. (Crate, Nuttall et al. 2009:246)

As Lazrus states, changes in the environment will mean different things to a Tuvaluan than to a person visiting the island. One of the problems focused on by climate scientist in Tuvalu is that Tuvaluans are in the danger of losing their culture. Niko Besnier criticises that many global environmentalists have failed to see that food problems are a bigger issue to Tuvaluans than the loss of culture due to movement. (Besnier 2009:62) One such group of environmentalists was a film crew that visited Tuvalu. Their campaign name “*Alofa Tuvalu*” can both translate to “Love Tuvalu” or “pity Tuvalu”. (Farbotko 2010) Under the saying, “we are all Tuvaluans” they came to Funafuti in the search for “the noble savage” wanting to portray the Tuvaluans as model citizens when it came to renewable energy and sustainable resources. As anyone who has visited Funafuti could have told them, people are fond of cars and motorbikes, which are a status symbol. Usually, people wish to have as much “*palagi* items” as possible, such as televisions and mobile phones, to impress their peers.

The film crew noted that the youth was changing the culture of Tuvalu, as they were the ones usually driving around on the motorbikes and talking in mobile phones. The film crew wished to make Tuvalu one of the first nations to live in harmony with nature, basing themselves on renewable energy. Farbotko notes that this could be because they considered it easier to convert such a small country. Amatuku, one of the islands in Funafuti close to the main island Fogafale, has been used as an experiment in renewable energy. *Alofa Tuvalu* states their intention of introducing this model to the other islands as well. (Farbotko 2010) The village in Amatuku, which actually is the country’s Maritime Training School, looks more like the village in Nukulaelae than the one on the main island of Funafuti, which is only a short boat ride away.

However, the question is who should decide what kind of energy the people of Tuvalu should use? Should they refrain from using fossil fuels because their islands could be in danger from climate change? Would it matter if they did? Many of the *kaupule* – council of elders, members in Nukulaelae are retired seamen. They have been to Europe and seen how people live there. Nukulaelae is one of the only outer islands in Tuvalu to have internet and mobile phone connection. This is because the *kaupule* has worked hard in getting money to modernise the island. Does getting access to the internet and mobile phones destroy the culture in Nukulaelae? Many of the young generation of Tuvalu are now on Facebook. In Funafuti there exist several internet cafés. Instead of destroying the culture, the internet has become another arena in which the young people of Tuvalu keep in contact with relatives who have moved overseas. Facebook has become another arena in

which to perform social customs and retributions. Many conflicts are now a day's expressed by the participants writing crude comments to each other, in the comment boards under published photos.

Drought

In 2011, Nukulaelae suffered from a long-lasting drought. This drought was so severe, that after months of no rain the New Zealand government had to send distillation plants to Funafuti, Nukulaelae and Niulakita. (BBC-News 2011) This ensured enough drinking water until the crisis was over. The southern islands of Tuvalu were the most dramatically affected by the drought. All water used for either drinking or washing in Tuvalu is rainwater. The groundwater is usually too polluted or salty to drink. Each home has at least one water-tank connected to the roof. When the water hits the tin roof, it is led down the sides, continuing to a pipe ending on the top of the water tank. The water tanks are usually made of green plastic. The opening on the top is covered by netting, stopping twigs and leaf from falling down in to the tank.

I was told that during the drought, all the water-tanks in Nukulaelae had run empty. Before the distillation plant arrived, the inhabitants had to go in to the village to get one bucket of water per family a day. This water they got from the big water reserve underneath the community hall. By the time the reserve was empty, the distillation plant had luckily arrived. One bucket of water a day is enough to survive on as drinking water. However, the families had no water to wash themselves with, flush the toilets, or do the dishes. The family I lived with used to bathe in the brown water from the small well outside the house, and rinse with a cup of water. The lack of hygiene resulted in several people getting diarrhoea or boils. Despite this, what concerned people the most was the effect this was having on the island's plant life.

By the time I arrived in January, the drought was over. However, the after effects of the drought were still present. People were talking about the dangers of new droughts, and in the radio were warnings of new periods of water shortage. We were told to be careful with the water, but it did not appear to me that people were worried about having enough to drink. They were however rather concerned about the *pulaka* - a traditional root fruit, grown in human dug pits. Before the drought, *pulaka* had been a very important part of the islanders' natural food resources. The drought however, made the water in the *pulaka-pits* too salty, making the *pulaka* difficult to grow. The few they managed to produce was said to taste funny, and was much smaller than they used to be. One of the girls in my family told me: "Before the drought we had plenty food here. There was bananas, pulaka, pumpkins and lots of coconut." However, during my stay we got bananas once, and

pumpkins only twice. They had all died during the drought, and people were struggling to get them growing again.

The coconuts were also fewer and smaller than they used to be. This resulted in people drinking less fresh coconut. During the worst periods, they had to slaughter some of their ducks and chickens because they had nothing to feed them. The ducks and chickens were normally fed with the dry coconut meat that was left after pressing out the *lolo* – coconut milk. Instead of using coconut milk for their cooking, this was replaced by soy sauce. On some of the outer isles around the group, you could see that most of the coconut palms and vegetation had died. Even if people tried to grow cucumber in their gardens, it was difficult to keep the plants alive. This made the islanders dependent on imported food such as rice, flour and sugar.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described Tuvalu's history in regards to outside influences, as well as entered the discussion of environmental challenges the islands face. The environmental challenges has, as mentioned earlier, been of recent importance to different studies in the region. Many of the climate change environmentalists writing about Tuvalu describe the country as a sinking island paradise. The picture of the helpless island nation, disappearing in the sea because of global warming, is a picture used to evoke strong emotions in the reader. This picture has given Tuvalu a lot of attention in the political scale, like during the Copenhagen Climate Conference in 2009, where the country was represented. Tourists has also come to Tuvalu to see the country before it disappears. (Farbotkol and McGregor 2010)

In addition, many journalists have come to Tuvalu. Some stay a few days in Funafuti to interview representatives of the government and other high standing people of the society, before they travel home to write their articles. The problem with this approach is that the government are dependent of the financial support they receive. They might for this reason, be biased in their answers. During my stay I wanted to see what people talked about themselves, trying to distance myself from the climate scientist that usually comes to ask people questions. Instead, with the translation help I received, I participated in people's daily conversations. This way, I intended to find out what actually concerned people in their day-to-day life. It is not my intention to go in to the discussion of global warming, but it is necessary to mention the ongoing discussion. The problems faced by Tuvalu's inhabitants, in the form of water and food shortages, are central elements in explaining why people behave and do the things they do.

Tuvalu's history concerning outside influences are still affecting the islands. Through time missionaries, traders, colonial forces and now environmentalists have visited the islands. Some have tried to influence how people should live their lives. As the small island communities may seem transparent, a place where most people know what their neighbours are doing, these changes might make the island and the culture appear vulnerable to an outsider. As mentioned earlier, this vulnerability has also become a part of the islands self-representation. It is, however, important to note the Tuvaluans own agency in regards to these matters. It was my impression that people were not helpless. They had a strength and attitude that sometimes could make me believe they could handle anything. I felt it was important to observe how people coped with the external influences and challenges affecting them. People would use agency by trying to control situations within the given boundaries of their society. This is something I will discuss in later chapters. In the next chapter, I will describe Nukulaelae as an area. I will give a demonstration of how the society works, as well as how people act in accordance to their environment.

Chapter 2

The Island and the Village

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I have given an introduction about Tuvalu and the country's history. I have had a focus on how outside influences have affected the islands. With this, I wished to demonstrate how Tuvalu through time has been affected by external influences. What we know about Tuvalu's history is mostly recorded after the arrival of the sailors. The islands in pre-colonial times were illiterate, and the information from that time is based on legends, like the play with the child eating giant, mentioned in chapter one. As my focus has been on what these external influences has meant for Tuvalu, this is also relevant for this chapter. I ended chapter one by entering the discussion of the focus on change in Tuvalu. Why do so many of the written works on Tuvalu dwell on subjects related to changes affecting the islands? Is it because changes seem to be happening faster, and become more visible in such small places? I will now discuss change with an actor-oriented approach. By focusing on what people do in conflicting situations, I shall attempt to explain the dynamics of the Tuvaluan society with regard to changing social situations. What do the inhabitants of Tuvalu do to cope with change, and what kind of changes do they arrange themselves? To me, it did not seem like people were helpless victims of change, rather they did what they could in their lives with what measures they had. This is something I will describe closer in the following chapters.

Tuvalu

From January until august 2012, I did fieldwork in Tuvalu. The first four months of my fieldwork was spent in Nukulaelae, the country's second smallest island. The second half of my stay was spent in Funafuti, the country's capital island. Divided by miles of ocean, Tuvalu has two boats travelling between the islands. By bringing goods and people, they keep the country connected. These boats depart from Funafuti on an irregular schedule. Sometimes three weeks passes between the arrivals of a boat to an outer island. Other times, as much as eight weeks may pass. The outer islands rely on supplies from Funafuti. A long period in between ships will put a strain on the islands. In such a period, they might run out of goods such as gas, rice, flour, sugar and tobacco. In Funafuti, the plane from Fiji arrives twice a week. Funafuti is so narrow that during a landing by plane all one can see is water, giving the illusion that you are about to land on the ocean itself.

The two boats of Tuvalu usually switch between going either north or south. The larger boat, Nivaga II usually travels around the northern islands. As there are more islands to the north, they usually need the larger cargo capacity. The Manu Folau, a smaller ship, usually travels to the southern islands Nukulaelae and Niulakita. On my arrival in Tuvalu, I mistakenly believed there would be boats travelling to Nukulaelae twice a month. The boat to Nukulaelae left three days after my arrival in Funafuti. The next boat however, did not arrive until two months later. This proved to work in my favour, as in the first month in Nukulaelae I was so ill that I would have left had there been any opportunity to leave. There was no doctor in Nukulaelae during my stay; the closest hospital was in Funafuti. Only a nurse with a small supply of painkillers and antibiotics resided there. Usually, people would rely on traditional medicine and massage against diseases. Only the very sick were brought to Funafuti by boat. The nurse could in cases of emergency call the police boat in Funafuti to come and get the sick.

Method

Having spent time in both Funafuti and Nukulaelae I was able to experience the differences between the islands of Tuvalu on a personal level. In Funafuti, I got to spend time with many of the people I knew in Nukulaelae. This is because many of them travelled from Nukulaelae to Funafuti to participate in my friend Sonia's wedding (see chapter four for an account of this wedding). Some also came to participate in the Tuvalu Games, an annual competition, where representatives from the different islands of Tuvalu come to Funafuti to compete with each other in various sports genres. During these first few months, it was proven to me how impossible it is to completely prepare oneself for the experience of doing fieldwork in such a remote place. The food, the heat, and my failure to understand proper social customs in the beginning was overwhelming.

On the boat to Nukulaelae, I had been told that the journey to Nukulaelae usually only lasted one night. My surprise was big when I discovered the boat would be heading for Niulakita first, and that there would be another 24 hours on the boat. I had not brought enough food and water with me, and the bad weather made me sick. For two days and nights I lay on my mattress on deck with the women and children, only getting up to run to the bathroom. Luckily, a couple of women on board took pity on me and shared some of their food with me. I am told I looked both pale and close to tears upon my arrival in Nukulaelae. Sonia and Mary, two women I would be living with, were running at the beach waving, as we arrived in the small boats bringing people across the reef from the ship to the island. While Sonia and Mary were running and waving, the people on the boat

pointed and said to me “There is Sonia, there is Sonia!” Everyone in Nukulaelae had heard that a girl from Norway, the same country as Sonia's father, was coming to stay with Sonia and her family.

During my time in Nukulaelae, I became aware of conflicts between the younger and the older generations of the island. Several times, I found myself in the middle of these conflicts. The fact that I was an unmarried girl traveling alone without my family was met with scepticism and confusion from some. Why would my family allow me to do this? As they saw me as being in a vulnerable situation, it fell upon my family to show me the proper care and to look after me.

However, I sometimes ended up misunderstanding this kindness. I was not used to my movements being restricted, neither was I aware of who I was allowed to talk to or not. This is something that became clear to me in the first couple of weeks, when one of the boys came and asked Sonia if he could speak to me alone. As we were outside our house I said yes, thinking it would be a good opportunity to do a short interview. He kept asking if I was afraid that the family I stayed with would see us talking. I said no. We were after all just talking outside the house. What could be the problem? I was naive, and still unaware of the tension associated with an unmarried boy and girl talking together without supervision. The conflicts between the younger and older generation is something I will discuss more closely in later chapters.

My family was also under pressure by the other villagers. The villagers had their own opinions on how my family should treat me. How strict rules I should have, who I should talk to, and what I should do. This put strain on my host family, and at the time, I did not fully understand what they went through by having me staying with them. Jean Briggs describes her own fieldwork among inuits in the article “Kapluna daughter”. Here she stresses that conflicts and misunderstandings that occur between the anthropologist and his or her hosts during a fieldwork, might bring forth an understanding of important factors in the society he or she studies. (Briggs 1970) By doing mistakes and making a fool of myself, I slowly became to understand more of what was going on around me. Through reactions I got from other people, I began to learn what was important in this community. At first, I failed to understand the reactions I was getting, as they were very subtle. A Tuvaluan will seldom resort to anger or try to correct what a guest is doing, unless this guest has made a grave mistake. Sometimes people would avoid talking to me or looking at me, while I was still ignorant of having done something wrong in the first place. Most often, I would become aware of a person being unhappy with my actions through other channels than the person who was unhappy. People who wanted the best for me would try to explain to me how I should behave.

Ethical challenges

As the anthropologist Niko Besnier was still in their memories after he lived there, I explained to people that I was there to do the same as him. I was there to write stories and study the culture in Nukulaelae. However, they wished for me to write good stories about the island. It was important to them that I should see only the good things in the village and their family. In the beginning, I was not allowed to go in to the village during night-time if they knew people were going to drink. They would say to the children that they should not cry in front of me, because then I was going to write about it. As the weeks went by, this fear gradually diminished. As I gradually became a part of the family, I also failed to live up to the expectations on how a proper researcher should behave. I was not the same as Niko. I was more concerned about spending time with the young adults than interviewing old men. I went from being the scary researcher who would write about them, to becoming Sonia's unmarried sister from Norway. This more informal role made both my Tuvaluan family and me more at peace.

This caused for some ethical challenges for me. How could I be sure to maintain informed consent if everyone had stopped thinking about me as a researcher? At the time, I assured myself that it was OK. Everyone in Nukulaelae, as well as the people I met in Funafuti later on knew I was there to study the culture. They knew I was there on behalf of my school, even if I did not walk around with a tape recorder to interview high-standing members of the community. As Wikan describes in her book *Tomorrow God Willing* I, like her, became to see my informants as my real friends and family, rather than only a source of information. (Wikan 1996) I completed my fieldwork relying mainly on informal conversations, taking notes and photographs, as well as participating as best I could in the day to day life. To deal with the ethical aspects, I have decided to use synonyms of some people I discuss when I talk about delicate matters. This is also, what I did in the introductory story of this thesis. However, as everyone in Nukulaelae knows who my friends were and where I lived, it would be ungrateful not to mention my family in this work. I will also use people's real names in examples that will not be damaging to them later on. I have also received permission from Sonia to use her name in the examples regarding her, as she now has left Tuvalu.

Fieldwork

My fieldwork was a multi-sited one, as I spent time in both Nukulaelae and Funafuti. This proved to be both challenging and advantageous. As George Marcus explains in "Ethnography in/of the world system", I used the anthropological method of following people where they go, to see how their problems and challenges follows them and changes in different places. By applying this method of

“multi-sited fieldwork” I was able to meet the challenges of the field in regards to change associated with movement between the islands. (Marcus 1998) I got to spend time with the Nukulaelae community in Funafuti, as well as with the Funafuti youth. Marcus also mentions that a multi-sited fieldwork will put the anthropologist in contradictory personal commitments, and that the anthropologist’s role must be re-established when moving from place to place. (Marcus 1998) Considering how stories from Nukulaelae reach Funafuti, many of the Nukulaelae people in Funafuti already knew who I was. I travelled together with Sonia, and as I was seen as being Sonia’s guest, this went smoother than it might have done had I travelled to New Zealand alone as I originally intended. This being said, the way of life is vastly different in Funafuti and Nukulaelae. Most of my time in Funafuti was spent longing to go back to Nukulaelae, where I had felt more at home. It was not until later that I understood how important the insight I got in Funafuti actually was.



2.1 Nukulaelae’s main island³

Nukulaelae

Nukulaelae is a small low-lying atoll island. It consists of several small islands surrounding a lagoon. Being north of Niulakita, Tuvalu’s smallest island, Nukulaelae is the second closest island to the capital Funafuti. The reef connects the islands of Nukulaelae in a circle, making it possible to walk to the next island during the low tide. Only one of these islands is permanently inhabited, although the outer islets are frequently visited in order to gather food or have a holiday from the village life. The inhabited island is named Fagaua, and is 1,5 kilometres long. The width of the island ranges from 50 and up to 200 meters at the widest point.

³ The map of Nukulaelae is borrowed from the webpage <http://www.10000.tv/island/nukulaelae/> to illustrate the shape of the island and its roads. The authors of the web page runs a project where they intend to take a photo, and do a short interview, with all the inhabitants of Tuvalu about climate change.

