Wanem ia jenda?

[What is Gender?]

Translations and (Mis)Understandings between
Development Discourse & Everyday Life Experiences
in Port Vila, Vanuatu
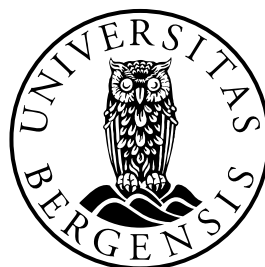
MASTER THESIS

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submitted in partial fulfilment of the MPhil degree

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Contents

List of Illustrations

Unless stated differently, all photos and figures are taken and created by me.

Between July 2015 and December 2015 I conducted my first ethnographic fieldwork in Vanuatu, where I spent most of my time in the capital Port Vila.

The fieldwork was part of the MPhil programme Anthropology of Development at the University of Bergen.

It was, furthermore, connected to the project "Understanding Gender Inequality Actions in the Pacific: Ethnographic Case Studies and Policy Options", conducted by the international research team of the European Consortium for Pacific Studies (ECOPAS).

Originally, my research focus lay on the question of how Ni-Vanuatu men and women understood the notion of Gender - Based Violence (GBV), but I soon figured out that the term is problematic as neither the notion of Gender nor Violence have a simple equivalent in the Vanuatu's national language Bislama or in the many local languages. Instead I focused on the term Gender in order to understand how it was used, shared and (mis)understood. I uncovered a field, created by so called global Development, that is characterised by translation processes and charged with power differences, and that create mutual misunderstandings between the ontological spheres of Development agencies and non-elite Ni-Vanuatu men and women.

This thesis is the result of the fieldwork.

Delightful Acquiescence

Everybody loves
a self-effacing
submissive woman

Vanuatu men and women
love self-effacing
acquiescing women.

For better or worse
we force
talented women
into acquiescence.

The power echelons
and hierarchies
thrive
on acquiescent women.

Vanuatu toasts
foreign women
kava
before local women.

Vanuatu pays homage
to foreign women
womanples ino gat ples.

Vanuatu supports
liberation movements
in other parts of the world.

Half of Vanuatu
is still colonised
by herself.

Any woman
showing promise
is clouted
into acquiescence.

Vanuatu loves
self-effacing, acquiescing
submissive, slavish, women.

Grace Mera Molisa (1989)

*

Grace Mera Molisa (1946-2002) is Vanuatu's probably most famous female activist.
She was the daughter of a clergy man and grew up in Ambae. One of the first two girls from the island to receive secondary education (in Auckland, New Zealand), she eventually became i.a. the first female Political Advisor and Secretary to the first Prime Minister of Vanuatu, Father Walter Lini. She was the President of the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW), the Vice President of Transparency International Vanuatu and founding member of the University of the South Pacific Council, and the Women in Politics national, regional and international networks.[1] She translated the CEDAW document into Bislama with the subtitle: *Woman ikat Raet Long Human Raet O No?* (Women have rights in Human Rights, or not?; my translation)
Grace Mera Molisa is furthermore a political poet. Her most famous publication is *Black Stone* (1983). Her poems target the issues, amongst others, of colonial power structures, the status of women in Vanuatu and the influences of a globalising world on Vanuatu. Most of her writings are in English andhave a rather experimental form and a critical, almost sarcastic undertone, as the one above.
Grace Mera Molisa surely inspired many men and women, as the collection of eulogies after her death shows. But she is also a representative of the postcolonial process called global Development, that has been causing an increasing separation of the Ni-Vanuatu society into economically better off, urban intellectuals and the non-elite, rural population.

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1   For more information, see Randell 2003.

Acknowledgements: *Tangkiu tumas*

I learned many lessons in Vanuatu, and one of the most important one is probably that talking is an activity of respect. Sitting down with someone, telling stories, sharing knowledge means more than just having a conversation, it means creating a connection.
I am grateful for every of those connections. I have to thank many people for talking to me, for sharing their knowledge and wisdom with me.

First, I want to express my greatest gratitude to the community of Navitora in West-Ambae. I would not have understood the lifestyle in Port Vila, if I would not have visited your village. Especially I want to thank my *bumbu* Esther, who has opened her house and heart for me. *Yu bin mekem rod blong mi. Yu bin tija blong mi. Yu bin givim niufala nem i kam long mi. Tangkiu tumas. Tambeana.*
My Navitora family, all chiefs and members of the Church of Christ, I am sorry that I cannot name all of you here, but *mi wantem talem tangkiu mo tambeana i go long yufala*.

As I spent most of my research time in Port Vila, there are many people whom I have to thank there. For reasons of anonymity, I will not name you, but every woman and man I met, is important and will not be forgotten. Especially, I want to thank the "young women" (you know who you are) and the *market mamas* who had the courage to take part of something new, to stand up and to share their stories. *Yufala taf tumas!*

I want to thank Claire, Larissa, Lana and Casey, for sharing feelings of frustration about a system that we are part of, but do not agree with. You are doing important work in Vanuatu, and you give me hope that the communication between the Development agents and the local communities can actually become better. Also: you gave me a hand, when I needed it most.
Marilena, thank you for showing me that 'empowerment' can be achieved through creativity and for letting me be part of *Aelen Gel*.

But all these friendships and life lessons I learned would not have been possible without the people who believed in my ability to do fieldwork in Vanuatu. I want to thank the Bergen Pacific Studies Group, for letting me be part of the team. Your enthusiasm about the Pacific has been very inspiring. Special gratitude is due to Edvard Hviding and Annelin Eriksen, who have made it possible for me to take part in the ECOPAS project. The whole team involved in this pilot project, has been supportive and I am very honoured to be part of it.

A special thank you also goes to the Vanuatu Cultural Center for giving permission for my research.

My supervisor Annelin Eriksen has been an important part of the journey towards this thesis. Thank you for your trust in me and for sharing your field site. Thank you for your patience and understanding. Your passion for Vanuatu and anthropology inspired me and I am honoured to have had the chance to work with you.

Last, but not least I want to express my love to my family and friends and especially to my life partner Eivind. You have always been there for me and encouraged me to follow my passion, even though it meant that we had to be half the world apart.

Thank you. Tangkiu. Tambeana. Danke. Takk.

Angelina Penner
June 2016

List of Acronyms & Abbreviations

16 DoA	16 Days of Activism (against Violence Against Women)
AusAID	Australian Agency for International Development
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DWA	Department of Women's Affairs
ECOPAS	European Consortium for Pacific Studies
GBV	Gender-Based Violence
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender/-sexual and Queer
MoJCS	Ministry of Justice and Community Services
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NZAid	New Zealand Government's international aid and development agency
UN	United Nations
UNiTE	United Nations Secretary-General's UNiTE to End Violence against Women campaign
VAW	Violence Against Women
VCC	Vanuatu Christian Council
VNCW	Vanuatu National Council of Women
VNSO	Vanuatu National Statistics Office
VNYC	Vanuatu National Youth Council
VWC	Vanuatu Women's Center
WHO	World Health Organisation

A Note on Names

According to ethical standards in anthropology, I will anonymize the names of my informants and friends, unless they explicitly stated it differently.

A Note on Footnotes

My text contains a large number of footnotes, which function as clarification of certain terminologies, as references to other literature and sometimes as commentary. These notes should help the interested reader to complement the information given in the text.

The national language of Vanuatu is Bislama, an English-lexifier pidgin language.

Although it is widely used in the country, there has been only little standardisation of the spelling of words. According to the 2nd edition of *A New Bislama Dictionary* (Crowley 2003), the general rule of Bislama spelling is, that words are spelled as they are pronounced, e.g. night = *naet* ; there are no silent letters and the same sound is written in the same way wherever it occurs, e.g. centre = *senta,* school = *skul.* "Sh" or "ch"- sounds in English are usually omitted in Bislama and written with an s or j, e.g. showing = *soim,* church = *jos. Verbs usually are indicated by an 'i' and end on '-im' or '-em', e.g. to take = i tekem, to see = i lukim.*

The basic pronunciation rules include:

a - like in English 'after'

e - like in English 'elephant'

i - like in English 'Missis'

o- like in English 'optimist'

u - like in English 'put' or 'sp<u>oo</u>n'

ae - like in English 'br<u>i</u>de', '<u>i</u>sland' or 'v<u>io</u>lence'

ao - like in English 'p<u>ow</u>er' or '<u>out</u>'

j - like in English 'jury' or 'gender' but also like '<u>ch</u>urch', '<u>ch</u>ief'

Whenever I use Bislama expressions or quotes in this thesis, I will *italicise* them and translate them in brackets.

Capitalisation

To emphasize that Gender and Violence are understood as concepts with particular premises, I decided to capitalise the words throughout this thesis. The same applies to the notion of Development. It creates a certain alienation effect, which should make the reader more cautious when reading the thesis.