At the north-point of the island lies the guesthouse, right next to the islands football pitch. Further south, at the other side of the football-pitch, the government house is situated. South of the football pitch is the Telecom house. Here people come to make phone calls, buy phone cards, or even get access to the internet. The island's small nursery lies here, although they were building a new hospital at the other end of the island during my stay. The priest's house lies north of the spot for the church, and next to the government house. Further south, on the side facing the ocean, beside the priest's house is the wharf. The wharf consists of a big stone plate that leads from the road and down in to the water. Here the light boats from the ship will arrive with goods and people. Not far from the wharf is the island's only store. During my stay, the store suffered from economic problems, something that resulted in two of the three private canteens on the island having a larger variation of supplies than the main store.



2.2 The main road of the village in Nukulaelae

The village itself consists of several low concrete houses. The houses usually consist of one or two open rooms, with windows made of Plexiglas tills to ensure enough air circulation. Some of the houses in the village also have railings covering the bedroom windows. The tin roofs of the houses are used to gather rainwater in the green or concrete water tanks by their side. The centre of the village consists of the church and the *maneapa*- community hall. There was no church in Nukulaelae during my stay. The old church was demolished shortly before my arrival, and they were in the process of constructing a new one. In the meantime, the community hall was used for church services. The community hall consists of a big open main room. The walls are low, with

poles reaching all the way to the roof, and leaving the open parts to serve as windows. Inside the hall, another set of white and green poles are keeping the roof up. The walls are painted white, with flower decorations covering the walls near the ceiling. Connected to the community hall is a separate building with a kitchen. Here the food and tea will be served during feasts. Also connected to the community hall is a big, square concrete water reserve for emergencies. Behind the community hall is a public kitchen hut. Made of sticks and with a roof of leaves, it is regarded to be in the same style as the houses in older times used to be. People come here to cool off and relax, sometimes claiming that the modern concrete houses are just too hot.

On either side of the church and community hall runs the village's two main roads. Both roads have houses on each side. Outside these houses, grow colourful flowers, and palm trees used for toddy gathering stands beside the road. The roads are neat and usually free of leaves. In front of the community hall is a concrete sports field, where it is possible to play basketball, tennis or volleyball. At the southern end of the village lies a grey two story house without windows, this is where some of the unmarried men gather to drink or sleep. This house together with some trees marks the border of the village. From this point, the rules of the village are not as strict. One can move around during the time reserved for prayer, when guards control that everyone are inside their houses in the village. Still several of the island's houses lie beyond this point of the village.

There are two roads leading from the village. Between the two roads leading out of the village are the islands *umaga* – human dug pits used for growing *pulaka*. Pulaka is a root fruit with a dry, tasteless consistence. Its size can vary from being that of a small melon. I was told they could become as much as half a meter wide, but that this was uncommon these days. The pulaka is a key ingredient in Tuvaluan cooking, although it is being replaced by rice as the growth conditions have gotten worse. The pulaka-pits are human dug, and tending them is hard work. The pulaka grow in a mix between the freshwater from rain and the saltwater coming up through the coral grounds. The bottoms of the pits are muddy and slippery, usually covered in dead leaves. While the pulaka grow in the soil, the leaves of the fruit can become over a meter high and are wide and green. During the day-time these pits are used by people tending their family's *pulaka*. During the night-time, these pits are sometimes used as a hideaway by men who want to drink, or couples not wanting to be seen.

One of the roads from the village follows the coast-line, facing the seaside. This road runs past the diesel-driven power plant. This brings electricity to the island from six in the morning until twelve in the evening. Along this road are also most of the island's pigs, placed in small confinements facing the ocean. The power plant and the pigs give distinct sounds and smells to the road. The road is full of mud and excrements of ducks and chickens. Sometimes a pig has gotten loose and is roaming around. The use of this road is mainly by people who come to feed their pigs, or to get *kaleve* – coconut sap toddy, from their family's coconut palms in the morning and in the evenings. There are also several paths leading from this road and down to the *pulaka*-pits. During night time people tend to avoid using this road, as it is said to be a lot of ghosts here. Some are also reluctant to drive a motor bike here during the night time, as you can risk hitting a stray pig.

The “pigs-road” meets the other road from the village where the island narrows. The other road is cleaner, and consists of dust rather than mud. People are out and broom this street every morning. One of the island's canteens are here, so the road is commonly used. The children also use this road on their way to and from school. Along this road there are several houses facing the lagoon, but the space between these houses are larger than it is in the village. On the other side of these homes lies the beach and lagoon. The white beach extends from the village and to the end of the island, making it possible to walk on the beach from one end of the island to the other. To walk on the beach at night is still not recommended, as there is a risk to step into someone's excrement. Some still use the beach as a toilet at night, though this is prohibited by the island council, who wants people to use the water-closets.

The house

The road from the village heads further south out to the other end of the island. Here the road again splits, and continues in a circle around the end of the island. Here is the island's elementary school, the new hospital in construction, the island's fishery, as well as most graves located. This is also, where my host family lived. When following the road from the village you would arrive at a red house built on wooden poles set into the ground. Opposite of the red house, across an open space lies a small, grey concrete house. Next to the red house is a small kitchen hut. Most houses in Nukulaelae have what they call an *umu* - an open kitchen hut made of wood, connected to them. The kitchen huts usually face either the ocean or the lagoon to get most of the breeze. This is where most cooking and social activity takes place.



2.3 My host family's home

The kitchen hut consists of four thick wooden poles holding it up. In the more modern kitchen huts, the floor is made of straight planks. This one however, was made with uneven rows of wooden sticks to create the floor. In front of the kitchen hut is a small stand with two bowls. This is where the dishes are cleaned with soapy water in one bowl, and clean rinse water in the other. On a plate above these bowls are all the clean cups and cutlery. The kitchen hut has a tin roof, with rolled up plastic tablecloths that can be rolled down as walls, in case of rainfall.

Underneath the kitchen hut lies old cigarette butts and discarded tea bags. Cans and other trash are thrown away in the hillside where they lie and rot. An iron rod used to open coconuts is placed in the trunk of a fallen palm tree next to the kitchen hut. A solar panel stands unused by the water tank, usually with some yellow canisters or clothing that has been laid out to dry on top of it. Behind the kitchen hut is an earth oven, with dry coconuts to be used as firewood by its side. The oven consists of a hole in the ground where the firewood is placed. One way to use the oven is to place a barrel with a grate inside over the fire. Stones are placed over the fire to continue giving off heat. The food is then placed on a rack inside the barrel, before a metal lid is put on top.

As long as there is gas on the island, people will prefer to use the gas stove rather than the earth oven. This is because burning coconuts emit a powerful strong-smelling smoke that will affect the

taste of what they are cooking. Certain types of food can only be prepared in an earth oven. As many families lack an electrical oven, the earth oven will be used for the baking of pizza and cakes. People laugh when the smoke gets thick and jokingly refers to it as "*sausau o Tuvalu*" - perfume from Tuvalu. Most married women constantly smell of this smoke. Sundays are the exception; they will clean themselves properly and wear nice clothing and perfume for church. There is a big difference in clothing used for daily wear and clothing used for special occasions.

Inside the kitchen hut stands the gas stove and rice cooker, as well as some plastic buckets containing flour, sugar, salt and rice. On these buckets are likely the name of one of the people living in the household, as they have been sent with the boat from Funafuti. Some cloths are lying around, and an old detergent bottle has been made into a baby bottle with milk for the smallest child. Some open cardboard boxes stand next to the stove. Here is likely a bottle of soy sauce, a bag of curry spices, and a box of powdered milk, a can of baking powder and a tin of ketchup. If they have had some extra money, you may also find a few cans of corned beef and a packet of biscuits here. Inside the kitchen hut is usually a pot of weak tea, with several large ladles of sugar in it. There are electric lights in the ceiling. A broom is leaning up against one of the poles supporting the kitchen hut. Behind the kitchen hut is a slope upward. On the other side of this hill is the ocean. On this slope are the duck pens, a hammock, and an unoccupied house without walls. In this house is the family's freezer, which usually contains fish and some bottled water set for cooling.

Between the kitchen hut and the red house is a green water tank. Next to this green water tank is the red house. A tree stump standing outside the entrance serves as a staircase to get into the house. The house consists of one large open room. One can see the ground below through slits of the woodwork. In the corner near the door is a wood cabinet with a padlock. Inside this is the jar with the money for the canteen they run, as well as some of the items they sell. What they sell include matches, noodles, biscuits, sanitary pads, mosquito coils, soap bars for laundry, ketchup and Twisties - a type of cheese snacks from Fiji. The unopened goods are in cardboard boxes along one of the walls.

On top of the cabinet stands their home phone. Next to this is a bench. On top of this sits a flat screen television and a DVD player. As well as several pieces of paper and boxes. In front of this stands a blue, partially broken plastic chair. Hand woven mats of pandanus leaves cover most of the floor and in a corner of the room stands an electric fan. The windows in the house are made of

Plexiglas and can be tilted to get the most breeze through. In some places, the glass has fallen out. Along the wall, away from the goods to the canteen, are several chests of wood. These include personal items such as clothing and bedding. It is particularly attractive garments stored in these chests. In the corner are some suitcases. In these the clothing for everyday use are stored. A bag with personal belongings hangs in the corner by the suitcases. In the back of the house is an exit to the toilet, which is located on the ground level and is surrounded by tin walls. This red house is unique in Nukulaelae, as most of the other houses are grey and made of concrete.

On the opposite side of the open space stands a low grey concrete house. This is also a part of the household. This house has a tin roof with ridges that lead rain water into two large water tanks located on each side of the house. Inside is a bathroom with a water closet and grey concrete walls and floor. A wall with a door separated the other two rooms. The walls are painted green, with yellow windowsills, and Plexiglas window tills. In the main room were exit doors on both sides. Here stood the food cupboard, where prepared food was put to keep the flies away.

Day to day life

In the red house slept the married couple Tagisia and Efata. As well as Tagisia's daughter Myra, who stayed there with her children Angelina, Salai and Meli. Some slept on mats on the floor, and others slept on thin foam mattresses underneath mosquito nets. Tagisia's son Dan also belonged to the household, although he used to sleep in his aunt's kitchen hut closer to the village. In the concrete house slept the married couple Mary and Tulimanu with their children Damien and Tafaki in the main room. In the other room I slept, and Sonia. Sonia was Tagisia's niece, and had been living with Tagisia for almost two years during my stay.

Usually people would get up around half past five in the morning. The children or women in the family would broom outside the houses. Twigs and garbage from the day before was swiped together. All of the area was cleaned to make the spaces outside the houses seem neat. There was no problem for people to throw away garbage on the ground, as long as this was removed with a broom the following day. After all the garbage was collected in to a small pile, the children would lift it up and throw it into a hole in the ground behind the house. It was the women's duty to make sure the house looked good before they went anywhere. The woven mats and mattresses from the night were removed and rolled together to be placed in a corner.

There is a minimalistic and orderly ideal to what is regarded as *gali* – beautiful. There should be no stuff lying around inside the houses. The spaces should be open and wide. This is because they think it looks nicer, but also because the mosquitos will breed heavily in any mess they find. The same principle applies outside the house. The spaces should be open, and any grass should be removed by hand. Heavy work, like the removing of grass, should be completed before nine o'clock in the morning. After this time the sun is usually too strong for heavy labour. Inside the house, it is encouraged to broom several times a day to keep the house neat. However, one cannot broom the house after dark, as this is seen as bad luck and would symbolize you sweeping out your riches.

After the sweeping is finished, the young women in the household will go to clean up the dishes from the day before. After this is finished it is the unmarried woman's job to make the days rice. When the young girl has prepared the rice, it is usually an older woman taking over and finishing the rest of the cooking. In our family, Tagisia – the senior married woman of the household, had the main responsibility for cooking the food. Next to the fireplace behind the kitchen hut sat usually Efata on a blue plastic chair, with his crutches leaning against the kitchen hut. Inside the kitchen hut one could usually find Tagisia sitting by the small two-plate gas stove. Sometimes she was smoking a *sului* - a local cigarette made from dried pandanus leaves and Irish cake tobacco. She would sometimes call for the children or her husband to get her something, or happily gossip with her sister who had come to visit.

It was her responsibility to cook the food, but others who helped would come and sit beside her in the kitchen hut, either cutting the fish or preparing the pulaka. The food was usually finished before ten o'clock. The exception was if there were any big events going on, which would require cooking larger amounts of food. One such event could for example be a gathering in the community hall, where the family were required to bring a tray of food. Tagisia or Myra would usually prepare the tea in the morning, and again during the daytime. In a five litre kettle of boiled water would be added two or three bags of tea, as well as three or four large spoons of sugar. Resulting in a weak and very sweet tea.



2.4 Tagisia in the kitchen hut smoking a *sului*, while Tulimanu is preparing a *pulaka*.

For breakfast, the normal thing to eat was mainly breakfast crackers with tea. The children would usually eat their food before the adults. The children would walk the 50 meters to the school from our house by themselves. They would start school at eight o' clock in the morning. In the lunch break, a member of the family would sometimes go to deliver lunch for the children. In periods of food shortage, the children would usually skip the lunch. Eating before they went to school, and after they came home.

The men would go to get the fresh coconut toddy and feed the pigs in the morning and evening. It was also the unmarried man in our household's main responsibility to gather food for the family by fishing. The married men, as well as Tagisia would feed the ducks and the chicken. The married men would also light the fire, and remove the husks from the coconuts. After the work was done the men would usually sleep, or watch a movie on the small television. The family also got together to play cards. For lunch, they would eat the food prepared during the morning. Usually rice with fish or a chicken stew. The leftover food would be placed back in the food cupboard for safekeeping. It was rarely cooked new food for dinner; and the leftover food in the cupboard would be eaten. But if one of the women had won a food price at the bingo, some cream buns or pumpkin they had won might be served.

During the daytime, the women would usually walk to the store or one of the canteens, to chat with other women and do some shopping. The unmarried women would sometimes spend time with their female cousins. From time to time, the girls would bring mats, pillows and snacks and go on a small picnic. Sometimes behind our house or another place, where we would chat and relax together. They would talk about boys, gossip, listen to music and tell each other funny stories.

The unmarried men on the other hand would get together after the day's work to play cards, relax and so on with their family or each other. During the daytime, if someone had the money to buy fuel, they would go out in one of the boats fishing. If no one had the money, they would use a fishing net or a pole while standing on the beach or reef. After the day's work, the men would sometimes get together and drink the day's ration of *kao* - coconut sap toddy fermented in-to an alcoholic beverage. The men would gather in the house or kitchen hut of one in the group, or simply in the "bush" - hidden from the eyes of the rest of the village.

Place and landscape

Above I have given a brief introduction about Nukulaelae and some of the daily life on the island. As mentioned earlier, what lies beyond the border of the village is considered as possibly dangerous. Niko Besnier explains how the *umu* serves as a kind of buffer between the village and the bush, the house and the beach. With smells of cooking and smoke, newly caught fish and so on, the kitchen hut is not a clean place. However, it is regarded as a part of the domestic sphere. (Besnier 2009:35-36) Besnier describes how he as a guest was discouraged from entering the kitchen hut during the early stages of his fieldwork. He was encouraged to stay in the house, where guests are normally received. The smoke from the kitchen hut would hurt his eyes, they said.

As the use of gas instead of coconut husks has become more common in heating the food, the concern with keeping guests outside the kitchen hut seems to have lessened. This seemed to apply especially in the larger kitchen hut, where there was more space to separate the area one would sit, and the area reserved for cooking of the food. In the beginning, my family also gave me my first meals inside the house. In the beginning of my fieldwork, I was ill for a long period, and stayed most of my time inside the room. If I were to come out to the kitchen hut alone, the younger women would seem stressed, and ask me if I needed anything. However, as time went by the awkwardness of not knowing each other passed, and I felt welcome in the kitchen hut as well. In the event of a gathering for prayers, these were held in the family's large kitchen hut in the village. This belonged to Tagisia's father Toe. For birthdays, funerals or other formal occasions the important guests, mainly older men and their wives, would sit inside the house to eat. The unmarried women would

serve them food and tea. Meanwhile, most people would eat outside in the kitchen hut while the official program was going on inside.

The bush and the beach are still considered to be possibly dangerous. Walking here to do work during the day is fine, as well as necessary. However, to walk here alone during the night-time is considered dangerous by many in the village. People who are used to living outside the borders of the village are not as afraid as people from the village, but they keep to their houses or have company while walking outside during the night. If a person is spotted walking alone in the bush at night, this is regarded with suspicion. Women are ideally not supposed to go anywhere alone during the night in Nukulaelae. They walk together, or get their children to accompany them, for example to the bingo. If a woman appears at the bingo alone at night, the other women will comment and talk about it. They will usually find someone to walk her home when the bingo is finished, around midnight when the power is cut.

To describe how place and space is constructed in Nukulaelae I will use the perspective developed by Christopher Tilley. His definitions of space and place are described in his article “Space, Place, Landscape and Perception: Phenomenological Perspectives”. Tilley argues that a place is always more than just a point or location. A place has meaning, and is something constructed socially. The meaning of a place is what matters to people. A place can be viewed with affection or aversion. Tilley argues that this is defined by cultural identity and personal experiences. (Tilley 1994) A space, he says, consists of several places. In Nukulaelae, the space would include the ocean as well as the landmass. However, my focus will be on the social and cultural associations to a place, and what this means for social behaviour, as well as the role this plays in how changes in nature is viewed.

“I can't be found there” – Land and families

As earlier mentioned, Besnier writes about how the nature in Nukulaelae is defined as being either inside or outside, safe or dangerous. Everything inside the border of the village is regarded as being cleaner and safer than what is outside the borders. The fact that my host family lived outside of the village made them slightly different. They had the opportunity to do things in their own way, without getting reprimanded by the other villagers. The sound of the church bells signalling the evening prayer a quarter to seven every night never reached that far outside of the village. The evening prayers were done voluntarily rather than compulsory.

The fact that our house was situated next to several of the islands graves made people afraid to venture there during the night. One night in February, after attending a funeral for a relative in New Zealand who had died, two of Sonia's cousins wanted us to go for a walk. They walked us to the village, and then we walked along the beach back to the house. It was the first full moon during my stay, and they told me that especially people from the island Niutao "go crazy" during the full moon. At the end of the beach, several children covered in leaves jumped out from the house in which the funeral had been to scare us. The children laughed, and started to sing. Sonia's two cousins started hitting a rhythm on two empty barrels placed on the beach. The other children from our household also came out from the house. They all danced on the beach while singing, and the boys hitting the rhythm on the barrels.

After this, Sonia's two cousins walked us home. When we arrived at our house, they did not want to come in to our room, sitting instead in the main room of the house. We jokingly told them stories of unexplainable things we had seen out here. To my surprise, this resulted in one of the boys becoming completely silent. Even if we asked him questions - he refused to answer. Both moved themselves closer to the door of our room, while Sonia and I cleaned inside. It ended up with us having to walk them past the graves, halfway back to the village, because they were too terrified to walk back on their own. The following day, we found out that one of the boys had been so afraid that he could not speak. They told us that after saying goodbye, they had ran as fast as they could back to the village. Sonia explained to me that people believed that ghost would follow them from the bush and in to the village if they walked there during the night.

Another time I was walking home with my friend after attending tala vu, the islands Christian youth group. While walking along the road, she was approached by her boyfriend. He wanted her to come with him, so he could talk to her alone. Young couples in Nukulaelae will usually hide their relationship from the rest of the community. In such a small place, this is a difficult task, as the chances of being seen are very much present. The girls are supposed to be virgins when they marry. Because of this, their family will try to keep an eye on them, and protect them from boys. The girls will usually want to show their family respect and love by listening to them. However, there is also an understanding in the community for people who are in love. A young girl in love with her boyfriend might sneak off to see him, even if she knows that her family will disapprove.

On this night, walking home through the dark village, her boyfriend approached my friend. He wanted them to go to his families abandoned kitchen hut, so they could stay there. She rejected him, explaining to me later that it would be very bad for her if she were to be found there. It was better for her if the boy came to her house. The boy on the other hand was hesitant to do this, as he was afraid of being discovered by her relatives. Land is associated with the families that own them. If you go outside of your own land you will have abandoned the safe territory of your family. It is assumed that when a girl and a boy spend time alone they will engage in immoral behaviour. The responsibility to ensure moral behaviour befalls upon the whole community, but for minor disturbances, it will be the family's responsibility to punish the offending parties.

Land on the island is as mentioned associated with the families who own them. The families also own land on the outer islands around the lagoons. These places are used for family picnics and food gathering. For example, when preparing for a wedding, the families will go out to these places to gather fish, coconut crabs, coconuts, birds and green leaves. The more land a family own, the more area they have for food gathering. The families will also get a yearly payment from the government, depending on how much land they own. This payment is given to the head of the family, who then delivers it to the other family members. The owning of land is associated with wealth both in economic terms as well as in the ability to gather food.

Land also has another meaning. By staying on their families land, a person will be better protected against *vai laakau* – magic or sorcery, in some cases dark magic that someone might try to place on them. Different rituals are used to protect an area. Words can be whispered, leafs can be laid out to protect against evil spirits, and items can be dug down. The planting of papaya-trees around the houses, was also said to protect the house against evil spirits. It also appeared to me, as if the magic of the family belonged to the land they owned. This way, a person of this family would be protected by staying here. The phrase “this is my family's land” was used as a form of saying that the person had a right to be there, and that he or she belonged there.

This also had an effect on residents of Nukulaelae who were not originally from the island. Two of the men in my household were married to Nukulaelae-women, but they themselves came from another Tuvaluan island. In these relationships, their wives had a bigger say than their husbands in regards to family and island matters. They were seldom included in fishing, and some even called them lazy, because they did less work than what was expected. Initially, I also saw them as being

lazy. They seldom fished, and would rather sleep or watch the television, making their wives angry about their lack of labour. However, they were in many ways excluded from social gatherings, and even if they did do work, they would never be good enough. They would never have the same amount of influence a man who is native to Nukulaelae possessed. They could never be elected to the council of elders, and I seldom saw them attend gatherings in the community hall. The men, who were both from the same island, would rather spend time with another man also from their home island and their wives. However, they did have to attend compulsory work assigned to them by the island council, like the building of the hospital or the new church.

Nature and money

Anna L. Tsing writes in her book *Friction* about how capitalist ideas have an influence on local communities. By regarding the landscape as an actor, and not just as something producing goods to be exported, she discusses conflicts regarding the cutting of rainforest for timber in Indonesia. (Tsing 2005:29) By describing how Indonesian companies manage the rainforest, she describes how the forest is being destroyed in order to save it. She writes: “This is the salvage frontier, where making, saving and destroying resources are utterly mixed up, where zones of conservation, production, and resource sacrifice overlap almost fully, and canonical time frames of nature’s study, use, and preservation are reversed, conflated, and confused.” (Tsing 2005:32) The same overlapping tendencies, of both at the same time saving, making and destroying resources, can be said to take place in Nukulaelae, I shall now discuss this more fully.

In chapter one I discussed how Tuvalu is regarded to be in danger from rising sea levels and climate change. It is my intention to show how people of Nukulaelae govern their nature and vulnerability, in an environment where the access to money is becoming increasingly important. Tree planting projects overlap with projects where large parts of the islands palm trees are cut down. Conflicting notions of saving the island by planting trees, and cutting the trees for money coexist. In addition to these two examples, is a local notion that wild growing nature is uncivilised. To make an area civilised, the area should be managed by humans. I will now explain this by means of an example.

Some months in to my fieldwork, a ship with workers from Fiji and New Zealand arrived at the island. With giant trucks and excavators that drove straight off the boats and through the water until they reached land. Young and old came to watch these trucks that could drive in the water. The crew was there to dig a new passage through the outer reef, to make it safer to arrive in Nukulaelae by

boat. The first intention was to dig a passage all the way from the ocean and in to the lagoon, but the budget and concern for how this would affect the water flow in the lagoon stopped this. For several weeks, the crew from Fiji worked on the passage. While they were there, the council of elders wanted to get other work on the island done as well. While in the process of building both a new church and a new hospital, they were modernizing the island. Behind Tagisia and Efata's house stood a big old tree. One day the excavator came to our house. People came from the village to look at what was going on. They tore down the tree behind the house, because it could be dangerous and fall atop of the house in a hurricane. They also started tearing down all the palm trees between the school, our house and the new hospital. Creating a wide, naked space, with only crushed coral stone left. The only ones finding this sad and upsetting was Sonia and I, others thought that it was exiting. The un-kept bush was removed, opening up the area and making it nice and easy to see what was going on.



2.5 The bush between the house and the school is removed

During the work, a member of the council of elders was there to supervise the workers. One day he had tea in Tagisia and Efata's kitchen hut. He called me over, wanting to speak to me about his time as a sailor, Europe and Nukulaelae. Efata and Tagisia remained silent as we talked. This is some of what he said:

“You know, these two here, they don’t like me. But if it was not for me then they would still have that big tree behind their house. It’s good that we cut down the tree, because if it was a hurricane it could fall on their house. You know what the leader of the building crew told me? You know, the New Zealand guy? He said that the palm trees here, they are very good quality. He said that if we make a factory and cut them here, and sell the wood-planks, we can get 300 dollars for each palm tree. Do you know anyone in Norway who could do the job, and then we split with them fifty fifty? Then we can cut down all the palms here and on the outer islands. You know, it will be a lot of money. Maybe when you come back in a couple of years we have built a brand new village. And we get a new big ship for Nukulaelae, so we can go to Funafuti whenever we want.”

When I asked him that surely, cutting down all the palm trees on Nukulaelae would be bad for the island he said no. They would cut down one area at a time, and plant new trees to grow back before they cut down the next area, so that people could still get toddy and firewood. He said the families who owned the land they would cut the palm trees from, would get a fee from the council for each tree they took. That way everyone would be happy. Cutting down vegetation was not seen as something bad. As the houses would be cleaned to have wide, open spaces, the same applied to the outside. Another man once said to me “You know the women here, I don’t know why, but they always want to take away all the grass outside the houses. They think it looks more beautiful, but they do not think about the grass holding the island together. If we take away all the grass and trees, the island will fall apart right? However, they do not think about that. They only want it to look nice.”



2.6 The area after the removal of the bush

The associations and cultural definition of a place defines the value given to the place. When the area around the school was cleared for trees, it stopped being defined as “bush”. As the land belonged to the island government, one could before this get a fine from picking coconuts here illegally. However, with several fallen palm trees lying around, people went too and forth to get fresh coconuts as well as palm leaves to make brooms. When the coconut trees were removed, this became a process of making this side of the island a part of the village. As the new doctor would come and live in a house near to the new hospital, it was important that the area was *gali* - orderly, open and beautiful. At the same time, the crew from Fiji were digging a new passage through the coral. The broken coral was brought to the area in front of the school. They were concerned about soil erosion, and wished to keep the coral on the island. The open area was to be made in to a sports field for the schoolchildren, when the work was finished.

In this way, if you change how a place looks, you could also change the meaning given to this place. As palm trees and unmanaged vegetation is seen as possibly dangerous, it is usually not seen as a problem to cut down these trees. It looks nicer, they say, with wide open spaces. Parallel to this, and organised by the same people who ordered the cutting of the trees, are other projects focusing on conserving the island. These are internationally funded projects. Some of these have workshops on the different islands and consists of a group of travellers who include the community in their work. One such workshop visited Nukulaelae in May. Nukulaelae and Niulakita were the last islands they were visiting, after having rented the police boat to visit all the islands of the group. Representatives from several different islands were leading the internationally funded project. The workshop in Nukulaelae lasted two days; the groups that participated were divided by age and what part of the island they belonged to. In Niulakita, the workshop only lasted a couple of hours one day, as the island is small and the inhabitants few. The groups in Nukulaelae would start with a seminar that lasted around two hours, here they were explained coastal erosion, and how trees could help keep the island together, as well as serving as a place to climb up in case of a tsunami. After the seminar, the islanders would walk around with the seminar leaders, who had brought with them tree seeds. These trees were expected to reach a considerable height in only a couple of years, making them ideal for Tuvaluan conditions. The group walked along the beach of the island planting the trees. The men would share the task of digging a hole for the tree, and the women would place the seed in its hole, and cover it with soil. Sometimes, they would place coconut shells in a circle around the seed, providing shelter and nutrition to the growing tree.

These two examples are conflicting, and similar to what Tsing called “the salvage frontier”. Conservation and demolition of the islands trees happen simultaneously. At the same time as the islanders wish to protect their island by planting trees, there is also a wish to clean an area and earn money from it. The inhabitants of Nukulaelae are actively managing the nature around them. They are not helpless victims in the face of nature. They themselves both apply change to their surroundings, as well as adapting to challenges that may appear.

Summary

In this chapter, I have introduced the island of Nukulaelae, as well as the household I lived in, and some day-to-day life. By doing this, I intend to set the scene for the discussions in later chapters. By giving these examples, I wish to illustrate how relationship to nature, family, and love relations are connected. The aspect of nature and family relations are present in most dilemmas faced by the inhabitants of Nukulaelae. It is not something that will be discussed at all times, but the knowledge of their perception of different places is present in the mind of the actors. If one were to follow the classic notion of Geertz, that culture is a web of meaning that man himself has spun, these notions of nature in Nukulaelae can be regarded as a central part of their culture. Notions of nature, where one can walk, gather food and so on are affecting and limiting the inhabitant’s choices. In the next chapter, I will discuss family relations in Nukulaelae, and give an introduction of common stereotypes and dilemmas in the society.

Chapter 3

Family and youth in Tuvalu

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have introduced the Tuvaluan society and the island Nukulaelae. I have argued that family ties to the land helps define the sense of belonging to a place.(Anderson 2011) In this chapter, I will go further in the discussion about what family ties means in the Tuvaluan society. I will have a focus on the emotional aspect of family ties in people's day-to-day life, rather than discussing the technical aspects of Tuvaluan kinship. To do this, I will start with introducing the notion of family in Nukulaelae. I will describe my own experiences with making family ties in Tuvalu, as well as some of the conflicts arising between the younger and older generation. I will then discuss typical family roles, and describe some generalised characteristics these roles may possess. I will also discuss the notion of sharing, and how this is practiced in day-to-day life. In this chapter I ask the questions; what does family relations mean in Tuvalu? How are they managed? What is expected of and given to a family member? Does their place in the family define how they are expected to behave? How does these expectations change as one grows? By answering these questions, I wish to give the reader further insight in to the Tuvaluan community, and set the scene for chapters to come.

Family

In Tuvalu, people will usually say that family is the most important thing to a person. For example, a young girl is expected to spend time with her kin, preferably befriending her female cousins rather than girls from other families. Food is shared with one's family, and people are expected to help their family members with work or other chores. You are supposed to show *alofa* – love, to your family.⁴ To show love is not defined as only affection, but as actions. To wash your brother's clothes is regarded as showing him love. To make food for a wedding is regarded as showing your love to the people getting married. To look after one's cousin, and make sure they are safe is to show love. Material goods are in this sense secondary to actions of love. You cannot just claim to

⁴ For further analyses of this concept, from Tonga and Fiji respectively, see (Perminow, A. (1997). "Moving things of love. An ethnography of constitutive motions on Kotu island in Tonga." (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Oslo). and Toren, C. (1999). "Mind, Materiality and History. Explorations in Fijian ethnography." (Routledge).

love someone; you have to show it through actions. Clothing, and other material items, are shared, if a family member ask for it. If the family has a lot of food, this will usually be eaten immediately, rather than being rationed. The ideal is that family members should share their wealth and look after each other. Material items are regarded as secondary in comparison to actions of *alofa*. Instead of keeping count of who gives each other physical items, it is normal to keep count of who shows each other the most love. In this way, love becomes a kind of currency, and sometimes even a competition. The one who gives the most love to their peers are regarded to be the better person. During my stay in Funafuti, a girl I knew helped preparing food for her cousins wedding. This cousin had been mean to her in the past, spreading rumours and saying rude things about her. People were confused as to why my friend would want such a big part in the preparation for her cousins wedding, as her cousin had treated her so poorly. When I asked her about it, she replied: “It is a saying here. That even if a person has shown you little love, even acted angrily towards you, you should not give back what you got from them. You should give back with love.”

Tokelau is one of Tuvalu’s closest neighbours. In a chapter describing *kaiga* –family in Tokelau, the authors explain how *alofa* –love, is important in maintaining ties of kinship. They explain, that in Tokelau, this is far from a romantic form of love, but is rather defined as a concern, compassion or affection that kin should have for one another. (Huntsman and Hooper 1997:115) The authors describes how families have common interests, and thus should “eat as one; live as one”. They write, “Tokelau people use the notion of kinship in a wide variety of contexts to convey a sense of common identity, purpose and destiny.” (Huntsman and Hooper 1997:116) Tuvalu share this notion of kin and *alofa* with Tokelau. The sharing of food is also an important aspect of familiar ties, which I will describe later in this chapter.

In the article “the desecration of Tokelau kinship”, (Hooper and Huntsman 1976) the authors describe the dynamics of the Tokelauan kinship system. One of the things I early came to notice during my fieldwork was the relationships between siblings and cousins. The authors explain the many rules of interactions between female and male siblings, but also writes, “in contrast to the reserve of brother and sister, the relationship between same-sex siblings is held to be the epitome of easy-going relationships, free of all restraints except the deference which a younger person owes to all elders.” (Hooper and Huntsman 1976) In this chapter, I will explain my own experiences with what came to be same-sex sibling relationships. In Tuvalu, it is not only age, that defines the dynamics of a relationship between people. Also the marital status of these two persons defines the relationship. An unmarried girl explained to me: “You see, a person who is married is seen as an adult. But an unmarried person is still not an adult. When a woman is married, she cannot do the

same things any more, or spend as much time with her cousins. One of my cousins and me, we used to be very good friends. I remember when her family wanted her to get married, she cried to me, saying that she did not want to marry the man. But then she changed her mind, because her sister and her father and everyone said to her it would be the best for the family if they married. So they got married. But after she got married, she stopped coming to talk to me. It is very sad, because now we don't talk so much anymore, and we used to be really close friends." This story shows how the relationships between unmarried and married female siblings or cousins change when one of them gets married. This is something I witnessed happen also during another wedding I Tuvalu. I will describe this more fully in later chapters. It is expected that the female cousins will resume their contact when the other person also marries, as they again will share the same status.