Map of Vanuatu
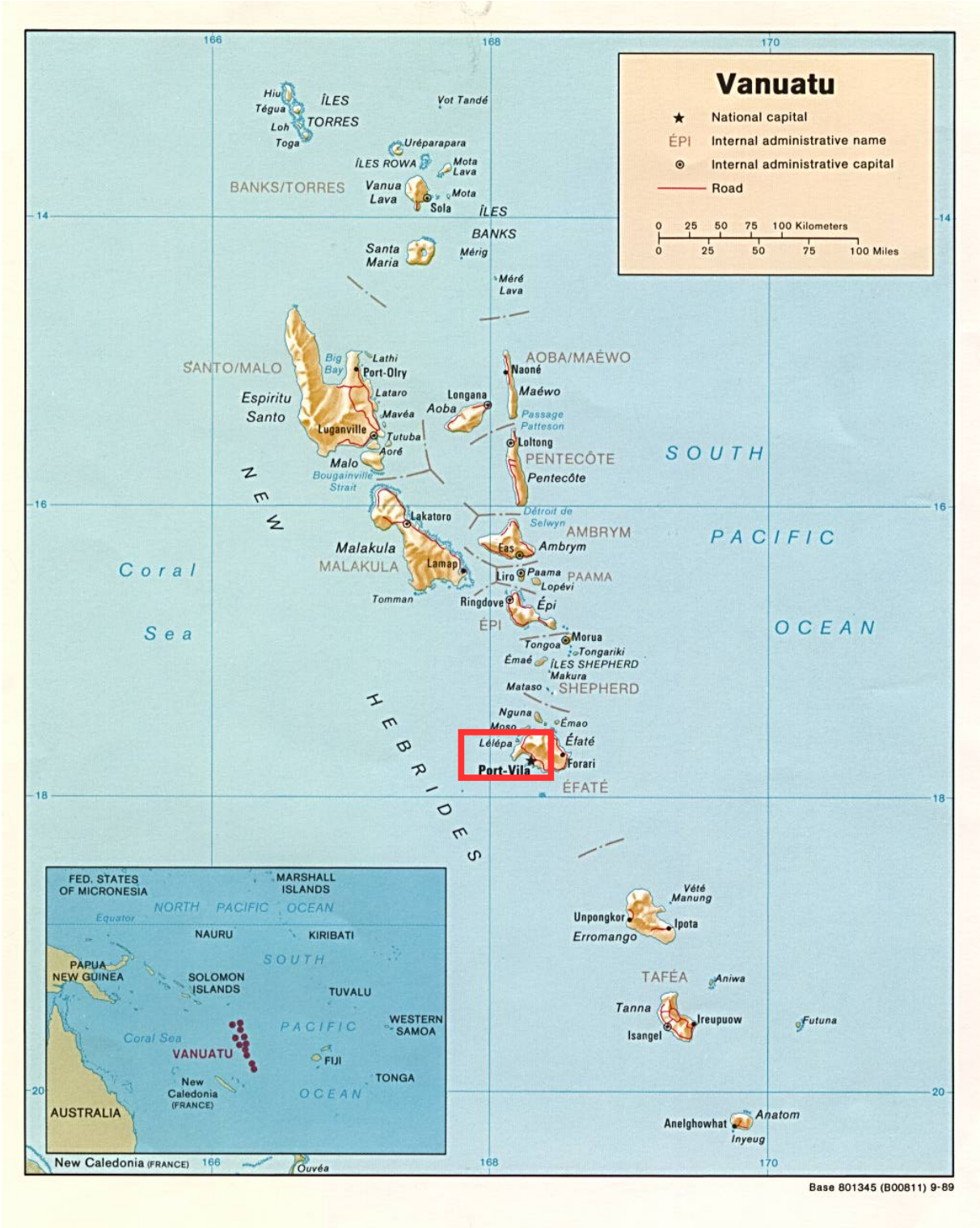
I. Introductions: Presenting the gap

Sketching my research objective

During a six-months fieldwork in Vanuatu in 2015 I tried to understand local concepts of what is termed *Gender Based Violence* (GBV). I did not intend to conflate GBV with *Violence Against Women* (VAW) as it happens often in mainstream discourses of the topic. However, I had soon to learn that it is not up to me to decide this. As I experienced in Port Vila, the narratives about GBV or Gender in general *always* came down to issues of VAW or Women. I started to wonder: Why does GBV get conflated with VAW? Why does Gender easily transfers to 'women' in public discourses - in Vanuatu as elsewhere?

As I tried to find out local understandings of GBV, I was also prepared not to find the terminology of Gender or even Violence, but hoped for vernacular terms for similar phenomena. Again, I had to find out that I was not quite correct. Soon after my arrival I mapped out a vast network of organizations and institutions located in Port Vila, which present themselves as "advocates for women's empowerment" and/ or "Gender equality". Most of the agents in this network are big multinational NGOs, but also national institutions like the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW), the Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) and the Department of Women's Affairs (DWA) as well as the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC) are important contributors to the discourses of Gender- related issues. And within this discourse they use the terms Gender, Violence Against Women, Human Rights, etc. - sometimes in Bislama, although most of the times in English. Regarding the international organizations, this was not surprising to me. However, I was puzzled when I saw these terms used in the publications of local institutions. They adopted the language of their international partners, almost copying their narrative. If national institutions that claim to represent the women in Vanuatu, refer to global definitions of GBV and VAW, what does that really mean? Why are local institutions seemingly embracing foreign terminology and concepts? And do they use the terms on the premises of understanding them, or based on misunderstandings?

In order to understand who adopts the language around Gender, how and why, it was helpful for me to talk to Ni-Vanuatu men and women outside of the context of development cooperation and public institutions. Interactions with Ni-Vanuatu women and men showed me that words like Gender, Violence and Human Rights are never spontaneously used in the

context of everyday life. These words belonged strictly to another context. Whenever I asked my friends and informants about what they think Gender is (*Wanem ia jenda?*), they shrug their shoulders, and only in a few cases did I get vague answers to that question. The same happened, when I asked, whether they could explain what Violence was. The difficulty in describing the latter was especially surprising for me as almost every woman and man I talked to could tell me at least one experience of, what I - socialized in a 'Western' society - would call Violence.

I heard stories about how boyfriends hit their girlfriends and how husbands force their wives to have sex. I observed how women receive controlling phone calls from their jealous husbands, and saw them with bruised eyes the next day, if they did not pick up the phone fast enough. I frequently spoke to women, who know that their male partners have relationships with other women, but they cannot talk to them about that. I heard these stories daily and often the women and girls would tell them to me without being asked.[2]

What struck me more than the frequency with which I was confronted with these stories was the way they were told. Women would tell their stories with neutral voices, as if they were saying something insignificant and ordinary as "I just got some food from the market". These stories were 'normal'; they were daily experiences of a lot of the women I met in Port Vila. "*Hem ia nao, Vanuatu stael*", one of my female friends would say sarcastically. "This is it now, the (life-)style in Vanuatu".

Now, I could continue here. Talking about the 'poor' Ni-Vanuatu women who experience Violence from their husbands and partners every day and who get suppressed by patriarchy. I could say that GBV and VAW is like an epidemic in Vanuatu, and by doing so I would repeat the main topics of the usual depictions of women in Vanuatu.

But that is not what I observed during my fieldwork. I have not talked to weak, helpless women. On the contrary: I lived, worked and became friends with, and even part of a family of strong women. Women who are mothers, who go to church, who work in offices, go to school; women who work in their gardens, sell fruits in markets and bread and *gato (*local sweet buns*)* at little stands on the side of the street.

Furthermore, I have not seen only violent monsters, when I saw men in Port Vila. I have seen

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[2] Most often, I would hear the following description for violence
Hem i bin kilim/ pusum/stonem/wudem/go behain long/ mi.
He hit/pushed/stoned/hit me with a wood/cheated on me.

Hem i jelus tumas. /Hem raorao wetem mi. Hem I bin benem ol klos blong mi.
He is very jealous. /He fights with me. / He burned my clothes.

gentle fathers, men who go to church, who work, go to school and some men who are chiefs and follow *kastom.*

I do not want to romanticize the life in Port Vila or elsewhere in Vanuatu. I am not saying that Violence is not a problem. I want to emphasize that a narrative of a man/perpetrator: woman/victim dichotomy focuses on a certain and very narrow aspect of *Vanuatu stael*. And still, this is the imagery that I have come across repeatedly during my fieldwork. Reports and other publications from international and local organisations about Vanuatu reproduce the image of violent men and helpless women.

What I experienced was a big gap: the gap between international language and narration around issues of Gender (e.g. GBV) and the everyday experiences and language of Ni-Vanuatu women and men. What I saw was a lack of real dialogue between the two poles, which I simplify as Development discourse and everyday life experiences of Ni-Vanuatu women and men. What I also observed was that this gap was not a sudden abyss separating two distinct groups (global from local, Western from Oceanic, modern from traditional, good from bad or similar dualisms), but that the translation of Gender happened in a more nuanced way than that.

Similar to the children's game Chinese Whispers, the translations and (mis-)understandings of Gender pass from agent to agent until they get transformed or even lost somewhere along the way.

The questions that form the background of this thesis are: How are the concepts of Gender and GBV communicated, e.g. during public events like the 16 days of activism or other campaigns, in posters and other available material (posters, flyers, booklets, video, songs, etc.)? How are women and men represented in these materials? How is the relationship between multi-lateral, national organisations on the topics related to Gender? Is the concept of Gender even relevant for the everyday activities of women in Port Vila? (How) do Ni-Vanuatu women and men understand the terms Gender and Violence? How do they represent themselves? And what does womanhood, manhood, personhood even mean in Port Vila in 2015?

Not all of these questions will be answered in this thesis. Nevertheless, they will be the silent reminders of the complexity behind the issues. As it is in the nature of any ethnographic analysis, there will be certain shortcomings and I claim neither novelty nor completeness of the argument. Instead, I want to present this argument as *one* way of looking at the questions at hand.