Personhood and stigma

To discuss the concept of personhood and family in Tuvalu, I shall now illustrate how important family-ties are for the notion of a person in Tuvalu. To do this, I will use examples from both Tuvalu and its neighbouring country Tokelau. Ingerd Hoëm writes in her book *Theatre and Political Process* about the discussion of social personhood in Tokelau, one of Tuvalu's closest neighbouring countries. Tuvalu and Tokelau share several cultural traits in regards to the way of behaving and what is regarded as proper moral behaviour. Tuvalu and Tokelau also share the concept of personhood and family-traits. She writes:

Returning to the discussion of social personhood and "the concept of person", this, in Tokelauan terms comprises, on the one hand, all the "sides", in the sense of relationships, that are seen to make up the social personae, and which the person partakes in. Moral evaluations of these "sides" relate strongly to the person's active engagement in these relationships. On the other hand, as the concept of personhood relates to ideas about individual identity and innate characteristics, a person is thought to inherit certain traits or skills or *uiga*, a word that also signifies "meaning". Thus, a man is said to "always come too late" and this is explained as a trait he inherited and that "runs in that family". Another woman may be considered a "funny person", and this is also explained as being a quality she has inherited. Such characterisations are common, and are part of the shared knowledge in the communities. (Hoëm 2004:137)

The view that a person will inherit certain traits from his or her family is also a common notion in Tuvalu. Besnier writes about how for example gossip, for the people of the atoll, is a trait that runs in certain families. (Besnier 2009:95) He writes that people inherit their *pona* – mark or stigma, through their adopted or biological families. He writes:

Whenever an individual's *pona* is mentioned, people immediately relate it to the familial *pona*, and the local discourse of personhood consists principally in searching for explanations of people's conduct in terms of the *pona* associated with their family. (...)Tuvaluans stigmatize Nukulaelae people for their propensity to gossip, Nukulaelae people attach the stigma to particular families, and family members (as well as Nukulaelae people in general) attach this stigma to the women of these families. (Besnier 2009:96)

He explains that a person's negatively inherited traits are more interesting to the inhabitants than possible positive traits, although these can also be inherited. A person from a family with a negative *pona* will have to work hard to distance themselves from his or her family, as the *pona* of the family helps define how people expect you to behave. (Besnier 2009:96) These family-run traits were also noticeably present in Nukulaelae during my stay. I was explained that the family I stayed with were known for their tendency to have conflicts. Some people of the community were concerned when I witnessed and sometimes were involved in these conflicts. They did not want me to see this aspect of community life. As Besnier mentions, it is not only blood relations that define these traits, also adopted or tied familiar bonds can make a person subject to this stigma. Adoption is common in Tuvalu, but another form of making family relations to one another, are for two people who have developed a close friendship to make a brother/sister of each other. I shall now discuss this more closely.

Tied-family

In Tuvalu, it is possible to do what is called "to bind siblings" with people from outside your family. (Besnier 2000:632) If a person makes someone his or her sibling, all of that person's family will become a part of the other family's relations. The two families will consider each other their kin, but the actual results will be depending on the closeness of the relationship. If other forms of adoption is included, and the two families are neighbours, they might for example start sharing the land they own. Created family is also something to take in to consideration when arranging a marriage. Weddings between persons, who are even remotely related by blood, will be frowned upon. These exogamic tendencies even discourage people from marrying someone from their own island, as they in such a small place inevitably will share a common bloodline. In addition to this, if a marriage between two people will break a so-called "tied family", there will most likely be negative voices against the marriage. At the same time as you can create family-ties with other families, it is also possible to break family-ties. If two people who come from families who have created family-ties with each other decide to marry, the previous family-ties will dissolve. Instead, the families will have ties to each other through marriage. If two people related to each other by blood decide to run off, and get married against their parents' wishes, they will, by doing this, dissolve the existing family-ties. This makes it possible for people coming after them to marry in the same family-lines without causing a scandal.

I will now discuss what it means to create a family-relation through making a sister or brother out of someone, based on my own experiences while in the field. Girls in Tuvalu are usually expected to spend time with people from their own family. If a girl becomes friends with a person from outside her family, this can be solved through creating a family-relationship with said person. To do this, both

of them agree to make the other their sibling. During my stay in Tuvalu, I was fortunate enough to make siblings with two girls and one boy. The first one of these was Mary. I lived in the same house as Mary and her children while in Nukulaelae. A week after arriving, I was walking with Sonia and Mary from our house and in to the village. Sonia told me Mary had asked her to ask me if I wanted to be her sister. I was confused, because I had never heard about the possibility of creating a sibling, and I did not know Mary that well at the time. Sonia told me that in Tuvalu you decide whom you like rather fast, and that I could say no, but that I would probably hurt her feelings. I said yes, and after that, we were sisters. By making a *ssai taina* – tied sister, with me, Mary in effect gave me a new status in the household. I was there as a family member, more than as an anthropologist. At this early time, they still referring to me as the “*palagi*” when they were talking about me. By tying sister with Mary, I became something more than just a *palagi*. I was told that sometimes they have a dinner when two people tie sisters, but not always. When it is two girls tying sisters, it is normal that the two just agree on it and let people know. They also have to start treating each other as sisters. For example by washing each other’s clothes, taking care of each other’s children, and by giving clothes and gifts to the other.

Most people after some time also came to see me as Sonia's sister from Norway. This was because Sonia and I both shared ties to Norway; therefore, we were regarded as sisters by blood, even if we never tied sisters. As I was viewed as Sonia and Mary's sister, people started to relax more around me. Other unmarried girls felt comfortable in talking to me about their boyfriends, as well as other things one would normally hide from people outside the family. One example of this is when I one evening was told about one of the family’s *vai laakau* - magic. Magic belongs to the families, and one should not talk to people outside the families about this. One evening, while talking to some friends in the family, I was explained some of the family magic. The story was about a ritual that could make a girl a virgin again. As there are two main families in Nukulaelae, and as I was seen as belonging to their family, I could know about this. However, they instructed me not to repeat what I had learned to our common friend who belonged to the other family group, as she was not supposed to know about this magic ritual.

Molly’s story

The second person asking me to become her sister I shall call Molly in this chapter. Molly and I met in Nukulaelae in January. However, my first connection with Molly was at a *tuisi* – a dance, in February. This was approximately one month after my arrival in Nukulaelae. She was drunk, although no one knew she had been drinking. There was a fight in the dance between her brother and her cousin, and Molly got very upset when she saw them fighting. Several people rushed to the place

where the fight started, and separated the two boys. When they had calmed down, she started screaming and crying to her brother because they had been fighting. Her brother started to get angry with her. People told her to calm down, but she kept crying how upset she was because of the fight. Her brother was also drunk, and got angry with her. Sonia stepped in the middle of them to stop him from hitting Molly. Later, he thanked Sonia for stopping him, saying he would have felt terrible if he had actually hit his sister.

One of Molly's male cousins dragged her away while she continued to cry. While keeping a grip on her arm, he was weakly shaking her and talking strictly to her. He was upset with her because of her behaviour. Sonia had told me the girl had been drinking, and that she was in trouble. I asked Sonia for the girl's name and walked up to her and her cousin. Taking her hand, I told her to come with us down to the beach. Her cousin let go of her, and left her to Sonia and me. He told us to take care of her and walk her home. Molly thanked us for taking her away from her angry cousin. After this, I had earned her trust. I had taken action and helped her out of a sticky situation. We walked along the beach to take her home. On the way to her house, we were told that her aunt was looking for her, and that she was angry. By bringing her home, and by later coming to check that she was ok, we showed *alofa* – love to Molly. After this incident, she started coming to our house to spend time with us. She stopped being shy in front of me because I was a *palagi*, as many were in the beginning, and started treating me as a friend.

Because Molly had been caught being drunk that night, she had had a fight with her aunt. She lived with her mother's sister because her mother was staying in Funafuti. The fight resulted in her running away from home to her friend's house. Her friend's father was her uncle, so she would be safe there. In the first few days, the two girls talked about how they loved living together, and always having someone to talk to. After about a week, this changed. Molly was afraid to go back to her aunt's house to get clothes so she could go to church. She had to borrow all her clothes from her friend, resulting in them not going to church on the following Sunday after the incident. Her friend's family started asking Molly to go and apologise to her aunt for her behaviour. Because Molly was afraid to face them, she continued to stay with her friend.

She started walking out at night alone, without having anyone to take her home. When Sonia and I found her like this, we had to walk her home, even if Molly wanted to sneak out to meet her boyfriend. I was explained that even if young girls usually help each other to go and meet their boyfriends, Sonia would be a bad sister for Molly if she did not help her to go the right way. This was because Molly was in a difficult situation living at her uncle's place. Two weeks after Molly moved to

her uncle, we went to visit her. She told us that no one had told her to come and eat the whole day. It would be very rude of her to go and eat unless asked to, so she went hungry. We bought her some noodles so she had something to eat. Still, her friend's family, both through actions and words, frequently reminded Molly that she should go apologise to her aunt.

A few days after this, Molly apologised to her aunt, and moved back to her aunt's house. Her aunt then forbade Molly to go outside of the house. She should only stay at home and do her chores as punishment. The other girls did not like this, and sent me to ask her aunt for permission to take her out for a walk from time to time. The girls sent me to ask, knowing that it would be very rude of Molly's aunt to say no. They knew that since I was a guest in the island, the pressure of treating visitors well would make it impossible for Molly's aunt to say no, when I came and asked to spend time with Molly. This meant that I had responsibility to make sure Molly did not do anything wrong while we were out. Her aunt asked me where we were going, and told us to not return too late. Even if the other girls ran away to meet their boyfriends, Molly stayed and talked with us the whole time.

Because of her problems with her aunt, Molly's mother had called and told her to come and stay with her in Funafuti instead. Molly did not want to go, but she had little choice in the matter. The day before the boat was supposed to leave for Funafuti, Molly and her friend came and stayed with us the whole day. They asked if we could have a "*palagi* night" and make food and spend time together the way *palagis* do. While borrowing our shower, Molly asked Sonia to ask me if I would like to be her sister. Both flattered and happy, as I liked Molly very much, I accepted. That night we had a dinner as a goodbye party for Molly, who left the following day. When she left, she left both Sonia and me some of her clothing as parting gifts.

After she left for Funafuti, it went two months before I saw her again. I was first introduced to Molly's mother, on the boat from Nukulaelae to Funafuti. She was introduced to me as my mother. We met Molly shortly after arrival in Funafuti. She had gotten a job at a store, and would not be going back to Nukulaelae in the near future. She wanted me to come and stay with her and her mother, because Sonia was going to get married to her boyfriend Isimeli, and move in to his family's house. I chose to continue to stay with Sonia, because I also made *ssai tuagaine* – tied brother, with Isimeli's younger brother. This, along with me being considered Sonia's sister, made it possible for me to continue staying with her when she moved in to her husband's family. Who I made brother or sister with, had a lot to say for my freedom of movement in the field. Girls are not supposed to go anywhere alone during the night. However, if they go somewhere with their sister or brother it is OK. It is the male cousin's duty to look after their female cousins. When Sonia got married in Funafuti, she was not

supposed to spend time with her unmarried friends any more. She was supposed to stay with her husband. I was instructed to ask my tied brother to come with me if I wanted to go anywhere after dark and needed company.

The relationship I ended up having with my two sisters in Tuvalu resulted in being very different in nature. This is because Mary was a married woman, and our relationship was somewhat distant compared with the relationship that I and Molly had. As Molly and I were both unmarried girls, we were expected to help each other and stand together against the married generation. It was an informal relationship. Same-sex siblings of the same marriage status can discuss and talk to each other on a common ground. This changes when one part is married, as a married person is considered older, and thus deserves respect. The dialogue should be in a more respectable manner, than between persons of the same marriage status. Molly would, during times of conflict with her aunt or other adult women on the atoll exclaim: “They don’t understand the life!” She was upset that they did not understand what it meant to be young. That they would gossip about things the young girls were doing, when they apparently had forgotten what it was like when they were unmarried themselves. My relationship to my married sister Mary was thus influenced by her being married and me being unmarried. We shared the same house, but Sonia and I were expected to ask her for permission if we wanted to do something. Mary had a responsibility to look after us, more so than Molly, who herself was an unmarried girl.

Looking after each other – Male and female cousins

Regarding the relationship between cross-sex siblings, this is described, as I have mentioned earlier, as being not as care-free as the relationship between same-sex siblings. Male cousins are, like illustrated in Molly’s example, supposed to look after their female cousins. They will reprimand them, and sometimes use physical force if the female cousin has behaved in what they see as an unacceptable way. What is regarded as unacceptable behaviour depends on the cousin, as some male cousins are regarded to be strict, while others are regarded to be more lenient. My female friends would sometimes jokingly refer to their male cousins as the “police”, when they came to check on them, when the girls were walking outside together during the night.

Male and female cousins will usually treat each other with respect. That is, the female cousins care about what their male cousins think of them, and the male cousins want their female cousins to be happy. Of the many rules regarding cross-sex cousin relationships, some are that male cousins are not supposed to see their female cousin’s underwear. Female cousins resting will lay on their side, rather than on their back when one of their male cousins are present. They will refrain from swearing in front

of each other, and are not supposed to be in the same room together alone. In my host family, Dan and Myra, two of Tagisia's adult children, both belonged to the household. As the house only had one room, Dan slept at his aunt's place, as he could not sleep inside the same room as his sister.

As the person I spent the most time with during my fieldwork was Sonia, it was her relationship with her male cousins, which I had most experience with. This relationship differed slightly from the other girls I knew and their relationships with their cousins, as Sonia is half-Norwegian, and the rules in some cases were not as strict. There is a difference between the cross-sex cousin and sibling relationships, depending on how close the relation is. I was explained that siblings have rules they must abide by, but that relationships between first cousins of the opposite sex, were subject to an even stricter set of rules. Previously, the relationship between cross-sex second cousins were also strict in Nukulaelae. However, I was told, that even if they in the old days would refrain from speaking to each other, this was now ok. Again, this differs from cousin to cousin. In Funafuti I witnessed second cousins jokingly dance together in a provocative manner, as well as talking about sex in front of each other. Cousins who has the most respectful relationship will often refrain from daily conversations. People will often tease each other about cousins whom they are respectful towards. This applies especially to first cousins. In Funafuti, the men in our household had a cousin in Nukulaelae who had gotten a child outside of marriage. Sonia would sometimes tease her husband by saying his cousin's name to him while laughing. He could reply by saying for example "Tee, go and marry Dan!" or another one of Sonia's male cousins names back to her in return.

Dan and Sonia had a relaxed relationship compared to the relationship Sonia had with her other male first cousins. I was explained that this was because Sonia's and Dan's mothers are sisters, making them more like brother and sister than like first cousins. The fact that they lived in the same household also made them develop a close friendship. Even if Sonia would have a polite distanced friendship with her other male cousins, she and Dan would at times hug each other and be more relaxed in regards to normal cross-sex cousin relationship rules. It is said that each cousin has their favourite cousin who they will do anything for, and for Sonia and Dan this was each other. Their actions were acceptable, because they were *alofa* – they showed great care and affection for each other. Dan would still have the ability to decide if Sonia should be allowed to do something, and Tagisia would ask Sonia to go with Dan if she wanted to do something after dark. Sonia, being Dan's female cousin could also have a say in which girls she thought was good enough for him, and reprimand him if he would drink too much. The actions between male and female cousins might at first glance appear as the female cousin having to do everything the male cousin says, but the relationship is, in essence, based on a mutual respect and compassion for each other, within the boundaries of their society.

My sister, Molly, also had her favourite cousin who she adored. She told me that even if they were second cousins, they regarded each other as brother and sister, and would do anything for each other. If a person is accused of doing something wrong, he might “promise on” his cousins that he did not do it. During Tuvalu Games in Funafuti, Nukulaelae team had a strict anti-alcohol rule during the games. Those who were caught drinking alcohol during the games were expelled from playing for Nukulaelae for the rest of their lives. Several people were caught, and expelled, during the games. One boy was also accused of drinking, although no one could prove he had done it. The team has several meetings in the Nukulaelae community hall in Funafuti regarding this case. This resulted in him “swearing on the heads of his cousins” that he had not been drinking. In the end, he was allowed to stay on the team. I was explained that as the cousins are the most important thing to a person, he would not swear on them if he was not speaking the truth.

To break a family bond

As family ties can be created, they can also be broken. During my stay in Nukulaelae, Sonia’s grandfather was celebrating his 90th birthday. He was now the oldest person on the island, and one of the oldest people in Tuvalu. All of his family members gathered, to prepare food and arrangements for the big day. During the preparing of the food, a young man came out to our house outside the village. Sonia and Tagisia was sitting in the kitchen hut, preparing fish and *pulaka* for the celebration. He brought with him a wheelbarrow with a single big *pulaka* filling it. He brought it all the way out to Tagisia’s house, because he did not dare bring it to Sonia’s grandfather’s house. Sonia told me that this man was adopted in-to their family, but that he several years ago had been caught doing something he should not have done with one of his adopted cousins. After this, Sonia’s grandfather had refused to speak to him for several years. Now that Sonia’s grandfather was turning 90, he wanted to make amends and contribute to the birthday by bringing the gift. He spent time talking to Tagisia and Sonia, explaining how sorry he was for what had transpired.