In this thesis, I will focus on the concept of Gender in connection with GBV.[3] I use Gender as a concept-metaphor (Moore 2004). I will trace how it is used as a power-loaded term in discursive practices in Port Vila. These discursive practices are producing certain knowledge or "knowledge statements" (Lindstrom 1990: 9), which are created outside Vanuatu but translated by local agents (institutions, groups and individuals). However, the access and distribution of the knowledge statements follow particular power networks and at the same time reproduce the same unequal knowledge/power relations.

Inspired by Sally Engle Merry's attempt to develop "an ethnography of the practice of human rights" (Engle Merry 2006: 39), the analytical and theoretical frame I have chosen for my argument is a blend of anthropological approaches to translation, (mis-)understandings and development. Foucault's seminal approach to Knowledge/Power dynamics and discourse analysis will also be of particular interest for my discussion. [4]

Before I introduce my field site and work I would like to invite the reader to step into what I will call 'the gap'.

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3   The conceptualisation of Violence in GBV is also very interesting and relevant, but can only be touched briefly upon in this thesis.
4   Lamont Lindstrom (1990) convincingly transferred Foucault's approaches to the conversational procedures on the island Tanna (South Vanuatu). Using an economical metaphor, he analyses how knowledge production, distribution and consumption on Tanna are produced by conversation and reproduce power structures on the island.

The gap is not a bottomless pit: Thinking within the gap

For a gap to exist, it requires two elements that allow a space in between them.

In this thesis, the two 'sides' of the gap are called Development discourse and, on the other side, everyday life experience of Ni-Vanuatu men and women. These are working titles if one wants, names, that describe a fundamental difference.

Dualisms, dichotomies and structures let the anthropologist often feel uneasy. If it was so simple, if every right had its wrong and every black had its white, anthropology could avoid many of its dilemmas.

Societies and cultures are not monoliths - a truism that every anthropology student will internalize. It is not possible to analyse social groups with surgical precision, as they are constantly changing, interacting and 'flowing' (Appadurai 1990).

How, then, can I speak of a gap? How, then, can I speak of two poles? The simple answer is: because dichotomies are easy 'to think with'. They can be helpful heuristic devices. If I assume, there is black and white of *some* sort, I might be able to look into the grey zone between the two contrasts. But as grey is always a combination of black and white, the gap is on the one hand the space in-between, but in the same time, it consists of the variations and kind of blending of its periphery. It is a space of simultaneity.

So, when I speak of Development discourse and Ni-Vanuatu everyday life experience these are methodological tools in order to be able to look into the gap.

Development as a political theory gained importance after World War 2, when colonial structures started to weaken and Communism was seen as a threat (Cooper & Packard 2005).[5] Before that, the colonial goal of Development was economic growth. Within the frame of the Cold War, however, the understanding of Development shifted from market-driven, economic development towards an international political agenda (Cooper & Packard 2005:129).

International organisations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and especially the United Nations (UN) and its affiliated organisations (e.g WHO, UNICEF, UNESCO) were established and facilitated the global spread of Development theory and practice.

The process of Development is not uniform, but according to Richard Rottenburg, it consists of the following elements:

>"a *society* that is labelled "underdeveloped" and thus by definition has been unable to

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5   See also: Ferguson 2005, Escobar 1995

achieve the goal of development on its own as a kind of involuntary social transformation;
a class of *elites* who believe they have been called upon to modernize their own society;
a *model* that promises to overcome underdevelopment;
international *experts* who assist local elites in implementing this model;
and a global network of formal organizations that engage in and finance the process of development. Here we can distinguish between donor and recipient organizations as well as between national and multinational organizations;
all of these organizations, however, populate what is called an *organizational field* characterized by distributed agency.
Last but not least, the discourse of this development arena is supported by the global *hegemony of the Western worldview*" (Rottenburg 2009: xii; original highlighting).

The "global hegemony of the Western worldview" is filled with notions like individualism, modernism and economic progress.

On the other side of the spectrum, is the ideal-typical Ni-Vanuatu lifeworld, which is often subsumed as a Melanesian worldview. This consists of relational personhood, focusing on kinship relations rather than on individuality (Leenhardt 1979, Strathern 1988), a close connection between persons and land (Taylor 2008), and a big influence of customary values, which are nowadays also often paired with Christian belief (Eriksen 2008).

I want to emphasize that these both sides are to be understood as ideal types, which I will use in this thesis as conceptual assistance in order to create an area, which I will focus on, namely 'the gap'.[6] This gap is to be understood as the area of transformation and translations between Development discourse and the "Melanesian Way" (Narokobi 1983). Rather than a neat spectrum it can be imagined as an intricate web-like construction. It is not ordered - from dark to bright -, but a bit more complex and messier. The web connects both sides and is dependent on them. As the poles change, the web changes. At the same time, the gap is also a whole construction on itself.

In order to be able to orient myself through this web, I will use yet another tool, namely the notion of Gender. I will trace how and if discourses of Gender in the Development sphere connect to Ni-Vanuatu lifeworlds and how the actors in the gap furthermore create yet another structure, namely the stratification of the society into classes.

Although I will name a few organizations working in Port Vila, I do not want to create the feeling that I blame them for the gap. I want to point out the *structural principles* that create the gap, rather than to indicate individual responsibility.

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6   Different scholars have given similar observations different names. Anne Lowenhaupt Tsing (2004: 4), for example states: "Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call "friction": the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference." Michael Carrithers (2014) wrote about the "knots" of everyday life and Norman Long has been writing since 1989 about the "interfaces" of Development processes.

The idea of the gap should become clearer throughout this thesis.

Let me now be more concrete and introduce Vanuatu and Port Vila.

Background: Vanuatu & Port Vila

Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago in the South Pacific Ocean. It is located east of Northern Australia and west of Fiji, in the region known as Melanesia.

Vanuatu holds the titles of one of the UN's "Least Developed Countries" (UNCTAD.org), one of the country with the "highest disaster risk in the world" (WorldRiskIndex 2015) as well as "the happiest place on earth" (Campbell 2006). Depending on the context, each of the titles can and will be used to describe Vanuatu.

For me, one suitable word to describe Vanuatu is 'diversity'. Not only does this Melanesian Island nation consist of around 83 islands (68 of which are inhabited), but more than 100 local languages[7] also indicate a linguistic and cultural richness.

First contact with Europeans was said to be established in the early 17th century. Before the arrival of Louis Antoine Bougainville (1768) and Captain James Cook (1774) the islands of the New Hebrides (as Vanuatu was called at first) were fairly unknown to Europeans (MacClancy 2002:38). In the following centuries the islands experienced increased attention from traders, whalers and Christian missionaries. The influence of especially the latter is still very visible, as Christianity is a central part of everyday life of people in Vanuatu. From 1906 French and British governments administered the New Hebrides together in a unique colonial arrangement, known as the Condominium. Fundamental administrative and social difficulties developed out of (and before) the Condominium and the New Hebrides eventually gained independence and became the Republic of Vanuatu in 1980. Nowadays, Vanuatu is divided into six provinces and two additional municipalities - Port Vila and Luganville.

35 years after Independence, Vanuatu is considered a young and 'developing' country. However, it is not considered a 'failed state' as many African countries and offers fertile soil for foreign investors.[8] Those investors, along with the sectors of Development cooperation and tourism shape the country's economic, social and political landscape.

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7 The exact amount of languages spoken varies from source to source. In one of the most recent publications, Lynch & Crowley (2001) list 106 vernacular languages.

8 The net official development assistance (ODA) and official aid received averaged around 95 Million US Dollars between the years 2011 and 2014 (World Bank 2016).

2015 was an interesting year to be in Vanuatu. Especially in the second half of the year, the atmosphere could be described as politically charged. Vanuatu dealt (once more) with severe cases of corruption, as well as with the upcoming general elections in 2016. At the same time, the aftermath of the CAT 5 Cyclone Pam, that hit Vanuatu on March 13, 2015 and destroyed a lot of the islands' landmass (especially in the southern islands) was still very present in people's everyday life. Shortage in seasonal fruits and vegetables and the increasing market prices for them was often commented and caused real problems for Ni-Vanuatu families. Furthermore, an extended drought period (El Niño) affected the harvests and freshwater supplies on the islands of Vanuatu significantly.

Only about 24% of Vanuatu's population lives in urban areas (VNSO 2009). That might seem like a small amount, but considering that there are only two cities in Vanuatu - Port Vila and Luganville - one can easily understand how densely populated they are.[9] Mostly motivated by the ability to find wage labour, people from all over Vanuatu have been moving to Port Vila, sometimes just for a few months at a time.[10] The connection to one's home island and village is important for Ni-Vanuatu women and men. And even though they might be born in Port Vila, I only rarely heard people talk about themselves as "*manples*" or "*womanples*" (lit."man / woman from this place"; local) in the city. However, men and women would proudly refer to themselves and to each other as e.g. "*man Tana*" (lit. "Man from Tanna"; Tannese) or "*woman Ambae*" (lit. "woman from Ambae")[11], emphasizing their connection to their island of origin and its community, and thereby their identity.

The links between Port Vila and the outer islands make the capital the central connection point of Vanuatu. It is in some ways a microcosm of Vanuatu: one can find customary practices and lifestyles from all over the country assembled in Port Vila. But at the same time Port Vila also does *not* represent Vanuatu and most of my informants made a strict distinction between *laef long taon* (life in town) and *laef long aelen/ vilij* (life on 'the island'/ in the village). The lifestyle on the islands was usually romanticised as "free" and "easy", while urban lifestyle was dominated by the need and greed for money.

Furthermore, being a capital, Port Vila is the main location for national and international agencies. Governmental institutions, the headquarters of the four national councils are located in Port Vila as well as numerous international organisations (e.g. UNWoman, Worldvision,

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9   According to the 2009 census, 44039 people lived in Port Vila and 13156 in Luganville (VNSO 2009).
10 It is not uncommon especially for young men to work in Port Vila for a few months (e.g. as bus drivers or carpenters), before they return to their home villages.
11 Tanna and Ambae are two islands of Vanuatu.

Oxfam, Safe the Children, etc.). The influence of tourism is also shaping life in Port Vila and its infrastructure. The main road of the town centre is filled with stores, restaurants, hotels that cater for the tourists' desires. Most Ni-Vanuatu men and women have access to these places only as staff.

The central market house is usually the busiest place in the city centre and frequented by Ni-Vanuatu men and women and long-term expats who buy their local produce here and get a cheap lunch in the restaurant area of the market house. Tourists usually get amazed by the abundance of 'exotic' looking root vegetables and fruits. Port Vila has a significantly different atmosphere on normal days, compared to the infamous 'cruise ship days', when the cruise ship tourists flood the town centre for a day, buying trinkets (often made in China) and sit in high priced restaurants and cafés.

The town centre is surrounded by a big suburban belt with a lot of settlements. Some of them are popular with expats and tourists, who reside in hotels or accommodations, which provide electricity, warm water and internet connection. Other areas, do not have either a steady water nor power supply and people live with their families in small huts made of corrugated iron, plastic covers and wood. The main means of transportation are mini-buses, which drive for a fixed price wherever the customers want to go.

Globalisation was never more tangible for me than here. Port Vila can be seen as an exemplary space of "compressed globalisation" (Hviding 2003). Hviding, who coined the term, describes therewith a phenomenon of rapid change in the social fabric of Melanesians due to the appearance of "multinational [...] agents of the wider world [...] activating wide-ranging global connections and systems" (ibid: 542) between Melanesians and 'the West'. This globalisation process has, according to Hviding, one major effect (if not even purpose):

> "In such postcolonial situations, political truths and other colonial facts have been transformed and twisted into a state of confusing uncertainty as to what is happening" (ibid.).

Accordingly, Port Vila is characterized by its profound and at times confusing connection to other parts of Vanuatu as well as to other parts of the world, creating various dynamics between local and global worldviews and epistemes. One of the certainly most pivotal of those dynamics is the interplay between *kastom* and Christianity. As both are important aspects of the diversity of everyday life and will be frequently mentioned in the present thesis, I would like to introduce Christianity and *kastom* in Vanuatu.

K*astom*, Christianity and governance in Vanuatu

> "WE, the people of Vanuatu,
> PROUD of our struggle for freedom,
> DETERMINED to safeguard the achievements of this struggle,
> CHERISHING our ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity,
> MINDFUL at the same time of our common destiny,
> HEREBY proclaim the establishment of the united and free Republic of Vanuatu founded
> on traditional Melanesian values, faith in God, and Christian principles,
> AND for this purpose give ourselves this Constitution. "

This is the preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu (1980) and it reveals clearly, the backdrop of Ni-Vanuatu society: Christianity and "traditional Melanesian values", also called *kastom*.

Kastom[12] refers to customary or 'traditional' practices in everyday life. But *kastom* does not encompass a uniform category of Ni-Vanuatu way of life. Customary practices in Vanuatu vary - sometimes widely - from island to island and sometimes even from village to village. Therefore, *kastom* is closely connected to one's place of origin and an important part of one's identity. Customary knowledge ranges from preparing certain food, building houses to secret knowledge. "In *kastom*, everything has its place and reason", a female informant told me. Especially important is *kastom* as regulatory frame for inter-personal behaviour and treatment of each other. How people relate to one another, their right and obligations are determined by customary kinship systems. From a Gender equality perspective, this is relevant, as *kastom* also influences the relationships between men and women.

Kastom is largely unwritten and usually overseen by chiefs (Bislama: *jif*). These are usually men who can become chiefs through multiple ways, e.g. by inheriting the title or taking pig killing ceremonies.[13]

Chiefs play important roles in everyday life in rural areas, but also in Port Vila. These urban chiefs usually administer the people from their home island. They perform ceremonies (e.g. weddings, separations, funerals, etc.) and are also the main body to resolve disputes. Even in Port Vila, where access to police and courts is easy, it is said that 80% of legal issues are dealt

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12 The term *kastom* has been is itself a pidgin word (deriving from the English word custom), introduced by Colonial powers and then used by Missionaries to contrast pre-colonial lifestyles with Christian values. For a comprehensive overview of the development of the term *kastom* see the first chapter in Lissant Bolton's *Unfolding the Moon: Enacting Women's Kastom in Vanuatu* (2003) and the special issue of Mankind (1982) titled "Reinventing Traditional Culture: The Politics of Kastom in Island Melanesia".

13 Sometimes, as in 'graded societies' in the northern islands of Vanuatu, chieftainship is graded and with each grade a man wants to take, he needs to present more pigs, which were usually contributed by other chiefs of the community (Allen 1981; Rio 2007, e.a.).

with by chiefs. The national body for chiefs is the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs, located in the capital. The Malvatumauri is formed of representative chiefs from almost all islands. How many chiefs live in Port Vila, is not possible to say, as the Malvatumauri does not keep book: "People know who their chief is", I got told.

It is important to realise, however, that the term and category *kastom* (and with it the institution of the *chief)*, is "a term with a history" (Bolton 2003:1), a colonial history to be precise:

> "The development of *kastom* as a category was [...], principally the effect of missionary endeavour, the reification of islander ways of living as a category that could then be opposed to European practices conveyed in a package with Christian beliefs" (ibid.:12).

According to this argument, the development of *kastom* (as a concept) and Christianity took place simultaneously. Therefore, they need to be understood simultaneously.

The first Christian missionaries arrived in Vanuatu in the early 19th century (MacClancy 2002: 48). Today, Vanuatu is thoroughly a Christian country. 91% of the population practices Christianity (Tor & Toka 2004: 21). There are countless different denominations and churches[14] - a development that matches Vanuatu's cultural diversity. Similar to *kastom*, one's denomination is a part of one's identification. It seems that the different Protestant churches[15] are not perceived as fundamentally different: ""*Yumi evriwan i bilivim long semak God nomo"* [We all believe in the same God], I heard frequently. This attitude caused for a rather flexible approach to one's denomination. I worked with families, in which father and mother belonged to two different denominations, or in which the children converted to another church. Also, some women would change to their husband's church after marriage. Christianity is an important part of the lives of most of my Ni-Vanuatu friends - men and women. Sunday services are considered important and the involvement in a Church women's group or youth group was common. Also, most meetings and workshops were started and ended with a group prayer.

The process of conversion is said to be so successful in Vanuatu, because it was mapped onto existing social processes, e.g. a focus on communality instead of individualism. Also, missionaries increased the involvement of local men and women in church activities, so that there were soon Ni-Vanuatu priests and teachers all over the country.

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14 In Port Vila alone, Eriksen and Andrew (2012) counted 49 churches and ministries.
15 Catholicism was usually met with bigger scepticism.

Furthermore, Christianity spread by returning labour migrants, who had worked overseas (e.g. in Australia), and especially by women:

> "It was as if the church, as it steadily grew as a movement in the twentieth century, had given a name to a movement that already existed, namely the practice of women as they married and created alliances laterally instead of competing hierarchically" (Eriksen 2008:97).

The role of women in *kastom* and Christianity is controversially debated. While some authors claim that the influence of Christianity has rather negative, even suppressive effects on women (Tor & Toka 2004), others see the Christian movement in Vanuatu as the movement of people, who were outsiders in the system of *kastom* and "saw Christianity as a means by which they could create a different organization of authority and prestige, one in which they could advance themselves" (MacClancy 2002: 78). Often it was pointed out to me, that the Protestant church was more open to "Gender Equality" than *kastom*, as it was possible for women to be female priests, whereas female chiefs are rare. *Kastom* proponents, however, argue that women 'traditionally' enjoyed more freedom and that Christianity caused the 'domestication' and thereby the suppression of women.

Calls to the government in this context, are a fairly recent phenomenon, as the notions of 'governance' and 'nations' themselves are fairly new in Vanuatu.

The Independence movement in the 1970s was heavily influenced by an emerging national feeling of 'being Ni-Vanuatu' and the development of political parties.[16] Soon churches and *kastom* became entangled with politics, as different denominations and customary practices became increasingly associated with certain political parties (MacClancy 2002: 136-7).

Eventually, the New Hebrides became the Republic of Vanuatu (meaning: 'land standing up' or 'independent land') in 1980 and Father Walter Lini from the nationalist Vanua'aku party became the first Prime Minister. Vanuatu's state motto "*Long God Yumi Stanap*" (In God We Stand) reveals the close connection between Christianity and Nation, making Vanuatu a "Holy Nation" (Rio 2011). In the same year, the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs (MCC) and the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) were established, indicating the importance of chiefs and women for the newly founded country. [17]

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16 The probably most famous political movement at that time was the *kastom*-oriented Nagriamel movement. For a comprehensive overview over the movements and parties leading up to Vanuatu's independence, see the chapter "The 1970s" in MacClancy (2002).