The breaking of a family is always dramatic and painful for the persons involved. Because everyone in the small society knew what this man had done, he was no longer considered a part of their family. He did not ask to be let back in as a member of their family; he only wanted to show his love for Sonia’s grandfather on his birthday. Although sexual relations are not supposed to happen between people who share a bloodline, they do occur. Children are, when they come of school age, explained to them their family genealogy, and who they are related to. Such relations between first and second cousins appeared to me as unspeakable, although I was told about certain instances where second cousins had caused a scandal in the past. If two people who were considered to be third-cousins had a relationship, they might say “Nooo, we are not family”, because someone previous to them had

already broken that family line, making it, in their mind, possible for them to have a relationship. Such relationships would still be frowned upon, and when someone would get pregnant with someone who their families considered to be too closely related, they might force the girl to use a *vai laakau* – a mix of oils and plants, to have the pregnancy terminated. If the parents approved, they would arrange for the young ones to marry.

Personhood and characters

Returning to the discussion of personhood, I shall now give examples of a generalised family role in the Nukulaelae community of great importance – the aunt. This is to further personify dilemmas faced by people in the Nukulaelae community in their day-to-day life. This life story will be based on typical aspects and persons in Nukulaelae. Arne Perminow discusses in his book *The Long Way Home*, from his fieldwork from Tonga, generalization as a way of insight in to a community. He states that:

Rising above the peculiarities of social interaction to the generalization of a situation and of social processes means losing much of the richness and complexity of social life. (...) If, however, in the procedure of discovery one succeeds in transcending the reign of peculiarities isolating or generalizing from the empirical material some of the factors influencing action, it is possible to gain insight into processes involving aggregates of individuals over time. (Perminow 1994:4)

He argues that generalization is a one-way process. It is possible to take a situation and generalize from it, but it is not possible to use such a generalization to predict people's behaviour, as the total complexity of each situation will differ. (Perminow 1994:4) As he wished to make a generalization of a typical day in the life of a young Tongan boy, I have, to some extent, used generalization to explain close relations, based my own experiences of actual occurrences. To say something general about a society is risky, as it will always be situations in which people act differently. However, I agree with Perminow that it is possible to discover situations that affects a number of people, by explaining reoccurring dilemmas in people's social life. To give one such example, I will now give a short generalized characteristic of a Tuvaluan aunt.

The aunt

She is a 55 year old married woman from Nukulaelae. She was born and raised in the island, and have never been outside of Tuvalu. She has three children. Her unmarried son goes to school in Vaitupu. Her two married daughters has moved to their husbands homes, who are from other Tuvaluan islands. She had one child outside of marriage, but her youngest two were born inside of marriage. In her youth, she was known to be beautiful, and is said to have made a lot of boys fall in love with her. She is bitter with the life she lives on the island. She wished she had married a *palagi*, so she could have moved away from Nukulaelae, and not have to do all the hard manual labour she has to do. She had great concern for her nieces and nephews, and some of the young nieces might feel that she meddles in things that does not concern her. She goes to church on Sundays, and stays to

gossip with the other women after the ceremony is finished. She is a social person, who enjoys conversation with others. She is regarded as a flirting person, as she enjoys teasing and flirting with men. She feels more at home in Funafuti, and she wants to move there, but she lacks money. To live in Funafuti would be too expensive for her, she says. She has a lot of compassion for her youngest son, whom she never yells at. Her two older daughters will however be heavily reprimanded if they were to do something wrong, whether in the upbringing of her grandchildren or cooking. She is quick to engage in “politics” – a term used by native in Nukulaelae regarding people who talk to and about each other to further their own cause. When she feels happy and content, she is a warm and fun person to be around, but when she feels out of place or as she is being wronged, she will use either words or physical retributions against the one who offended her. When she feels she is not in control she gets angry. In the household, it is clear that she is the one in charge, and not her husband. This is partly because her husband is from another island. She would recommend her nieces to marry people from outside the island, and made both her daughters marry early to people from other islands. If someone tries to undermine her authority, she will either yell at them, or talk about them to the other villagers.

By giving this example, I have tried to give a generalization of a Tuvaluan aunt, as young unmarried girls might see her. By doing this I wish to explain to the reader, some of the dynamics of middle-aged Tuvaluan woman, and which factors may affect them. I also wish to say something about what roles they possess with regard to their female nieces in particular. An aunt often has the ability to mediate between a young girl and her mother. In cases like Molly, where the mother lived in another island, the aunt will work as a mother figure for the girl. However, the aunt will usually be stricter than the girl’s mother would have been in the same situations, as the responsibility falls more heavily on her shoulders when she is looking after her brother or sisters child. If she were to adopt one of her sibling’s children as her own, she will usually be considered the child’s rightful mother.

Sharing

Another aspect where generalization will be relevant in explaining aspects of Tuvaluan life is situations regarding the sharing of food or drinks. As mentioned earlier, to eat together and to share food, is a part of what is considered to be a family. There are rules about the sharing of food, and from whom it is permitted to accept food. Ideally, you are not supposed to accept food from anyone who are not in your family. Even if they will tell you to come and eat with them, the polite thing to do is decline. If you do not decline, people will talk about you and your family. They might state that your family has no food, and that this is the reason why you would go to a stranger’s house to eat. If someone were to state that your family had no food, this would be shameful for your family, who does not want to appear as poor. Another reason for not accepting food from people outside your family is the fear of black magic. I was explained that there are multiple ways to curse food. Either by whispering words over it or adding spit or other substances. This will make the person the curse is meant for ill, but will not affect other people. Cursing food can also be a way to make someone fall in

love. Because of this, I was warned by my family to not accept for example chewing gum or soda from boys I did not know.

Another situation in which sharing becomes a central theme, is during the consummation of alcohol. Drinking is a social activity, and the principle is to share all the alcohol with the group. In opposition to food, drinks in Nukulaelae will be shared between people who might not be close kin. It is regarded as a men's activity, and they will all bring their own alcohol to the group. If a person is known for having a lot of alcohol, people might go to him to ask him for a bottle, or to join him. They will usually sit in a circle. One person will be the "bartender" as they call him. He has the alcohol, whether it is the bottle of *kao*, or a bag of wine they had gotten on the boat from Funafuti. The whole group will share one cup or glass. The bartender will fill the cup with the amount he sees fitting, giving it to one of the men for him to drink in one shot. The man will then give the cup back to the bartender, who will fill it again giving it to the next person in the group. The bartender can decide to give a lot to one person, and less to another, thus having control over who gets the most drunk. As the group will share all the alcohol, they will be hesitant to let too many people join the group, if they only have a couple of bottles to share. However, if someone is trying to hide their drinks from the others, or start drinking before the others arrive, this could result in fights. The sharing of alcohol resembles the sharing of other goods or food in the island. If a person is cheap and refuse to share what he or she has, he will become unpopular with his peers who will slander him, or at times outright confront him.

Many young men in Nukulaelae would drink regularly, and sometimes the unmarried girls would hide and drink with their male cousins or with each other. The consumption of alcohol is regarded as a male activity, and girls will usually be careful not to be discovered by anyone if they were to drink. They fear that the older women in the village will speak badly of them if they knew that they had been drinking. As Sonia and I both were considered to be *palagis*, the rules were not as strict for us as for the other girls. Sonia's male cousins would sometimes invite us to drink with them, including us as a part of their group. Even so, drinking is regarded as a cause for immoral behaviour. As a woman in Nukulaelae is supposed to be a virgin when she marry, it is feared that she will be easier to pressure in to something if she were to be drunk. When drunk, the men would sometimes fight, throw stones at houses or scream their despair in the village. It was said that men who were nice and quiet when they were sober would be the worst when they were drunk. This was because they kept all their feelings bottled up inside, causing it to come out when they got something to drink. If a drunk person disturbed the peace and quiet in the village, the islands police officer would come and catch the person responsible for the trouble. He would then put him in

handcuffs attached to an abandoned tractor. Here, he would sit for 24 hours, until he had cooled off. To be put in lockup would sometimes jokingly be referred to as “riding the tractor” by the younger generation.

Summary

In this chapter, I have explained some of the family dynamics in Tuvaluan kinship relations. By both generalization and personal recollections, I have discussed different ways to create, and behave as family. I have tried to illustrate how actions of love and sharing are important aspects in regards to family relations in Tuvaluan society. I have discussed my personal experience with creating a “tied-sister” and what this meant for my stay in the field. By explaining the relationship between cousins, I have intended to describe an important aspect of the lives of young people on the islands. By showing how people create, and sometimes dissolve family relations, I have tried to illustrate the importance of family. Belonging to a family affects both who you socialize with, where you can move on the island, as well as who you can share food and eat with. By giving the example of Molly and her aunt, as well as a generalization of a Tuvaluan aunt, I wish to show the importance of the aunt in Tuvaluan family relations.

By giving these examples, I have also ventured in to the topic about how conflicts are solved in the island. This is illustrated both in the example of the young boy who brought *pulaka* for Sonia’s grandfather to apologise, as well as Molly who was encouraged to go and apologise to her aunt. Offenders are encouraged to go and apologise to their elders if they have done something wrong. Even in instances where they feel they have done nothing wrong, I was told that the young unmarried girls had to accept their punishments from their parents, and cry their tears quietly. It was explained to me that “You have to accept to be yelled at by your parents and your aunts, because in the end, it will always be them that are there to take care of you.” However, the ideal that young girls have to keep quiet and accept the reprimands they get from their elders, sometimes made them snap under the pressure. I was told about an instance when one of Sonia’s female cousins had snapped and thrown a teapot at her aunt’s head in anger. Still, even if family situations might put pressure on the young generation, the notion of *alofa* is present in regards to most family matters. In a family, one is always supposed to take care of each other, forgive each other, share ones goods, and show actions of love. In the next chapter, I shall further discuss family relations regarding love, conflict and forgiveness by the means of an example.

Chapter 4

Love and Marriage

Inside the room, alone on the bed sits Sonia crying. Its night-time, and the other family members are in the other house. They are dealing with a conflict between Sonia's cousin Dan and another boy. Sonia is listening to the song "Ionatana" on the computer repeatedly. The song is about a husband leaving his wife. Outside the tiled windows stands a boy I shall call Michael. Earlier the same night Molly, Sonia's cousin had dragged Sonia away after the local youth group meeting. She needed to tell Sonia something important. Michael, Sonia's long time on and off boyfriend was going to marry another girl. The wedding was rumoured to take place when the girl arrived on the boat from Funafuti. Michael, standing outside the window, has been drinking. He starts crying as well, promising Sonia that he is not going to marry the other girl. He says he will marry Sonia. Sonia is angry with him, and kicks the windowsill shut with her foot. He continues to open the window, while she kicks it shut again and tells him to go away. After trying for a while longer to talk to her, he is forced to leave when the conflict between Sonia's cousin Dan and the other boy escalates. Later Sonia regrets refusing him, but he is gone and does not come back for several days.

Introduction

In the previous chapters, I have given a description about Tuvalu and Nukulaelae, as well as entered the discussion about the meaning of place, family and personhood in the islands. In this chapter, I will use this in order to discuss love and the situation for young people in Tuvalu, and relate this to the anthropological discussion of moral reasoning. I shall examine how people govern change in their society with regards to a marriage, were one person is Tuvaluan, and the other is half *palagi*. What kind of rules and expectations does the young generation in Tuvalu have to cope with? Are these rules changing? What are people's reactions to uncustomary changes, in regards to a customary tradition like marriage?

Customary and uncustomary are both expressions Tuvaluans use themselves. Custom and customary behaviour is defined as behaviour that ensures social continuation of past and often moral traditions. To act in accordance to custom, is to behave in what is regarded as the "proper way" in different situations. A customary situation, I shall define as a situation that is subject to many of these expectations regarding behaviour and tradition. Tagisia would, if for example I had misunderstood how I should behave, say "that is not the custom here. In Tuvalu the custom is to do "this" instead." Uncustomary behaviour, I will in this thesis define as behaviour that breaks with

what people regard as proper moral or “right” response to a situation. An uncustomary situation, I shall define as a situation that in essence breaks with what Tuvaluans regard as proper custom. In this chapter, I shall describe both customary and uncustomary situations, and also explain how people might act in a way they regard as being in accordance to custom in an uncustomary situation.

In this chapter, I have decided to use different names on most of the parts involved in the story, except Sonia and Isimeli, who have agreed to me using their names. As this chapter will touch upon sensitive subjects, I have gotten special permission from Sonia to write her story. Because of her distinct situation, it would be easy to recognise her for people of the small community even if I used a different name. As Sonia now has moved away from Tuvalu, I am allowed to use her name in this chapter. She will also be able to read and approve of this chapter in advance to its publishing.

Sonia grew up partly in Norway, Tuvalu, Fiji and Australia. Her mother is from Nukulaelae, and her father is a Norwegian man who met Sonia’s mother during his visit in Nukulaelae. (Dahl 1992) The fact that she is only half Tuvaluan, and has experienced both the Tuvaluan as well as the *palagi* way of life makes Sonia both inside and outside of the Tuvaluan community. She is included in the daily life, but when conflicts arise, she is sometimes told she does not belong, and that she should move back to Norway. Other times, people would ask her in all sincerity why she would choose to live in Tuvalu, when she had the opportunity to live like *palagis*? This also made her the target of jealousy. When her mother sent her packages from Australia, these would mysteriously disappear on the boat between Funafuti and Nukulaelae. However, her being a half *palagi*, combined with her outgoing and caring personality, has also made her an attractive spouse. During her stay in Tuvalu, she has had to decline several proposals. ⁵

It was explained to me, that in Tuvalu it is normal for unmarried people to have several *spuun* – flirts, and one *famau* – true boyfriend or girlfriend. The *spuun* was described as a casual boyfriend or girlfriend, but the *famau* was the one you kept in your heart. An unmarried girl explained to me:

⁵ The fact that she would decline a marriage proposal is heavily humiliating for the man asking her to be his wife. In Nukulaelae, the man will often appear at the girl’s house with either his uncle or friend to ask her hand in marriage. In Funafuti, the custom is that the boy waits at home, and sends an older relative, like his father or uncle to ask in his stead. A marriage proposal is often called a *fekau*. First, the visitors will introduce themselves, and explain their purpose for coming. The owner of the household will bid the guest to sit down to talk with them. Then the girl’s relatives, in Sonia’s case her aunt and her cousin, in other cases the parents, will say if they think they should get married or not. The girl will be the last to give her opinion, and if the parents say yes, and the girl says no, they will normally still get married. If the girl says yes, and the parents say no, it will not be a wedding. In Sonia’s case, her opinion was regarded to have more value, as she could refuse to marry someone she did not want to marry by calling her father, and say to him that she did not want to get married, making him call off the wedding. I was explained that when declining a marriage proposal, it was important to speak of the good things regarding the boy, and also specify that it was nothing wrong with him. To decline a proposal might make the girl appear as if she thinks of herself as better than the boy. This would be quite unpopular in a society where people are supposed to be equals. (Besnier 2009)

“Until a person finds their *famau*, they have several *spuuns*. When a person finds the one they want to keep in their heart, they agree with him to only be with each other.” I was surprised when I for the first time discovered that three of my unmarried female friends all were *spuun* with the same boy. None of them thought of it as a problem. They would all stay friends regardless. The problems arose however, when two people both got strong feelings for the same person. Rumours, arguing, and the girl doing little things to ruin for each other in the competition for the boys love would happen. I was told, and witnessed, the girls competing with each other when it came to who was considered to be the best marriage subject by the elder generations. This would for example happen during food making for a birthday or funeral. A girl could for example be told to get something by the other girls, that in the end would make her look stupid in front of the older women present.

The opening story is about Sonia and Michael. As they were fourth cousins, their relationship was forbidden by their families. It is generally frowned upon when people in even remote families become romantically involved. As explained in the previous chapter, even if it is frowned upon it sometimes happens. As Nukulaelae is a small island with under 400 inhabitants, everyone is in some way related to each other. Sonia told me that her grandfather had said he wished for all his grandchildren to marry with people from other islands. These exogamic tendencies applied mainly to the institution of marriage. Even if they could only marry with a boy from another island, the girls would often have boyfriends from their own island as well. Sonia’s aunt would also encourage her to marry to a man from another island, and have him move to Nukulaelae. That way she would be on her family’s land, and would have more to say in family matters than the husband, as explained with the example with the men in our household in chapter two.

When it came to Sonia and Michael, they were forbidden to be together by Sonia’s family. Not only because they were fourth cousins, but also because Sonia’s grandfather had an old argument with Michael’s grandfather about the ownership of land. As there are two main family groups in Nukulaelae, both these argue over the inheritance of land. As described in previous chapters, the land owned by a family is important when it comes to the gathering of food and yearly income. The conflicts over ownership of land have a far reach in to the community, and will come to light in island politics, gossip and other affairs. ⁶

Even if marriage generally is regarded as something to be done of convenience, there is a strong affection for tragic love stories. In songs and stories, the tragic tales of two people who cannot have

⁶ Politics, or *politiki* is as explained in chapter three a word Tuvaluans themselves use to describe actions or words, used by people to further their own agendas in different matters.

each other comes to light. Songs are often used to cope with emotions, and when someone shows signs of depression, others might start to sing a song describing their pain. Several of the girls advised Sonia to stay away from Michael for her own sake, even though this might have been advice speaking from jealousy. Another of Sonia's cousins was also in love with him, and these two would often compete and quarrel with each other for his attention. Sonia's family would get angry if they saw them together, or if Michael came to the house during the night to speak with Sonia. At one point, there had been many weeks since Sonia and Michael had spent time together, and Sonia was distressed. I asked Michael why he had stopped coming to the house, upon which he answered, "Sonia's uncle told me I should stay away. Because we are family. And he is my uncle too. I love my uncle and my family, so I listen to him."

The court case

To describe Sonia's marriage and the situation with Michael, it is necessary to describe her background in Tuvalu. Four years before my arrival in Tuvalu, two men raped Sonia on the boat between Vaitupu and Funafuti. She was traveling with her aunt, and it happened while she went to the toilet during the night. Sonia described to me:

After I managed to run away and came back up, my aunt woke up by my crying. I was full of bruises, and she hit me. She was screaming "What happened? What happened? Have you been raped?" I could not say anything, I was just crying. After we came back to Funafuti I went to the doctor. The doctor said he would help me. After I went to the doctor, we went to the police station to press charges. There had never been anyone sentenced to prison for rape in Tuvalu before. My family asked me if I was sure if I wanted to press charges. One of my uncles wanted me to marry one of the men who had raped me, seeing as we now already had had sex. I refused, and luckily, my aunt supported me. The wife of one of the men called us on the phone the day after. She said they would give me a lot of money, rice, clothes and other things if I would drop the charges. Then my aunt grabbed the phone and screamed, "Do you think Sonia is for sale?" And then she slammed the phone down. Ha ha, I love my auntie. But then when it became clear that I would not drop the charges, the families of the two men became angry. In Tuvalu, when someone tries to apologise, you are actually compelled to forgive them. It is forgive and forget here. But I wanted them to go to jail. Usually they say the girl is to blame if she is raped. So people were very angry with me. Some stood outside the house and screamed words. Or they tried to throw stones. It was very scary. I had to be with the police all the time. People threatened to hurt my family. My family in Australia paid for me to go to Norway to get away from everything here. I went to Norway for two years. The men were let out of prison in wait for the court case. There is a court case only like twice a year, when a judge comes from New Zealand to take all the criminal cases. When the waiting for the court case was finished, the Tuvaluan government paid for me to come back for the court case. The rumours were the worst during this time. My male cousins got in a lot of fights with the boys from the other family, and one of the rapists brother said he would rape all of my female cousins. At the same time, some of my family felt I was the one to blame. And since one of the men also was from Nukulaelae, there was a lot of

conflict in the island because of this. Both of the court cases were sent live on the radio, so everyone in Tuvalu could hear what happened. They were both sentenced to the maximum punishment of seven years. It was the first rape cases in Tuvalu where the men were sentenced to prison by trial.

The last court case finished nine months before I arrived in Nukulaelae. Some implications of the court case were still present. People mentioned it during conflicts, and some people in Funafuti were still angry with Sonia. However, as time went by I got to witness several people apologising to Sonia for fighting with her. Even one man, who was related to one of the rapists, and whom I was told had been very angry with Sonia and her mother during the court case, even to the extent of coming to their house to threaten them after the court case. However, during my stay he showed a great amount of sympathy and concern for Sonia when she was hurt by a drunk relative. Sonia had tried to stop two boys who was about to fight outside our house, when one of them had spun around and hit Sonia in the head, making her fall to the ground. The man, who in the past had been angry with Sonia, had stood beside the house when it happened. He ended up carrying Sonia in to our house, while saying “Sonia, don’t die, don’t die!” The forgive and forget attitude I repeatedly was told about is demonstrated in this example. Even if a person does something wrong in the eyes of the community, they will usually be forgiven over time. However, when new conflicts arise, old conflicts will be brought up by the participants to use against the other party.

The court case had a great deal to say for my fieldwork. With Sonia as my main informant, I was often introduced to people based on how they had behaved during the court case. For example, Sonia would say, “This is “name” but I don’t like her, because she did “bad things” during the court case, and is in “rapists” family”. In the regard of Sonia and Michael, her friends would sometimes tell her that if the rape had not happened, and she had to leave Tuvalu, then she and Michael would already have been married. However, because she left, they never got back to the way things were before. Instead, during my stay, Sonia would come to marry another man.

Sonia and Isimeli

Sonia told me that Isimeli had approached her already during the first day of the court case. Even if he was related to one of the rapists, he had come and sat next to Sonia before the meeting. This was in a period where she did not have a lot of support in the community, and she said she could still remember him offering her a cigarette. During this time, Sonia’s family wished for her to marry. One of Sonia’s aunts in Funafuti and Isimeli’s mother were close friends. Sonia’s aunt wanted Sonia to marry Isimeli. At this time Sonia’s mother and another aunt wanted her to marry a police officer, so this marriage proposal was declined. During my time in Nukulaelae, Isimeli was regularly

present. He seldom talked to us. Instead he would talk to Tagisia and Efata in the kitchen hut after getting toddy from his family's coconut tree behind our house. He also became a friend of Dan, Sonia's cousin. Sonia would sometimes comment, "Look, there is the one who asked to marry me. Now he is trying again by befriending my family."

The fact that he never came to our house only to talk to Sonia, helped him avoid the negative consequences the other boys who tried to come and talk to her received. Because of what had happened to Sonia, her family was especially afraid of anything else happening to her. She often had stricter rules than the other girls on the island did. In regards to drinking, smoking and her relationships with her male cousins, she had more freedom since she was half *palagi*. However, in situations regarding what time she should be home, and whom she should spend time with, she sometimes were not allowed to do things the other girls were allowed to. Prior to my arrival, she spent most of her time in the house, seldom spending time with the other girls. When I arrived, this changed, as she would accompany me if I wished to go somewhere. In the beginning, this made Tagisia quite upset, as she now was expected to take care of two *palagis* whom she could not protect when they left the house. Isimeli's brother would later tell a story about when he had been in Nukulaelae. He had tried to go to Sonia's house because he liked her. However, his aunt, who is married to Sonia's uncle, had stopped him and warned him not to go. He told me "But I did not listen. I went anyway. So then my aunt, she hit me and yelled at me. I don't know how Isimeli did it."

As time went by, Isimeli and Sonia started to talk. The day the coconut trees behind our house were torn down, as described in chapter two, Sonia stood beside him grinning and asked me in Norwegian if I thought they would make a nice couple. After this, their relationship became more and more serious. He would walk us home from events in the community call, and show concern for Sonia like any of her other relatives would. As Tagisia and Efata accepted him, they welcomed it rather than rejected it. This continued until he again asked her to marry him. He was going back on the next boat to Funafuti, as his parents lived there. He wanted her to come to Funafuti on the next boat. Sonia's aunt and uncle did not like this. They told me that it would be appropriate for Isimeli to come and get Sonia if he wanted to marry her, not expect her to go on the boat to Funafuti alone. Funafuti was still considered a dangerous place to be for Sonia. Many people there were still angry about the court case, so her family did not want her to go.

Isimeli left on the boat, after telling his family in Nukulaelae about him and Sonia. Sonia stayed in Nukulaelae for three more weeks. He called from Funafuti and told her that he wanted her to come

on the boat, but that he could not come and get her. Sonia was undecided whether she should go or not. But because her family seemed to approve more of Isimeli than Michael, she considered him to be the better option. As time went by, Sonia decided to go to Funafuti. Not to get married, but because she had to go to the hospital there. Her ear was hurt and needed medical attention. The police boat had arrived for a work-shop in Nukulaelae, and we were told it was possible to join the boat back to Funafuti. The ordinary boat to Nukulaelae was scheduled to leave the following week. The plan was to only spend a couple of days in Funafuti and take the first boat back. Others from Nukulaelae also used this as an opportunity to go to Funafuti for some shopping. Sonia wanted to talk to Isimeli and have time to decide what to do. However, when she arrived in Funafuti, both her and Isimeli's family took this as a sign they were getting married, and began to arrange the wedding.

The preparations

Sonia's aunt in Funafuti was very happy that she was going to marry Isimeli. It was she who had tried to get them to marry the previous time. In the first couple of days during our stay in Funafuti, she came to talk to Sonia about the wedding. It was her opinion, that because of Sonia's situation and the court case, it was important to have the wedding as soon as possible, before anyone could find out about it. She was afraid of the "politics" others would attempt in order to stop the wedding from happening.⁷ She wanted Sonia to have a small wedding as soon as possible. She told Sonia she would not have time to wait for the arrival of her family from Nukulaelae, or that her parents would come from Australia. This made Sonia cry, as she wanted both her grandfather in Nukulaelae and her parents to be there for her wedding. She felt that things were moving too fast and that she had no say in the matter.

At the same time as her aunt was rushing the arrangement of the wedding, other family members approached Sonia to say that they would not attend the wedding if she were to marry Isimeli. During the court case, this family had lived with Isimeli's family. However, due to an argument they had to move. They also felt that Isimeli's family had taken the other side during the court case and could not be trusted. People who had opinions about the wedding repeatedly approached Sonia. Even if Sonia's aunt wanted the wedding to happen without anyone knowing, several people had gotten word of the wedding arrangements. The woman who owned the hostel we were staying at was against it, and decided to raise our rent for the room drastically, when she got word of the wedding. This resulted in Sonia and me having to move to a guesthouse owned by some of Isimeli's

⁷ See chapter three for a definition of politics.

family. The fact that she moved to her future husband's land before their marriage, was not popular with some of her family, who would rather have us stay at the hotel. They meant that Sonia and Isimeli were supposed to move together after the wedding, not in front of it.⁸

Even if her aunt tried to rush the wedding, Sonia did not want to marry before her family from Nukulaelae and her parents had gotten the opportunity to arrive. The boat went to Nukulaelae, and Sonia's family had to rush with the slaughtering of pigs, gathering of coconuts and coconut crabs that comes with preparing a wedding. Sonia was told on the phone that people were arguing about who was slaughtering the most pigs, and who was going to attend the wedding. In the end, many of Sonia's cousins, her grandfather, aunts and uncles came on the boat. Of the ones who stayed behind, some did because they had to, and others because they opposed the wedding. One of Sonia's uncles, who was unable to attend the wedding, called Sonia on her mobile. During our time in Nukulaelae, he had been angry with her. He had spread rumours, and called Sonia's parents to complain about her. He called her to apologise for his behaviour. Now that she was getting married, he wanted them to be friends and said he realised he had been wrong in behaving like he did.

Sonia's family from Nukulaelae arrived on the boat. As most of them had family members living in Funafuti, they stayed with them. Sonia's aunt Tagisia, some of her cousins and her grandfather stayed with Sonia's aunt in Funafuti. Here, the most of the preparations and cooking for Sonia's family would take place. Two other houses were also used for cooking, and people were driving on motorbikes from house to house, to bring goods or request items they needed. Isimeli's family would do their preparations in their own families' cooking huts or kitchens.⁹

After a lot of organising, and Isimeli's parents talking to some people they knew, Sonia's parents were able to get airplane tickets on the plane from Fiji. These tickets are normally difficult to get at such a short notice. Sonia's mother Emma arrived two days before Sonia's father and brother. When Sonia's mother arrived, everyone gathered at Sonia's aunt's house to welcome her. As Emma had been away from her family for over a year, the greeting was warm, but rushed as everyone was stressed, and had a lot to do. Emma had to head for a funeral right after she arrived, but when this was finished Sonia went to pick her up with a motorbike. Sonia later told me what happened:

⁸ Virilocal tendencies are normal in Tuvalu. The bride is expected to leave her family and join the husband's family when she gets married. She is supposed to be the new woman of the house, so that the husband's mother can relax.

⁹ Most houses in Funafuti has a kitchen hut connected to it like in Nukulaelae. However, the use of this is slightly less frequent, as many houses also have kitchens inside the house.

And then mom just said I had to come with her. We went to my family's house next to the Nukulaelae maneapa. Inside were many of my uncles, some of my cousins and aunts. They were all sitting along the wall, and I had to sit in front of them while they questioned me. They all asked me many questions, and seemed angry. I started to cry because I was scared. They asked if someone was forcing me to marry. If I was pregnant. If I really wanted to marry Isimeli. I said to my mother in Norwegian "mom, you are being really scary now." To which she answered in Norwegian "I know Sonia, but this is tradition" and then she continued to yell at me in Tuvaluan. It was horrible. After they had finished asking me all the questions, they also cried and everything was ok. They said they only wanted the best for me. But they were angry at my aunt here in Funafuti, because she had tried to rush the wedding, and only wanted a small wedding. My mother said, "does she think my daughter is an animal? You have to have a big wedding." Since I am the first-born, I am actually supposed to have a big wedding. My aunt did not say anything against it then. She had wanted me to have a small wedding because of the court case, but it was because of the court case that my mother and family wanted me to have a big wedding. They wanted me to show everyone that I could marry properly. Because everyone now knows I am not a virgin, many people has said that no man in Tuvalu would want to marry me. By having a big wedding we would prove them wrong.

After the talk was finished, everything speeded up when it came to the planning. It was decided that the wedding reception was to take place in Funafuti's hotel. The hotel would take care of a lot of the food. The meeting and arrival of Emma all happened Tuesday before the wedding. The signing of the papers was planned to happen on Thursday, and the wedding reception on Friday. The following Sunday after a wedding is said to be the most important day, where the family deliver the bride in to the grooms family.

The days prior to the wedding, family members of the bride and groom went out to their land on the outer islands of Funafuti to gather food and firewood. The people who remained in Funafuti spent their time cooking, although the many people staying in the same house ate a lot of the food cooked these days. Tagisia, who had come from Nukulaelae, spent a lot of her time in the second floor of the Funafuti aunt's house smoking or doing preparation work. The down-stairs floor was usually crowded and hectic, making people who wanted some peace and quiet go upstairs. Motorbikes are frequently used in Funafuti, and people went back and forth on the bikes. Some went to buy cloth for making dresses, others for buying food or drinks; others again went to rent loudspeakers. Everyone came to Sonia's mother to get money for all the things they needed, or if there was any problems. This was making Emma, Sonia's mother, so stressed that she in the end stood still with her hand on her face unable to say a thing.

As people were cooking, sewing dresses and arranging the wedding, some cousins of the bride and groom went around collecting money from all their cousins. The dollar bills were to be made in to a

crown of money, presented to them on their wedding day.¹⁰ Thursday was the arrival of Sonia's father and brother. People arrived to greet them at the airport. Sonia's brother, now thirteen, had not been in Tuvalu since he was two years old. Toe, Sonia's grandfather had not seen his grandchild in all that time, and was very happy to see him. When Sonia's father and brother arrived at her aunt's house, the children danced for them to show their happiness.

Because of the court case, some in Sonia's family were worried that someone would try to sabotage the wedding. As mentioned in previous chapters, the girl is usually supposed to be a virgin when she marries. One of my female friends later explained this to me. She said that if you are a virgin, then you want to have a big wedding. Because then your family can be proud of you. She said "But I'm not a virgin. My mother asked me if I had sex with a boy. I said yes. She was disappointed but she understood. When I marry, I want it to be a small wedding. I don't want people to talk about it."

To check that the girl is a virgin when she marry, the bride or groom's family usually puts a white sheet on the bridal bed. Both families prepare a room with a white sheet, but only one is used. The family will wait outside for the married couple to finish and send out the white sheet. An older woman will then control the sheet and see if the blood is real. I was told that some girls knew just the right spot on the body to cut to make it appear as virgin blood. Sonia's family was concerned that some of Isimeli's female cousins might put a white sheet on the bed on purpose, even if they knew she was not a virgin.

As Isimeli's cousins was preparing their room, I talked to another one of Sonia's female cousins outside. She said "You know about the white sheet? Sonia is lucky. They won't do it with her because they already know. But it's worse for the rest of us. I don't want to marry in Tuvalu. But it's better here in Funafuti than in Nukulaelae. In Nukulaelae they are really strict." I asked what would happen if they found out that the girl was not a virgin. She explained, "Sometimes her family will be really angry with her. Especially her cousins will be ashamed. But sometimes, they will decide to keep it a secret from everyone else, even if she is a virgin. Other times, if she is a virgin, they will be really happy and have another feast. If she is not a virgin, sometimes the family of the husband will say they don't want them to be married at all, so they send her back to her parents. Or they can let them continue to be married, but his family will hate the girl."

¹⁰ The currency used in Tuvalu is Australian Dollars

During the preparations, people would sometimes argue with each other for failing to “follow tradition” as they described it. Others complained that people invented traditions, just to get Sonia’s parents to buy more stuff. During my time in Tuvalu, I got to attend two weddings. They were somewhat different, but the main themes reoccurred. Conflicts are associated with such big events, as everyone has their own ideas and wishes for how things are to be done, and how to best follow local custom.

The signing of the papers

The signing of the papers is a formal ceremony where the bride and groom, along with their witnesses, go to the island council to make their marriage application formal. This meeting was in Sonia’s and Isimeli’s case set to happen on Thursday, May the 17th. Only two weeks after Sonia arrived in Funafuti on the boat from Nukulaelae. This was also the same day as Sonia’s father and brother arrived. After greeting her family, Sonia was taken up to the second floor of her aunt’s house. It had been decided that I should be Sonia’s witness, seeing as I was her guest. The witness are supposed to follow the bride and groom through all of their ceremonies, sitting by their side and helping them if they need anything. They are also there to sign the marriage-papers along with the bride and groom. A couple of Sonia’s female cousins dressed up both her and me. The bride or groom and his or her witness are dressed in matching clothing. With matching shirts or dresses, only the amount of flowers and leaves covering them separates the witness from the person who is about to be married.