17 The other two national councils - Vanuatu Christian Council (VCC) and the Vanuatu National Youth Council (VNYC) - followed later.

Since then, *kastom*, Christianity and national politics depend on and influence each other and often occur together in public discourses on various topics (e.g. land disputes, women's empowerment, etc.). Also, in lived experiences, a categorical distinction between Christianity and state, or between 'tradition' and 'modernity is not possible in Port Vila.

State Funeral of former Prime Minister E. Natapei (July 31, 2015)

Men in *kastom* attire (from Futuna) and women in Mother Hubbard dresses (introduced by missionaries and now referred to as 'Island dresses') are waiting in front of the parliament house in Port Vila. Next to them parks a luxury car. On the left is a *kastom* drum (*Atingting*) from Ambrym.

View on the Parliament House, Port Vila

in the foreground: a statue of a circular boar tusk; symbol of *kastom*; in the background: a statue of a man, a woman and a child - a core family; in the far back: the Vanuatu flag; the Parliament House.

Fieldwork: Strangeness amid Familiarity

Besides a very enriching, but relatively short period in West-Ambae, I spent most of my fieldwork time in Vanuatu's capital, Port Vila.

Doing anthropological fieldwork in an urban setting comes with its very own challenges and perks. One of the biggest challenges for me was to define myself as a researcher - an unfamiliar role for myself. As Port Vila is filled with tourists, aid workers and expatriates from all over the world, I was all too often confused with them. As much as I tried to differentiate myself from these groups, I had to admit that my outward resemblance with them must have been too remarkable.

It was tempting to escape into the comfort zone of what I called it 'the white bubble', where restaurants, resorts, spas and beach fronts elegantly hide their colonial after-taste and the fact that most Ni-Vanuatu men and women will not have access to them other than in the role of the employee. Often I felt very much, what Taylor so precisely describes as

> "a mixture of desperation born of loneliness, a growing sense of both the ambiguity of my situation as neither tourist nor expatriate "local", and a simultaneous awareness of my complicity with the social inequalities that so obviously pervade these contexts" (2008:21).

There are ambiguous, if not even contrasting, dynamics that shaped my experiences in Port Vila. For me, it soon became very clear, that there are many 'layers' in this town.

Port Vila contained, what Taylor pointedly phrases as the "sense of the uncanny – of strangeness amid familiarity" (2008:21) – and in the end of my stay, whatever was strange became familiar, and the familiar became more and more strange.

Placing myself in Port Vila: The importance of kinship and place

In many ethnographies, anthropologists tell their arrival stories and how they got adopted into the community they studied. In the urban setting of Port Vila, I did not receive such an initiation within the first two months.
Soon after my arrival in Port Vila, still overwhelmed by its contrasts, but eager to jump-start into my research, I intended to connect myself to an institution or organisation that deals with

GBV and so called "Gender issues". I hoped to get insights into the work of such organisations, as well as get to know men and women working there or using the services of the organisation. My first attempts failed and my requests for collaboration got diplomatically declined.[18] I then, changed my strategy and asked for interviews and meetings with representatives of diverse organisations. The contacts to these people came from different directions and suddenly I had numerous interviews scheduled. In the beginning, the interview questions were very formal and broad, as I was still trying to establish my research focus.

As I needed to prove that I was trustworthy, I was present in public events, workshops and forums about different topics, which were not always related to Gender. I would see certain individuals repeatedly and get in contact with them. The first phase in my fieldwork was therefore occupied by networking and building rapport, not only on institutional level, but also to individuals. This, however, was certainly harder to do than I thought. Again, because of the saturation of *waetmen* (white people) coming to Port Vila, I was often met by Ni-Vanuatu men and women with a distance, that was cautious, sceptical and at times very "professional". I, addressed as *Missis*[19], was expected to behave in a certain way, that often felt like the role of a teacher, live in a Western Style house with electricity and warm water (a luxury most people in the periurban settlements of Port Vila do not have), and I was also expected to talk English and to prefer 'Western' food to Ni-Vanuatu dishes. I worked against those expectations by stressing that I am a student not a teacher, trying to learn from my Ni-Vanuatu friends. I also learned and soon communicated only in Bislama with Ni-Vanuatu men and women. This as well as the fact that I really enjoyed *Aelen Kaekae* (local food; literally: Island Food) amused people and it helped me a lot to connect to Ni-Vanuatu. The best decision, however, in order to create a network and establish myself in town, was (ironically maybe) to leave it. "You do not understand Vanuatu, if you only stay in Port Vila. You have to get out of town", Ni-Vanuatu men and women suggested frequently. And they were right. It was when I decided to leave town for two weeks in September, and experienced "*aelen laef*" (island life) in the village Navitora in West-Ambae, that I understood the fundamental importance of kinship in Vanuatu.

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18 It took me a while to understand the way these organisations said "no" to my requests. Often they would not answer my emails, and even personal meetings would be constantly postponed or changed. It was an important lesson for me, as it revealed to me a communication style that disguised a "no" in seemingly friendly attire, but only to avoid confrontation and a possible disagreement. This strategy was often used also in the Women's group that I worked with. Disagreements were rarely openly expressed, but rather "behind one's back" in form of gossip. This form of communication is powerful, but it also causes a constant caution if not even mistrust between the communication partners (in this case, women in the group).

19 Foreign (Caucasian) men would usually be referred to as *Master*, foreign women as *Missis*, a title I could not get used to at all, as it reminded me of the colonial past of Vanuatu, as well as the perceived power differences that my whiteness expressed, without my will or the ability to change it.

Vignette: Becoming the Flower of Navitora

Lucky coincidences (probably the most used and least mentioned tool in anthropological fieldwork), lead me to meet Jeff, a teacher at a high school in Port Vila, who suggested I should visit his family in Navitora. Following his advice, I landed in a small air plane on the short, grassy landing strip of Walaha (West-Ambae), in the midst of lush growing bush. When I exited the plane, a small old lady came towards me with a big, welcoming smile on her face. She would be my patient teacher, guide and guardian in the next 17 days. As it was appropriate, I called her *bumbu* [20](grandmother) Esther. I grabbed my backpack directly from the plane (no baggage belt, not even a proper terminal). A man, slightly younger than *bumbu* Esther, waited for us outside the airstrip, leaning on a pick-up truck. "My name is Joseph", he introduced himself in Bislama, "*Bumbu* Esther is my *angkel* (pronounced as uncle)." It sounded peculiar to me, but I thought, I just misunderstood him and did not pose further questions. We drove for about an hour on a bumpy dirt road until we reached Navitora. *Bumbu* Esther lived in a cleared, grassy space in the middle of bush. Three buildings were built in the same area: two concrete buildings and an outdoor kitchen, built out of wood and covered with a big natangura leaf roof. Inside the open kitchen were a fire place, as well as a table, some chairs and a bed (for midday naps). One of the concrete houses was a beautiful, new building with four spacious rooms, one of which was my temporary bedroom. "This is Jonny's house", *bumbu* Ester explained proudly, "he is one of your *dedis*." The green coloured house, with the tiled floor and a big porch distinguished itself visibly from the other traditional style houses I would see in Navitora.[21] The second concrete house was rather small. *Bumbu* Esther shared this house with the family of her other son Richmond. But as Richmond was a carpenter and worked in Port Vila, his wife Marilyn lived with *bumbu* Esther and her daughter Shingley in this house. Marilyn and Richmond also had two sons – Peter, who went to a boarding school in a neighbouring village and Richard, who worked as a chef in a resort in Port Vila.

A small outhouse, a dwell and a separated house, where we could take bucket showers completed the area.

On my first day in Navitora, I joined *bumbu* Esther to her prayer group in the Church of Christ a few hundred meters from the house. The church and the open public building outside

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20 As it is also an address of high respect, I will continue calling her *bumbu* Esther throughout the text.
21 Johnny worked for a big company in Port Vila and could afford a comparably luxurious house.

of it – the *nakamal*[22] – were central meeting points for the people in Navitora. The ca. 30 households of Navitora were dispersed and separated from each other by forest. One big truck road, and many small food paths connected them.[23] People frequently visited each other. And the church messes on Sundays, such as prayer meetings, women's group's meetings of the Christian Women Fellowship (CWF) and Bible singing lessons for children were the main events, during which the villagers, met collectively.

I followed *bumbu* Esther to the Monday's prayer meeting on my first day in Navitora and by the church ceremony on Sunday, the word about me had spread and I was asked to give a speech to the whole Church of Christ fellowship of Navitora. As I showed my respect and my gratitude to the community and told that I was a student, interested in the culture of Vanuatu, the villagers welcomed me warmly into their group.

By that time, not even a week after my arrival, Marilyn, the warm hearted, lovely woman with an always friendly smile, had asked me to call her *mama*, as she called me *gel* (daughter), making me calling Shingley *sista* and Peter *brata*. In the first week, I was also given a new Ambae name by *bumbu* Esther: *Gwevira Navitora* - the flower of Navitora – connecting me explicitly to the place.

Whenever I would meet a new person, I got introduced to the person as "this is my brother, therefore it is your *bumbu*", or more generally speaking "this is my [x], so it is your [y]". I was immediately placed into a kinship network, as well as into a congregation. And my relation to another person was always verbalised and made clear.

The kinship network I was placed into in Navitora had effects for my further research back in Port Vila.

Back in town, namely, I met regularly with my *brata* Richard and also saw my *dedi* in town.

The teacher Jeff, who initiated my trip to Navitora, was suddenly my *dedi* too. He invited me to the COC congregation in Port Vila, that is connected to the one in Navitora and after I gave a little presentation there too, people welcomed me as *Gwevira Navitora*.

Also the relationship to my Ni-Vanuatu friends, had changed after I came back from Ambae. "*Yu wan woman Ambae nao* (You are a woman from Ambae now)", they declared. I was finally placed – to an island, as well in a kinship network – I was finally a trustworthy person.

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22 *Nakamal* is a meeting house, traditionally used by men to discuss issues and drink kava. Nowadays, it is a community area, where people gather for ceremonies and events. Every village has one *nakamal*. In Port Vila, commercial kava bars are also sometimes jokingly referred to as *nakamal*.

23 The more people walked on these paths, the bigger and more visible they became. These paths are not only logistically important, but they also mark a relationship. In Bislama *i mekem rod* means both "to make roads" and "to create relationships".

Bumbu Esther on a path in Navitora, September 2015

Back in Port Vila, only the living situation remained tricky. Although I intended to stay with my Ambae family, the option never really occurred and I ended renting a 'Western style' apartment from a Ni-Vanuatu family from North Ambae.[24] It was located in *Freshwota*, a steadily growing settlement close to the centre of Port Vila. This area is densely populated by Ni-Vanuatu families from different part of Vanuatu. Houses made of corrugated iron and wood, stand next to concrete bungalow houses or stone houses of decent size. *Freshwota* is a big area, less influenced by tourism than the city centre, but a popular area for Ni-Vanuatu families from diverse social backgrounds. The proximity of *Freshwota* to the town centre as well as to other settlements, made it easy for me to commute and visit my friends, who lived in various parts in the outskirts of Port Vila.

My living situation turned out to be an acceptable compromise between living in a 'local' area, while also having my privacy.

Methodological Iterations

Methodologically, my fieldwork experiences did not develop as a straight forward progress, and not even as a neat learning curve. The way from broad to detailed (and critical) interview questions, from overwhelming to selected observations, from confusing to informative

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24 Coincidentally, I eventually found a kinship line between my landlord from North-Ambae and my *bumbu*.

discussions developed for me in a rather spiral path.

Sometimes my experiences felt like endless repetitions, stagnations, and at times even set back. But in fact, with every new iteration, I gained some new insights - into Port Vila, into the lives of my Ni-Vanuatu friends, into my own research.

Step by step I established networks of groups and individuals, which gave me the opportunity to collect diverse data through various methods. Besides the semi-structured and open ended interviews with experts, I first and foremost conducted participant observation. This research method is often referred to as "the foundation of cultural anthropology" (Bernard 2011:256):

> "Participant observation involves immersing yourself in a culture and learning to remove yourself every day from that immersion so you can intellectualize what you've seen and heard, put it into perspective, and write about it convincingly. When it's done correctly, participant observation turns fieldworkers into instruments of data collection and data analysis ".

Although Bernard's definition is very poetic and at the same time quite complex, it has been a challenge for me to find the balance between "immersion" and "distancing" myself from the everyday impressions I collected in the field and their transformation into data.

It turned out to be especially hard for me to write analytically about the two groups I worked most closely with in town: The first group was a newly established small civil society organisation in Port Vila, founded in 2014 by a fairly outspoken and public Ni-Vanuatu woman. The group especially targets young women at the age between 17 and 30. I spent two months with them, planning the group's participation at a local Music Festival (Fest'Napuan). We met regularly, created banners, T-Shirts and even a short enactment, which the women performed during the Festival. The meetings gave me a insights into the outer and inner struggles of a civil society group. Even more, however, the group enabled me to connect to young women from various places in Vanuatu, talk to them and listen to their stories. We spent afternoons and many evenings together, laughed, cried and gossiped together. By the end of my stay, the group had some serious internal struggles and I decided not to write about it. The women and what I learned from them, are however the fundament for most of my analysis. If it was not for them, I would never have tumbled over the *angkel* case (see below) or would be able to witness a wedding ceremony.

The other group, that I worked most closely with but does not get the attention in this thesis that it deserves, are the women cooks at the Port Vila Central Market House, the *market*

mamas[25], who took part in the social theatre project *Aelen Gel*. I will talk about the performance in the last part of this thesis, but my experience with the group goes further than what I could express here. I attended every rehearsal of the group, talked to the *market mamas* regularly before and afterwards and also had intensive conversations with the initiator of the project Marilena Crosato. These experiences have shaped my analysis, but most of them will not find the appropriate space in this thesis; not at this point now, but maybe in the future.

Chapter Overview

The present thesis is divided into five parts.

After this introductory part, I will now frame the gap and introduce theories about translation, misunderstanding and power of languages, which I will use to understand the processes within the gap.

In the third part, I will present the role of women and women's groups for the translation processes within the gap. I will show how the idea of women as bridges and paths is reconceptualised and gains new meaning among an emerging elite of urban women. I will present four women, who represent different aspects of the diversity of urban women in Port Vila.

The fourth part is the core of the thesis. Here, we enter the gap and trace specific translations and misunderstandings. First, by analysing the *Vanuatu National Survey of Women's Lives and Family Relationships (2011)* I carve out certain premises that the survey report is based on and which are claimed to be not only true, but universal: e.g. the idea of the individual person and the concept of Gender dualism. I will challenge both notions with what I call the *angkel* case, which will emphasise not only the long known importance of kinship systems for Vanuatu sociality and for the Ni-Vanuatu concept of the person, but also demonstrates how important it is to notice the different ways in which kin-categories are gendered in a non-binary way. As I will show, despite of being derived from the word uncle, *angkel* is not the same.

The second part of my discourse analysis, focuses on the rhetoric around Gender and GBV in the awareness campaign called 16 Days of Activism. By highlighting certain *Leitmotivs* in the

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25 The women called themselves *market mama*, and I will therefore use that term as well in this thesis.

public speeches, I want to demonstrate how concepts that are established in Development discourse are reproduced by the local elite. One of those concepts is bride price, which is often presented as the reason for the suppression of women. I will challenge this imagery by looking into the practice of *braed praes*. I will give an ethnographic example of a wedding ceremony near Port Vila and describe how the understanding of *braed praes* for Ni-Vanuatu men and women is not necessarily understandable as commodification of women but as a sign of respect.

In a way, I will contrast two common ways of knowledge creation and distribution, that happen in the gap (the creation of surveys and the organisation of awareness campaigns) with two important aspects of Ni-Vanuatu lifeworlds (kinship and marriage). The *angkel* case and the *braed praes* discussion interrupt the analysis of the survey and speeches, in a way, that serves as 'alienation effects'. They are consciously chosen to remind the reader of the common misunderstandings inside the gap.

In the fifth and last part, eventually, I present a social theatre project as a way to bridge the gap by creating a dialogue and opening a space for 'respectful listening', instead of assuming understanding. Finally, I will spotlight some remaining questions and prospects for further thoughts.

II. Theoretical Background: Framing the gap

"All community awareness, education and training programs to address violence against women by all stakeholders must be explicitly based on a human rights and Gender equality approach." (Vanuatu Women's Center 2011: 21)

"*Evri komiuniti edukesen, awaenes mo ol trening prokram we ol nara grup o okanaesesen oli mekem, imas tokabaot vaelens agensen woman olsem wan isiu blong Human Raet mo long fasin blong promotem jenda ikwaliti.*" (Vanuatu Women's Center 2012:29)

These two quotes are taken from two versions of *The Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships,* which I will critically look at in the following chapter. The two quotes state the same and even without any background in Bislama, one can detect at least a few familiar words in the second quote. I especially want to emphasize the following terms: *vaelens agensen woman* (Violence against Women), *Human Rae*t (Human Right), *jenda ikwalit*i (Gender Equality). Reading the terms might seem a bit baffling, but soon the similarity with their English equivalents is uncanny.

But just by making a word look like a local word, it might be translated, but it is not necessarily understandable. As I defined the gap as an area of translation and communication, I shall now explain, what I mean by this.

Translation

The process of translation in its simplest definition means to change a word (written or spoken) from one language into another. This definition of translation assumes that there is an object, that is described by a word and that is describable by another word in another language. The thing as such, its substance, would ideally not change with the new word.

The process of translation however is not always that straight forward. Culturally specific notions, phrases and metaphors are therefore hard to translate or not translatable at all into another language, because of its cultural context.

In the first anthropological approaches to translation, language has been often seen as an indicator for certain thought processes. Through the translation of languages, anthropologists have hoped to get some insight into the "modes of thoughts" (Lienhardt 1953) of different

cultures. During the eras of Functionalism and Structuralism, when cultures where thought of essential elements working together, translation of native languages became an important method to reveal the elements' social functions and the overall social structure.[26]

Subsequently, with the emergence of Symbolic Anthropology in the 1970s, texts and languages did not just become embedded in culture, but the notion of 'culture as text' gained prominence (Geertz 2005[1973]:86). In this line of thought, every element in a culture is a symbol, that needs to be read and interpreted by the anthropologist. Furthermore, to make these symbols understandable, the anthropologist also needs to translate them. Since then, the notion of "the translation of cultures" became "an almost banal description of the distinctive task of social anthropology" (Asad 1984: 141). Symbolic Anthropology was met with criticism within the discipline, especially for its limited consideration of historical and political contexts of the societies at hand and for its assumption that the interpretation of the symbols by the anthropologist would be corresponding with the interpretation of the people themselves. "But society is not a text that communicates itself to the skilled reader. It is people who speak." (ibid.:155).