After changing and putting on makeup upstairs, she went downstairs. Here, her family members gave her a garland of flowers to have on her head, and a single flower to put behind her ear. A garland of leaves was also put around her waist. People were rushing, afraid that they were going to be late. The bride and me as the witness were driven to the island council’s house in a car her father had rented for the purpose. Bringing cakes and refreshments along with us in the car. Others who wanted to see what happened followed on motor bikes.

A wedding in Tuvalu usually lasts several days. Five important events reappear in the Tuvaluan weddings I witnessed. The first is the signing of the papers at the island council. This can happen the same day as the main wedding, or one of the days before. Here the bride and groom, along with their witnesses will appear in front of representatives of the council. The bride and groom have to swear on a bible that they will speak the truth, and answer questions while standing up. The ones who are not answering questions are sitting on a bench with their witnesses by their side. It is normal to have one, two or even more witnesses. In Sonia’s and Isimeli’s case, they only had one

witness each. Sitting on the bench along with the witnesses and the bride and groom was Sonia's father. He also had to swear on a bible, and was there because he was Sonia's father. The witnesses were not expected to do or say anything here.

Even if this event was talked about as the signing of the papers, the actual signing of papers would happen the day after in church. Here, the government of Tuvalu was to approve that the marriage was legal. They started out in a serious manner. Without smiles, the two men and woman representative asked first the groom, then the bride several questions. Of these were why they wanted to marry. If anyone was pressuring them in to marriage. If they were in any way related. As both have family from Nukulaelae, their family ties can be traced back as everyone in Nukulaelae are distantly related. However, as Sonia's uncle already had married to Isimeli's aunt, this family was considered to be broken, as explained in chapter three.

They also asked for the full name and occupation of the couple and their witnesses. After they were finished with the questions, the council representatives changed their tone. They smiled, laughed a little and jokingly commented on Nukulaelae people preferring to marry each other. Then cake was put on the table in front of the council members. Several people had been sitting on the floor, watching the ceremony. Now everyone moved about and got some cake to celebrate, talking to each other and taking pictures of the couple with their witnesses.



4.1: The bride and groom in the middle, along with the witnesses and the bride's father in front of the island council.

The wedding ceremony

After the signing of the papers, the preparations for the main wedding the following day were proceeding in full stride. Dances were being rehearsed, and items for use the next day were made. The second important event in Tuvaluan weddings is the vows in the church. Here, the couple promise to stay with each other for the rest of their lives, in front of a priest. As Tuvalu is a religious country, these vows are usually taken seriously. Divorces are uncommon. As a marriage symbolise the merging of two families, a divorce will affect more people than just the two people involved. Weddings are a family decision, not just a decision between two people.

At the day of the wedding, Sonia and I got up before six in the morning, and headed for her aunt's house. We had been told the day before to arrive as early as possible. When we arrived, people were rushing with the last preparations. Two of her cousins and her aunts were sitting in the small kitchen hut behind the house. The women were cleaning the *pulaka* and the men were using a grate to prepare the *pulaka*, making it in-to *fekei*, a popular sweet dish made of *pulaka* mixed with red toddy.¹¹ The bride was both nervous and stressed with the preparations and getting married, but she thanked her family for all their help.



4.2 The bride on the morning of her wedding. Her family members are preparing *pulaka* in her aunt's kitchen hut

¹¹ Red Toddy, or *Kaleve kula*, is a sweet syrup, made by boiling large amounts of toddy gathered from palm trees.

She was taken upstairs to get the dress and makeup on. She put on a white wedding dress, which is normally used for the church ceremony. Along with some of her female cousins, I helped to put on her makeup and do her hair. When everyone was ready, the bride was to walk from her aunt's house to the church. A car drove in front of them, her cousins and aunts were holding poles with a white cloth and balloons over her while she walked. Along with her walked the witness, some children and many of her cousins. Several people were walking in front and behind her. They were clapping their hands and singing songs as they walked. Her family had also been afraid that someone would try to spoil her walk to the church, by either yelling or throwing something. Luckily, no such thing occurred.



4.3 The bride on her way to the church

The bride's father led her inside the church, where the groom and his witness was waiting. Several of their family members were sitting along the walls on the floor. The bride and groom, along with their witnesses, were sitting in front of the priest on four chairs. The church service started with the priest preaching, and the singing of the choir present. After this, the bride and groom approached the priest. He asked them if they would honour each other and stay together in sickness and health, where upon they both answered yes. They gave each other rings, and went to sit down again. The

priest said a blessing over them. After this was done the bride and groom, followed by the witnesses came up to the altar to sign the marriage papers. The priest then told the groom to kiss the bride, upon which the groom lifted her veil, but was too shy to kiss her in front of all their family members.

After they were declared husband and wife, all their family members came to shake hands, give hugs and their congratulations to the newly wed. Then the married couple left the church. People stood outside, cheering and throwing rice at them. They then entered a community hall lying next to the church. Here, people ate cakes for a short while, and a few speeches were held, before the bride and groom had to continue with their program. A car and a van drove the bride and groom as well as the witnesses and several children to The Blue Ocean and back again. The Blue Ocean is a restaurant, lying at the end of the road in Funafuti where the island ends. I kept asking what we were going to do at The Blue Ocean. It turned out that nothing would happen there, but that it was custom to drive to the end of the island and back in a car when there is a marriage to celebrate. After a trip to the end of the island, we returned to a wharf near the church. Here were three boats that would carry the bride and groom, as well as several family members to one of the outer isles, to take wedding pictures. The people in the boats were clapping their hands and singing, as the boats crossed the lagoon. Children were holding the white cloth with the balloons above the heads of the newlywed couple. On the island, the boys who were not dressed up were responsible for the boats. They used the opportunity, while the newlyweds were being photographed, to take a bath. The women who had come along sat on the beach singing, while the bride's father took pictures of the bride and groom, along with their witnesses and the children.

The bride and groom got strict orders not to get their clothes wet, because they had to wear them for the wedding reception later that day. After returning to the room in the guesthouse, we only had a short time to freshen up before we had to head for the car. When we drove the first time, Sonia had sat herself in the back of the car with me, while Isimeli's witness sat in the front with him driving. Isimeli's mother rushed forth when we passed their house. She told us to drive back again and change seats. Everyone had to see Sonia sitting in the front with Isimeli as the car drove around Funafuti, before heading to the hotel for the reception.

The wedding reception

The wedding reception is the third important event of a Tuvaluan marriage. It is usually held in one of the many community halls in Funafuti. This was held in the hotel, because Sonia's family felt they would have more control of who could enter the wedding. It was also close to the police

station, so help was not far away if someone would try to sabotage it. In a wedding held in a community hall, the newlyweds usually sit at the centre, along one of the walls. In the hotel, the stage was converted to a place for the bride and groom to sit, with their witnesses at their sides. The other guests were placed around tables on the floor, with an open space to serve as a dance floor in front of the bride and groom. Since Sonia's parents had rented the hotel until ten o'clock in the evening, they had to rush the wedding slightly, so no speeches was allowed.

Even if there were no speeches, there was a lot of food, dancing and entertainment from the bride and grooms family. Isimeli's and Sonia's male and female cousins, as well as other family members, and guests not in their family each came up in groups to deliver their presents, give their congratulations, and dance for them. It was the witness' job to take the presents and place them in a safe place. In my confusion as to what I should be doing, I placed some of the presents behind their seats. A wrong move, as the other witness had to come and help me move the gifts back to their appointed place on the stage, so that the guests could see them. The bride and groom also danced, followed by the witnesses, and the bride and grooms parents dancing together. Sonia requested that she would be allowed to dance with her grandfather. Even if he is over ninety years old, he stood up and danced with her to show his happiness. Dancing and food is an important part of Tuvaluan weddings. The concern if they have made enough food is always present, but in this wedding, it was enough for everyone. Sometimes, when the wedding is held in a community hall, there will be *fatele*. This is a traditional Tuvaluan dance, where a group of men or women dance, while the other participants drum or clap their hands in a rhythm, and sing louder and increase the pace with each verse. However, since they could only stay at the hotel until ten o'clock there was no time to hold a *fatele*, although several other dances were preformed.

During the wedding, the bride and groom along with their witnesses headed away from their spots to change in-to different clothing. Both the bride and the groom's family had gotten a new attire ready for them. The newlywed and his or her witness spent as short time as they could to change their clothing. The white wedding dress and tuxedo, was replaced by homemade clothing with plenty of flower-garlands fastened on their head, around their waist and on their arms. We were supposed to change clothes two times, but as Sonia and I was waiting to participate in a dance, which had been practiced with her cousins the day before, we lost the chance to change again before the wedding was finished. Sonia's cousins had complained to the DJ that they were supposed to dance. He had answered that the song we were supposed to dance to had been played too many times already that night. Some of Sonia's cousins complained that he only said that because he was from Isimeli's family. That he did not want Sonia's family to win against them in having the best

performances. There is a strong competition between the bride and groom's family about who had the best dances and entertainment. During the dances, the participants would do different stunts to get the audience to laugh. A female cousin carried her male dancing cousin off the stage to everyone's amusement, and one of Isimeli's aunts poured water over herself while dancing - making several people laugh.

The flowery sheet

Isimeli and Sonia got their own room at the guesthouse I had stayed at with Sonia. This was spoken of as their honeymoon suite, and was a gift from Isimeli's relatives who owned the place. When the newlywed couple arrived at their room, Isimeli's family had spent the whole day decorating it. Plenty of pillows, mats and flowers had been placed inside. The family members of both families had donated mats to the newlywed couple to decorate the room. On the bed was no white sheet, but a beautifully decorated sheet with flowers on it. Isimeli's female cousins, mother and sister were present in the room. Sonia's female cousins waited outside, while I followed Sonia and Isimeli in to the room, as his family wanted to explain to me what was happening.

This is the fourth important event in Tuvaluan weddings. Even if they would not check if she was a virgin, the decorating of the room and the talk from present family members in front of their wedding night is an important part of Tuvaluan weddings. They all took turns in talking to the couple. Isimeli's mother was crying. She said that Isimeli was her firstborn son, so he would have deserved an even bigger wedding than they had managed to do in such a short time. She told Sonia to take care of her son, because he was the most precious thing to her. She told Isimeli to treat Sonia well and never hit her. Isimeli's brother was drunk, and came and sat by the door, even if he was not supposed to be in the room. He also wanted to wish them luck, and told them to take care of each other. They were all crying and the atmosphere was very serious. The cousins and Isimeli's sister took turns on giving advice, explaining their feelings regarding the marriage, and that they wanted Sonia and Isimeli to be happy and take care of each other. They also brought up what had happened to Sonia regarding the court case. They said that they were sad that it had happened, because they wanted to think of her as Isimeli's true wife, but that they would love her and accept her either way.¹² After each person had said what they wanted to say, Sonia and Isimeli were also crying as they thanked Isimeli's family for decorating the room and for their kind words. After this Isimeli's family left the room, leaving the couple to continue their night in any way they wanted.

¹² If a girl is a virgin when she marry, this is regarded as confirmation that the husband is her true husband. Because he will be her first and, ideally, only man.

The Sunday gathering

The following morning, Isimeli's family had prepared breakfast for them. Two throne-like chairs were put on a porch outside their family's house, and a lot of food was prepared for the breakfast. As Sonia and I was chatting, she out of habit seated herself with me, rather than on the chair designed for her and Isimeli. It went a couple of minutes until we both realised that maybe she was supposed to sit with her husband now, and not with me. The party for the bride and groom was held Saturday after the wedding. Isimeli's cousin who owned a van, offered to drive them around the island while listening to music. The newlyweds, along with the witnesses, several cousins and siblings drove around Funafuti all night. We stopped by one of the clubs in Funafuti, where most of their cousins and friends were present. One of Sonia's cousins from Nukulaelae had been drunk since the day before, and had to be taken home. He said he was so happy that she had gotten married, and that he was going to celebrate for several days.

The biggest day of the wedding was the following Sunday. The bride and groom are supposed to attend church in the morning. I went to the church with Sonia, but Isimeli and his witness were so tired from the celebration the night before that they stayed at home to rest. However, when we arrived back from church, they were sitting with some of Isimeli's male cousins, drinking a carton of white wine. Their celebration was interrupted when Isimeli's sister and cousin came in to dress up him and his witness in matching clothing and candy decorations.

The families of both the newlyweds gathered at Isimeli's family's home. In other weddings, the Sunday gathering will sometimes be held in a community hall. However, as relatives of Isimeli had a big house available right next to Isimeli's parents' home, this was used for the occasion. In the Sunday gathering, both Sonia and Isimeli's families made food in Isimeli's family's kitchen hut. They did this to show that they now consider themselves to be each other's family. This was the official day where Sonia's family gave her away to Isimeli's family, and is an emotional day for them.



4.4 Isimeli and Sonia with grandparents at the Sunday gathering

The food was placed on tables outside, on the house's porch. Some women were walking between the tables, waving flies away from the food. Sonia and Isimeli got their food, along with me and the other witnesses. We ate inside the main room of the big house. Inside this room sat Sonia and Isimeli's parents, as well as many of their older aunts and uncles. The majority of the people present stayed outside, eating their food on the porch or in Isimeli's parent's kitchen hut. After we had eaten, there was a toast with ice cream. When the ice cream was served, both Sonia and I forgot to wait for the others, immediately starting to eat our ice cream. This caused Isimeli to look at us funnily, and some of the elders to laugh. Embarrassed, we put our ice creams down again, and waited for the toast – "*manuia!*" before starting to eat with the others. There was held several speeches, regarding both Sonia and Isimeli. The speeches that had not been given during the wedding reception was given today. Both Sonia and Isimeli's parents spoke, as well as many of their grandparents, aunts and uncles. They all gave their advice to the newlyweds on how to ensure a successful marriage, and wished them all the best. After this both Sonia and Isimeli spoke to the people present, thanking them for all their hard work and love.

The days following the wedding were spent both celebrating and as time for Sonia and Isimeli to be together. The first Monday after the wedding, I got up with Sonia to broom the area around Isimeli's

parent's home. His mother thanked Sonia for following their custom by doing this, but said that she wanted for Sonia and Isimeli to enjoy themselves and relax. The first few days, Sonia was not allowed to do any work in the household. Isimeli's aunts were still present, and helped Isimeli's mother with the cooking. However, when they left a week later, they asked Sonia to now help take care of the house and help Iemeima, Isimeli's mother with cooking the food and taking care of their home.

Marriage and Moral Reasoning in Tuvalu

Karen Sykes writes in her book *Ethnographies of Moral Reasoning* about her experiences with a wedding arrangement in Papua New Guinea. When a father asked about her opinion, regarding his son's marriage, she found herself unable to give a reply, as she did not feel she knew the culture well enough to answer him. A woman called Rose, had asked the man's son to marry her. The fact that the woman had proposed the wedding was unconventional, and made the man's father uncertain about the marriage, turning to Sykes for advice on what she thought about the situation. With the marriage in mind, Sykes uses her definition of "moral reasoning" in order to examine the terms of logic people use to define what is good and bad in their society, and how they cope with modernity. (Sykes 2009:30) She writes, "Contemporary social life can be examined from the perspective of ordinary people in everyday acts of moral reasoning". (Sykes 2009:25)

By analysing marriage as a social institution, that is common to humans, she argues that anthropologists might examine it to understand morality within a marriage, and to better understand peoples' reasoning in regards to specific social relations. (Sykes 2009:9) By examining a marriage in such a way, it might be possible to explain how people take control of their life inside the social borders of their society. Sykes explains how the young woman who proposed confirmed a generalization in the community that young people had lost values and moral. However, by giving the proposal in this way, she pressed the rest of the community to respond in a way that would ensure social continuity. Even if the proposal was uncustomary, the rest of the community responded with regards to social customs. (Sykes 2009:15)

Sykes claims that, "each person is pushed to reason through their relationships with their relatives and their friends. (Sykes 2009:15) Applying Sykes argument of how an uncustomary action can press the rest of the community to act in accordance to custom, I shall ask what this will mean for the Tuvaluan wedding described above? In Sonia's and Isimeli's wedding were both elements of

customary tradition, as well as new influences of “uncustomary” unprecedented tradition. This forced people to balance on the line between customary and uncustomary traditions, sometimes resulting in conflicts and confusion for the participants involved. The fact that Sonia is half *palagi*, as well as the circumstances regarding the court case, made people reflect on what way to best solve the wedding.

This is shown in the example where Sonia’s aunt in Funafuti wanted them to have a small wedding. She acted with regards to the tradition that girls who are known to not be virgins should have a small wedding, to avoid talk and embarrassment. However, as Sonia is the first-born child, and Isimeli is the firstborn son, this conflicted with the custom of giving the first-born child a big wedding. As their parents were against them having a small wedding, and the parents have the biggest say in regards to the preparations, it was their wish that would be followed, and not Sonia’s aunts wish. The example with how Isimeli’s cousins explained to Sonia inside the “honeymoon suite”, that they would accept her in to their family, even if she was not a virgin - illustrates how other local customs, like the fact that one is supposed to be compassionate and forgiving, can be used to deal with situations that are basically uncustomary.

Summary

In this chapter, I have used Sonia and Isimeli’s marriage, and described the conflicts and confusion they faced in planning and conducting their marriage. I have explained Sonia’s past in Tuvalu to show how her situation was unique, and also to show how the Tuvaluan community had reacted to uncustomary behaviour in the past. My intention with this chapter is to explain how people are not helpless in regards to changes in their community, as described in chapter one. Rather, it is to illustrate how people use uncustomary behaviour or situations, and responds to them in regards to what they feel is the right response, with help from moral reasoning. In this manner, they are able to change a confusing and uncustomary situation, in to something that enables the continuation of local customs.