The notion of translation experienced a revival within the so called Ontological Turn in the discipline, dominated by Viveiros de Castro's work on Amerindian Perspectivism. According to Amerindian Perspectivism, different species do not live in different epistemological contexts, but within different ontologies. What *is* and what *is not* lies in the eyes of the beholder.[27]

> "Therefore, the aim of perspectivist translation [...] is not that of finding a "synonym" [...] in our own human conceptual language for the representation that other species [...] use to speak about one and the same thing. Rather, the aim is to avoid losing sight of the differences concealed within equivocal "homonyms" between our language and that of other species, since we and they are never talking about the same things" (Viveiros de Castro 2004:7).

According to this position, then, translating of cultural concepts, the task of anthropologists is never possible, because the definition of the concepts can be based on differing, ontological premises. Hence, Viveiros de Castro suggests for anthropologists to take on the perspectivist

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26 Malinowski developed his ethnographic theory of language. Levi-Strauss' structuralist approach to the theory of mythology relies on translations and interpretations of the language used in myths.

27 Viveiros de Castro's ethnographic examples describes how, according to the Amerindian ontology, jaguars, humans and peccaries see each other and themselves, namely according to the categories of prey and predator Jaguars would see humans and peccaries as prey, peccaries would see humans and jaguars as predators They all would see each other (jaguar - jaguar, peccary- peccary) as humans and have the same cultural make up as humans (the habitat of the jaguar will look like a human house to the jaguar, the water it drinks will be seen as manioc beer).

view and focus on differences between concepts, rather than assuming that they are referring to the same object. He calls this "controlled equivocation" (ibid.:7). Instead of looking for cross cultural similarities and overlapping, seemingly identical, concepts, equivocation means "to communicate by differences, instead of *silencing the Other by presuming a univocality* - the essential similarity - between what the Other and We are saying" (ibid.:10, my emphasis).

With this radical focus on difference, Viveiros de Castro has been causing for interesting and controversial debates in current anthropology.

Understanding translation as "an operation of differentiation - a production of difference" (ibid: 20), has its appeal as well as it has its perils. In the present thesis, the question 'Is this really the same?' has its definite merits as it sharpens the attention to the *different* meanings and understandings of e.g. Gender and *jenda,* instead of assuming they are the same and therefore silencing other understandings than one's own. This being said, though, I find the idea that translation is entirely impossible and we can never understand 'the other', troublesome. With its focus on the Otherness as radically different, Viveiros de Castro's approach of controlled equivocation seems to neglect or even deny similarity between cultural concepts. And it further denies the possibility of the two perspectives being ever understood. Therefore, it seems to be a very static approach to the problems of translation and understanding between different contexts.

But as I indicated earlier, certain concepts of the Development sector and Ni-Vanuatu everyday life are not divided by a sudden, irreconcilable gap. Rather these two sides are connected through a "translation chain" (Rottenburg 2009) with numerous links.

To understand the process of translating Gender in Vanuatu, I suggest to use a more dynamic, processual approach to understandings and misunderstandings of the 'Other'.

As a helpful model, I would like to introduce Edda Weigand's approach to the "standard case" of misunderstanding.

(Mis-)Understanding

The linguist professor Edda Weigand (1999) developed the probably most comprehensible model of "the standard case" of misunderstanding. According to her model of D*ialogic Action Games*, the main purpose of all communication is "*coming to an understanding*" (Weigand

1999:769). Thereby she underlines the processuality of communication. This process is dialogic and at its centre is the human being. Accordingly, misunderstanding and understanding are not contrary opposites of each other, but "misunderstanding is a form of understanding which is *partially* or *totally deviant* from what the speaker intended to communicate" (ibid.). In the standard case, then, misunderstandings occur involuntarily: the speaker communicates an information and the recipient's understanding of this information is different from the original intention. Moreover, the recipient is unaware of her misunderstanding and needs to be informed about it (ibid.: 769). This is the crucial difference between a *misunderstanding* and *non-understanding*, as someone who has not understood something is aware of it and will react accordingly - either by trying to understand (e.g. by asking questions like: What did you say? What does that mean? etc.) or by trying to hide the non-understanding (e.g. to conceal her ignorance on the topic) (ibid.: 770).

Understanding, Misunderstanding, non- understanding are the three key elements in the model Dialogic Action Games, in which "coming to an understanding" is achieved directly, by pointing to a misunderstanding, by admitting non-understanding or is not achieved at all (when misunderstanding is not identified or non-understanding not revealed).

Weigand's conclusion is, that the outcome of communication is not predictable for the very reason that in the centre of the *Dialogic Action Games* model are human beings with their particular differences (e.g. cognitive, emotional, cultural differences, but also the differences between layman and expert or women and men).

These types of communication will be looked at in this thesis. And in this context, I want to raise the question, if, in the context of Development cooperation in Port Vila, there is a form of *planned* or *unresolved misunderstanding* at work. Planned misunderstanding is the voluntary, strategic choice "to select utterances which can be believed to lead to misunderstanding" (Weigand 1999:764). The interlocutor who has misunderstood something without recognizing it, will intentionally not be informed about this by the speaker, as the speaker has certain interests in keeping the misunderstanding deceived (ibid.:764). In this case, there is a clear difference in knowledge between the interlocutors, and it also reveals a certain power difference, as the speaker is causing the misunderstanding or is keeping the ambiguity in order to make profit. That assumes a certain ulterior motive by the speaker. But what if the speaker is not aware of the misunderstanding either? In this case of *unresolved misunderstanding*, a mutual understanding cannot be achieved, and therefore it could be categorized as a miscommunication.

Planned or unresolved misunderstanding however, can have severe consequences for the creation of knowledge as well as for power-dynamics between speaker(s) and receiver(s).

This dimension of the power of (mis)understandings and translations is at best only indicated in Viveiros de Castro's or in Weigand's theoretical approaches and shall be looked at a bit more explicitly in the present thesis. Therefore, a few thoughts on the power of languages are appropriate at this point.

The power of languages

In his chapter of the seminal anthology *Writing Culture* (1986), Talal Asad points out that there are "institutionally defined power relations between the languages" (1986:157), of the so called Third World and the Western languages (Asad's terminology). While languages of 'the Third World' are considered to be 'weak', especially English gains more power in everyday life of people as well as in academia - almost all over the world.[28] According to this view, translations between languages reveal political power relations.

Asad states that 'weaker' languages "are more likely to submit to forcible transformation in the translation process" (1986: 157f), meaning that in the translation from a vernacular language to English, the vernacular terms would experience more transformation than English in the other way around. This observation is relevant for the present analysis, as the English notion Gender gets 'translated' into Bislama *jenda* by minimal spelling changes and no phonetic changes.[29] The translational tool used in this case is called naturalized borrowing (Fernández Guerra 2012:7f) and if used too often, the translation maintains "a certain local colour or exoticism" (ibid: 8) to the reader.

The effect of borrowing the term Gender to Bislama *jenda* is not 'exoticism', but creates a sense of authority, as the translation runs from the 'stronger' to the 'weaker' language.

In her numerous publications, the anthropologist Sally Engle Merry traces these processes of translations and implementations of global women's and human rights to local contexts all over the world and illustrates the power dynamics in which these processes take place.

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28 It is not a coincidence that also the present thesis is written in English, although the author is German studying at a Norwegian University.
29 The pronunciation of *jenda* is like Gender but with a rather open "a" or "ɐ" sound in the end (instead of "ər"): dʒɛndɐ

In her article *Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle (2006)*, for example, she observes:

> "Because of these differences among languages, determined by professional, national, and international factors, the process of "cultural translation" can be an act of power, especially when it means reinterpreting one set of experiences and categories in term of another powerful one " (ibid.:42).

"Cultural translators", such as community leaders, Development workers, or social society groups, hold a position in between unequal powers (ibid.:40) and in this position they are powerful and vulnerable in the same time.

> "As knowledge brokers, translators channel the flow of information but they are often distrusted, because their ultimate loyalties are ambiguous and they may be double agents. They are powerful in that they mastered both of the discourses of the interchange, but they are vulnerable to charges of disloyalty and double-dealing" (ibid.).

A crucial point Engle Merry's view on 'the middle' is that the translators are affected by aspects like their own ethnicity, Gender or social status; the opportunity to wealth and power; and especially by the question "who is funding them" (ibid.:40).

Engle Merry's approach is crucial for this thesis, as it opens the door to take a closer look at the middlemen within the processes of translation and vernacularization, in order to understand the various power-dynamics they are engaged in.