Chapter 5

Change and continuity

Introduction

In this thesis, I have discussed the notions of change with regards to love, family and nature in the island state of Tuvalu. I started this thesis by asking the question whether Tuvaluans themselves have any influence regarding changes they face in their day to day life. By explaining social situations, in which uncustomary behaviour might cause conflict and challenges, I have argued that Tuvaluans themselves have some control of the changes happening around them, by their way of responding to these changes. As mentioned in earlier chapters, Tuvalu has a long experience regarding contact with the outside world. The fact that several of the men in the council of elders in Nukulaelae, have previously been seamen, gives them a detailed knowledge on the different ways of living in the world. This again affects how they respond to conflicts, and how they wish their island to develop. They strive towards acquiring modern technology and goods, while at the same time maintain what is regarded as typical Nukulaelae customs and morale, creating conflicting and difficult situations for the inhabitants. By applying Tsing's definition of "The salvage frontier" in chapter two, I have given an example of these conflicting situations in regards to nature, in the example with the cutting of the palm-trees alongside the planting of the trees. I have argued that goals regarding development and conservation might lead to contradictory results in regards to different specific situations.

It has been my intention to illustrate how the subjects of love, family and nature are interconnected in Tuvaluan society. As mentioned in chapter two, people's relationship to nature is expressed in a dual pattern of thinking: into inside and outside, dangerous and safe. This pattern affects how people behave in relation to certain places. Land is associated with the families it belongs to, and is connected to the ability to gather food as well as to earn money. Ties to land will again affect whom people are allowed to marry, as families who hold land in common, or who are in conflict regarding the ownership of land, seldom will allow their children to marry. By focusing on the relationships between the young, unmarried generation of Tuvalu and the older married generation, I have tried to illustrate how people deal with the tension between what they define as tradition or customary behaviour and its opposite, uncustomary behaviour. By doing this I have described processes of change and continuity going on in the island. However, as the young unmarried generation proceeds to get married, their status will also be altered and different things will be expected of them.

In the previous chapter, I used the example of the marriage between Sonia and Isimeli to explain how the community responded when having to adapt her uncustomary situation in to their own customary Tuvaluan wedding traditions. The conflicts regarding this wedding did not end with the wedding. Following the wedding, confusion regarding the change in status when going from being an unmarried girl to being a married woman transpired. In some ways, this can be regarded of an example of how getting married might put a social pressure on a person to in a stronger degree act in accordance to notions of local custom. I Shall now explain this more fully.

Married Life

When a female goes from being an unmarried girl, in-to becoming a married woman, the things she did before she got married is not supposed to be a cause for new problems. Whatever happened before will be forgiven, as it is somewhat expected that unmarried women act in ways they should not. If an unmarried woman runs away with her boyfriend or drinks alcohol, this will be somewhat expected, but still punished by her family. A married woman however, is regarded as her husband's responsibility. She is now regarded as a part of his family, and ideally, she is supposed to now belong to the husband's island community, cheering for his islands team and so on in football matches, and participating in feasts for his island rather than her own. This is not always the case however, as I was told about several occasions where the woman had gotten her husband to start cheering for her own island, and attending her islands gatherings in Funafuti.

The newly wed wife is expected to behave in a more mature and responsible way. After a woman gets married, she can be asked to look after her unmarried friends by their mothers, as the mothers now expect her to act responsibly. Their way of speaking to her will change, as they will now want to hear her opinion instead of just giving her orders. As Sonia had me as her guest, she had to juggle both the custom of keeping one's guest company, and the custom of the bride and groom spending all their time together after a wedding. The period after a wedding was reserved for the husband and wife to get to know each other. In the many talks given to Sonia and Isimeli, their family members would stress that the time for flirting with people and having several boyfriends or girlfriends now was finished. They were both encouraged to spend time with each other. They told Isimeli to prioritise to stay home with his wife, instead of going out with his friends to drink. Sonia was also told that she could not spend so much time with her unmarried cousins anymore. When Sonia got married, I was surprised that her female cousins, who prior to the wedding had visited every day, completely stopped coming. Sonia was told that she was not the same as them any longer. As the

unmarried girls would talk about boys and meet their boyfriends, they would be a bad influence for her. They were both told that they had to leave the unmarried life behind them.

The first couple of weekends after their wedding, Sonia and Isimeli would go to the *tuisi*, a dance at a club in Funafuti, together. To celebrate, we would sometimes join in the drinking of red wine inside the club. However, one weekend one of Isimeli's male cousins approached Sonia in the *tuisi*. He said to her that she was married now, and that in Tuvalu, married women were not supposed to go to the club and drink. She could not do the same things as her unmarried friends any more. In this example we see that instead of Sonia's cousins reprimanding her, it was now Isimeli's male cousins who spoke to her. However, as she now was Isimeli's responsibility, she was in theory not doing anything wrong, seeing as he was with her and approved. However, this example illustrates how the social pressure for following custom might increase after one is married. I mentioned in chapter one how the environmentalists' group "Alofa Tuvalu" claimed that the youth of the islands were changing the country. However, when these youth transpire from being unmarried to becoming married, they will normally start to behave more in accordance to what is regarded as customary social conduct, after pressure from their peers. As mentioned in chapter four, Sykes claims that "each person is pushed to reason through their relationships with their relatives and their friends." (Sykes 2009:15) The examples of Sonia, and Isimeli's cousin exemplifies how people in Tuvalu help each other to reach the reason to act in accordance to custom. This example also illustrates Isimeli's male cousins showing *alofa* to Isimeli and Sonia, by giving his advice to her.

The Ghost

In earlier chapters, I have briefly discussed the notion of *vai laakau*, magic and ghosts in Nukulaelae and Funafuti. Besnier writes that "Nukulaelae cosmological understanding of sorcery and spirits are inseparable. Without spirits there is no sorcery, and the primary task of spirits is to enable sorcery" (Besnier 2009:148) It was also my impression during my stay that *vai laakau* and ghosts were closely connected. As mentioned earlier, *vai laakau* is influenced by elements both regarding the ownership of, and belonging to land. *Vai laakau* is also associated with families who "own" the different recipes, techniques and spells. It can, as mentioned earlier, also be used as a means of getting someone to fall in love. By connecting *vai laakau* to some of the elements discussed in this thesis, mainly land and family, I shall now give an example where the fear of *vai laakau* and ghosts was prominent.

In a short period after their wedding, Sonia and Isimeli stayed in the honeymoon suite provided to them by Isimeli's family. The following week after their wedding, we went to sleep. Me in my room, next to Sonia and Isimeli's room. One night, I woke up by the sound of someone trying to open the door to my room. I also thought I heard steps going from the roof, and down along the wall. I thought to myself that it was just a rat walking on the roof, and went back to sleep. However, the following morning Sonia came running in to my room. She was shaking while she asked me, "Sandra, did you hear what happened tonight?!" She told me that she and Isimeli had woken up because someone had tried to open their door. They had gone outside in-to the hallway, but had not been able to see anyone. They had gone inside the room again and tried to go back to sleep, however, they started hearing footsteps on their roof. Then, Sonia told me, there had been a scratching noise on their windows, and a sound that reminded them of a child crying. Sonia had gotten frightened, because she knew people had tried to put black magic on her in the past. Isimeli had told her not to be afraid, but had held his arms around her and seemed frightened. When the noise from the hallway continued, they went out on to the porch to see if they could see anyone. The only thing they saw was the neighbouring dogs, who had gathered outside the house and were all barking towards their room. Sonia told me she had panicked, taking the salt she could find in the kitchen to pour outside my door and their own, as well as the windows. When she had gone in-to the room again and laid down, Isimeli had fallen to sleep. She told me, that as she was lying there she had started to feel a pressure on her chest. She had started crying, she said, realising that the ghost was on top of her. She said the ghost must have gotten inside when they had gone out into the hallway to check. She had held on to Isimeli crying, hoping that the ghost would go away.

The following day, she had a bruise on the side of her stomach. She showed it to me, saying that they call it to be bitten by a ghost. After talking to me, she went to her aunt's house in Funafuti, where her mother and family from Nukulaelae were staying. When she came to tell them what had transpired, they had started crying immediately. Both Tagisia, as well as her aunt from Funafuti and several of her cousins from Nukulaelae were there. They had begun to cry, saying that they had known something like this was bound to happen. They said that they never should have let Sonia marry Isimeli. That the other families that were angry with them now were trying to take revenge, by sending ghosts to hurt or kill Sonia and Isimeli.¹³ Later that day I went with Isimeli's sister on

¹³ It is regarded that ghost can be sent both to make people ill or to kill them. During my time in Funafuti happened several deaths that people blamed on ghosts. These deaths happened to people who had previously not been sick, but had suddenly died. Some of these ghosts were said to be sent by accident, by people who were "dealing with something dangerous". For example if someone was using a ghost to help them win at the bingo, the summoned ghost might end up killing someone inside the bingo instead of helping them.

her bike to deliver some food to a café. She stopped to talk to Sonia's mother on the way back. Sonia's mother was crying and hysteric, terrified for her daughter's safety. Driving back with Isimeli's sister I asked her what she thought had happened. She told me that many people in Funafuti knew how to use black magic, and that someone might be jealous of Sonia and Isimeli. She said it was more dangerous to stay in Funafuti than in Nukulaelae for Sonia. She told me that in Nukulaelae; very few people knew how to cast dangerous magic at people. However, in Funafuti, many people knew how to do this. As a guest and a *palagi*, I was not supposed to know about these things. Sonia's mother and aunts were hesitant to tell me anything about what was going on, even when I asked them directly. When Tagisia came to the guesthouse the same day, I met her as she was walking back down the stairs. I smelled a spicy smell emanating from her, and asked her what she had been doing upstairs. She told me they had done nothing, and that they just were looking for Sonia. Sonia later told me that I was not supposed to know about these things, and that she even felt hesitant to tell me about them herself. However, she told me that the green leafs from the nono plant growing in Tuvalu is effective in protecting oneself against ghosts. She told me that Tagisia most likely had been to the rooms to put out some of their family's protections. Isimeli's mother also came to our rooms to put out nono leaves.

After this, we only stayed in the guesthouse for a couple of more days. Then, we moved the short distance to Isimeli family's home. It was regarded that we would all be safer if we stayed on Isimeli's family's land. It would be more difficult for another family to send a ghost on to their land. However, they still insisted on Sonia and Isimeli sleeping with bibles beside their bed. Several times a day, Sonia would put a mixture of coconut oil and salt on her throat and wrists, to protect against ghosts. Sometimes nono leaves would be laid around the entrances of the kitchen hut we slept in to protect us. Sonia was also discouraged from taking a shower or bathe after dark, as water might make it easier for the ghosts to hurt her. She was also prohibited to ride a motorbike by herself, as someone could get the ghost to sit on the motorbike with Sonia, and confuse her in-to driving off into the ocean and kill herself. The threat of ghosts seemed to me to be taken very seriously by most people. It was seen as a part of life. It was necessary to adapt to it and protect oneself against it.

Differences between Nukulaelae and Funafuti

These two examples illustrates the difference in expected behaviour when people get married, and also some of the conflicts that might appear even after the marriage has transpired. Even if Sonia officially belonged to Isimeli's family after the marriage, her family would take action to ensure her

safety when they felt it was threatened. The after-effects of Sonia's court case were still present, and even if people had stopped being outwardly hostile towards Sonia, her family feared that people would use dark magic to hurt her. They wanted Sonia to move back to Nukulaelae, as she would be on her own land, she would be safer there. This illustrates one of the differences between Nukulaelae and Funafuti. Nukulaelae is regarded as one of the most peaceful islands of Tuvalu, with the fewest ghosts. The northern islands of the group are known for having more magic and ghosts. The day before I left the fieldwork, I came to speak to a man working for the Tuvaluan government. He was worried that I would write about all of Tuvalu, when I had spent most of my time in Nukulaelae. I assured him that I would write about Nukulaelae and the Nukulaelae community in Funafuti only. He explained to me that the culture in Nukulaelae was a lot "softer" than the culture in the northern groups.

As Nukulaelae was the first of the islands of Tuvalu to start believing in the Christian faith, it was my impression that they wanted to appear as more morally good citizens than was the case for the other islands. As mentioned in chapter three, it was illegal to drink alcohol for the Nukulaelae team during the Tuvalu Games. This was also the case for several of the other teams. The difference was in how they responded to offenders. In the Nukulaelae team, the players would be thrown out of the team, and those who lived in Nukulaelae would be sent back to get a lecture from the island elders inside the community hall, on how they had shamed the island. Another Nukulaelae player I knew who was discovered drinking however, just switched teams by starting to play for the Funafuti team instead, since he lived in Funafuti. He did not stop drinking in the weekends, but still maintained his spot on the team, as the Funafuti team did not have as strict control of the rules as the Nukulaelae team.

Choices and change

In chapter four, I used Karen Sykes' perspective to help explain how people apply what she calls moral reasoning to define what is good or bad in their society. I explained how an uncustomary action might affect others in-to responding with regards to social custom. In this event, the uncustomary action was not something intended by the actors, but a result of Sonia's situation and her being born a half *palagi*. Even if she had "special" circumstances, her choices were still limited, although slightly differently than for other girls her age, by the social customs in the place where she resided. The main reason she wanted to get married is that she was of the age where most young girls in Tuvalu do get married, and that she felt it was expected of her family. Several people, in the

conflicts regarding the court case, had claimed that she could never marry in the proper Tuvaluan way. They had said that no Tuvaluan man would want her. Because of this, it was regarded as a victory by both Sonia and Isimeli's family, to give them a big wedding.

Arne Perminow writes in his book about the concepts of value and choice in relationship to changes in a community. He states that "To account for the processes of stability and change of social systems a focus on "choice in context" seems sensible."(Perminow 1994:31) He states that since events are situated in specific social contexts, these contexts affects and limits people's choices. He writes that a focus on the process of deciding not necessarily means that the person has absolute freedom. But rather that their freedom, or lack of freedom, regarding their choices must be empirically established. (Perminow 1994:32) In this thesis, I have used several empirical examples from the islands Nukulaelae and Funafuti to explain how people act in accordance with the restrictions set by their society.

However, it appeared to me during my stay, that many things one was not supposed to do, several people did anyway. Young girls were not supposed to smoke, but instead of smoking in front of their parents, they would hide behind buildings during night-time to share a cigarette. People were not supposed to have sexual relationships outside of marriage, but unmarried girls still became pregnant. The limits of choices appeared to me to change regarding who was there to witness what they were doing.¹⁴ Certain places were associated with certain types of behaviour. For example, people would not break social custom by openly showing physical affection for their lover, or drinking alcohol, inside the community hall. Such action was unheard of, and would be punished by the community if anything of the like were to happen. This type of uncivilised behaviour was reserved for outside the village, the beach or the bush.

Perminow writes that "the contact between value systems is often characterized by a strong accentuation of differences and a determination to protect what is perceived as the fundamentals of culture" (Perminow 1994:134) As mentioned in chapter one, Tuvalu has through time been subject to a number of outside influences. Today, this consists of several of its inhabitants traveling to other countries and experience how they live life there. As mentioned in chapter one, some

¹⁴ A similar observation has been made by Bradd Shore in his book *Salailua. A Samoan Mystery*- Shore, B. (1982). *Sala'ilua : a Samoan mystery*. New York, Columbia University Press.

environmentalists have claimed that Tuvalu is in the process of losing its culture. However, these environmentalists have not taken in to consideration that in the meeting with outside cultures and values, the Tuvaluans has had an increasing wish to protect what they regard as valuable and fundamental parts of their own culture, as Perminow explains. The island community promotes moral behaviour, while it is regarded that *palagi* society lack the same moral values, as they possess.

Ingjerd Hoëm writes about personhood in Tokelau. She states that a person is regarded to have both light and dark forces inside of them. It is regarded that a person is not able to completely control the dark sides within them, and it is thus up to the social community to exert control by focusing on the light and peaceful aspects of sociality. (Hoëm 2004:88) The same aspects apply to the Tuvaluan community. When the society faces impulses of immoral behaviour, most commonly attributed to outside influences, it becomes more important for people to be inside the community, showing themselves as good moral citizens. The community will look after each other, and reprimand people who might give in to their darker impulses, like in the example of the boys on the Nukulaelae sports team who were caught drinking.

Conclusion

By applying theories of moral reasoning, place and personhood I have discussed, with the help of empirical examples, how change, love, family and nature are interconnected aspects of the Tuvaluan society. I argue that the actors in the examples mentioned in this thesis are subject to changing and contradictory expectations in their day to day life, and that this will affect and limit their movements and actions. By using terms of customary and uncustomary behaviour and situations, I have discussed how people themselves apply change and govern their own vulnerability by their reaction to different situations within the borders of their society. By having a focus on the young unmarried generation, their relationship to, and expectations from, the older married generation - I have in some examples used generalization, as a means to discover important aspects in the Tuvaluan society that may influence several people over time. While many of the situations mentioned in this thesis are specific situations regarding different people, their examples illustrate and are similar to problems and challenges faced by many of the young generation on the islands. By illustrating how Tuvaluans have responded to change in the past and to this day, I argue that they themselves are not helpless victims to change, but rather active participants creating, changing and conserving their own customs, surroundings, development and traditions.

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