At this point, I want to refer to Michel Foucault's ground breaking work on concepts of discourse and power. Foucault's concept of "discourse", "purposely blurs together three levels of meaning: the act of talking itself; a body of knowledge content that is talked about; and a set of conditions and procedures which regulate the talking" (Lindstrom 1990: xii). According to this theory, whoever is able to control discourse, is powerful. Power for Foucault is something that constantly (re)creates and articulates itself dynamically:

> "Power must be analysed as something which circulates, or rather as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation. And not only do individuals circulate between the threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing this power They are not only its inert or consenting target; they are always also the elements of its articulation. In other words, individuals are the vehicles of power, not its point of application." (Foucault 1980:98)

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Summarizing the analytical frame I want to use in this thesis I suggest the following:

- with 'translation' I do not assume that it is easy to understand culturally foreign

symbols or concepts from one cultural context to another;

- the focus on differences, rather than on similarities, as suggested by Viveiros de Castro, will be a guiding principle in the following analysis;

- however, I refrain from the assumption that these differences are based on static grounds;

- rather, I assume that the differences of meaning occur in more dialogical processes and have the character of misunderstandings, as described in Weigand's model;

- these dialogues, however, happen in a political space in which various actors hold positions of unequal power;

- therefore, by looking closer at processes of translations and misunderstandings, and especially by looking at the position of the translators, as Engle Merry does, not only power relations shall be revealed and critically inspected, but also the question of how these power relations emerge and sustain, e.g. by the use of miscommunication and controlled misunderstandings.

Bislama

When talking about languages, translations and especially power-dynamics in languages, the case of Bislama is certainly an interesting one. Bislama is declared as Vanuatu's national language, while English and French are acknowledged as official languages as well as "principle languages of education" (Constitution of the Republic of Vanuatu Article 3.1).[30]

Bislama is an English-lexifier pidgin, similar to Tok Pisin in Papua New Guinea and Solomon Island Pijin (Besnier 2004: 103). These pidgin languages developed in the 19th century, when Melanesians worked[31] in the plantations of Queensland, Australia. The workers on the fields often spoke different languages and used a certain 'broken English' in order to be able to

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30 In recent years, attempts have been made to implement vernacular languages into the school system: "Children will hear either English or French in the classroom from the beginning, but will be taught in a vernacular language chosen by the school committee, in cooperation with the parents. In urban areas, the parents may choose Bislama, since almost all urban children are fluent in Bislama by school age" (Republic of Vanuatu, Education Master Plan 1999: 6)
31 Recruiting and 'blackbirding' were common means to get Melanesian labourers to work on the plantations. Although some men and women volunteered, others had been tricked to go on board of ships (see the chapter *The Labour Trade* in MacClancy 2002).

communicate with their masters, an even more so, with each other (Crowley 2004:1). But to denigrate Bislama as a simple or even wrong English, does not do it justice, because, although Bislama vocabulary is mainly based on English,[32] the grammar is based on local language structures. Looking behind the English-based terms, certain vernacular understandings and concepts can be detected. Crowley points out that the

> "vocabulary that is used to express family relationships [...] is particularly strongly influenced by the ways that corresponding words are used in local languages in different parts of Vanuatu" (2004:1)

The examples of *braed praes* and *angkel* later in this thesis will reveal that these are terms that have often been misunderstood as the equations of 'bride price' and 'uncle'. However, behind the terms lie vernacular Ni-Vanuatu ideas of relatedness that are not corresponding neatly with the English counterparts. In this regard, Bislama can be seen as closer to other vernacular languages in Vanuatu than to English.

Formerly a plantation language, Bislama is expanding, both in its use as well as in its vocabulary. Especially in the urban areas of Port Vila and Luganville, Bislama is used in multiple contexts, as it becomes the language "of religious worship, national and local politics […], the bureaucracy, the courts and the police, shopping, work, sport, the radio, friendship and romance, and even family life "(Crowley 2004: 3).

Until today, however, there is no standardization of the use of grammar or spelling in Bislama. Furthermore, Bislama is undergoing many stylistic modifications that allow incorporations of especially English words - like Gender- into Bislama. These spread especially in the urban areas and within young urban population, but also "politicians are apparently free to anglicise their Bislama randomly" (Crowley 2000: 100). The lack of standardization of Bislama, causes for a creative use of the language but also for real concern, as it is questionable whether "the kind of Bislama that is used publicly by well-educated Ni-Vanuatu to lesser educated people is actually correctly understood" (ibid.) or if it "communicates nothing to their audience apart from the fact that politicians consider themselves far better educated in a metropolitan language than their constituents" (ibid.).

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32 To a lesser extent, Bislama contains words based on French, Spanish and other languages of Colonial powers.

Understanding Gender

In common understanding Gender is often described as *socially* defined difference between men and women as opposed to sex, the *biologically* defined difference between men and women. Both is understood to be universal.

Dichotomies of Sex /Gender, biology/ society and man/woman have been contested, challenged and "troubled" (Butler 1990), since the 1970s in feminist movements, in academia and in LGBTQ movements. Academic approaches often suggest alternative concepts, like Third Gender (Herdt 1994), Gender continuum (Eyler & Wright 1997) or Gender Fluidity (Davis 2008).

Furthermore, the assumption that Gender is a state of being is highly contested, especially in the feminist perspectives of anthropology, and especially in the Melanesian context. Gender and sexuality have been popular topics for anthropologists in the Pacific for a long time (e.g. Mead 1928, Malinowski 1929), but especially Marilyn Strathern's *The Gender of the Gift* (1988) is considered pioneering work for both Gender studies and Oceania studies. But also her earlier publication *Women in Between* (1972) is influential in both how anthropology has (1) dealt with Gender and (2) with the Pacific from the 1970s onwards. Strathern's notion of Gender sees "Gender dynamics as always inhering in relations, forging and reforged through complex interactions between embodied persons through socially shaped practices" (Morgain & Taylor 2015: 2f).The understanding of Gender as a process is closely interlinked with a concept of the person, who is always embedded in social relations, which are transforming over one's lifetime - a dividual instead of an individual.[33] From this perspective, Gender can be seen as a process of social (re-, de-, en-) gendering rather than as a "natural" constitution. Therefore, instead of asking "What is Gender?" the question "When is a person gendered?" seems more appropriate.

Besides Strathern, many other anthropologists have worked on concepts of person and Gender in Oceania, most recently in connection with the influences of Christianity and modernity (e.g. Jolly 2004, Eriksen 2008).[34] But although, there are multiple claims of scholars to move

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33 The notion of the dividual emerged out of Dumont's work in India and has been appreciated and criticised especially by Oceanianists after Strathern's (1988) adaptation of the notion into the Melanesian context (Hess 2006, Smith 2012, e.a.).

34 In Vanuatu especially influential is the work of Margaret Jolly (e.g *Women of the place,* 1994), Lissant Bolton (e.g *Unfolding the Moon,* 2002), John Taylor (e.g. *The Other Side,* 2007), Annelin Eriksen (*Gender, Christianity and Change in Vanuatu,* 2008) and Sabine Hess (*Person and Place*, 2009), to name but a few.

towards a diverse and fluid notion of Gender as contextual and locally different, outside of academia or LGBTQ movements, it is still bound in a strong man: woman straitjacket.

Gender in Development

With the rise of feminism and women's movements in the 1960s and 1970s, and parallel to academic models of Gender, emerged an increased focus on Gender issues in Development theory and practice.

During the 1975 UN International Year for Women and the following International Women's Decade (from 1976 until 1985), more projects and policies for women were established. The most foundational of document is probably the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which was adopted in 1979 by the UN General Assembly. It is often described as "an international bill of rights for women" (UNWomen a).

In addition, the Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women (1993), the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action from 1995, and the third of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDG) are amongst the major declarations to achieve "gender equality and the advancement and empowerment of women" (UNWoman b, paragraph 24) on a global scale. Gender equality and Gender-Based Violence (GBV) have been key words in international policies. Based on the assumption that Gender and Violence are universal phenomena, GBV has been treated as a 'truly global problem'.

Probably the most referred to definition of GBV derives from the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action 1995 (paragraph 113):

> "The term "violence against women" means any act of Gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivation of liberty, whether occurring in public or in private life."

It has been often criticized that GBV is conflated or equated with Violence Against Women (VAW), Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) and hence focuses on women rather than on Gender in general. The question of "What's Gendered About Gender-Based Violence?" (Jakobsen 2014) seems legitimate.

With regard to how Gender has been treated in academia, it is remarkable that the internationally recognised declarations are based on a dualistic understanding of Gender, leaving no space for Gender diversity or other forms of relating men and women (e.g. kinship

relations). Furthermore, they seem to conflate Gender with women and depict women as people, who need to be helped in their struggles against discrimination and violence.

Also, it has been criticised that the declarations lack the perspective of women from developing countries (Momsen 2004:14).

Despite their shortcomings approaches to Gender in Development became essential for governments of countries labelled 'underdeveloped' or 'developing' to request assistance from their 'developed' global partners (Momsen 2004:12). Gender became a powerful instrument for Development cooperation.

Gender as Concept Metaphor

Gender is a complex concept that seems to slip away once we think we could grasp it. In different context (as e.g. academia vs. Development) it has been understood differently. Therefore, I will use Gender in this thesis as a concept-metaphor as introduced by Henrietta Moore (2004). Concept metaphors are analytical instruments so to say: "They are domain terms that orient us towards areas of shared exchange, which is sometimes academically based" (Moore 2004:73).

Furthermore, although concept metaphors are to a certain degree based on physical phenomena, e.g. the connection between Gender and the sexed body, their exact meaning can never be precisely defined, because it changes depending on (e.g. culturally) particular practices and contexts (ibid.).

The ambiguity and openness of concept-metaphors is their strength, as Moore further argues:

> "Their purpose is to maintain a tension between pretentious universal claims and particular contexts and specifics. They are the 'spaces' in which details, facts, and connections make sense [...].
> In order to understand how these concept-metaphors inform the imagination and the practice of both academics and non-academics, and the degree to which understandings are shared, diverge and differ, it is necessary to subject the concept-metaphors to critical scrutiny" (2004:74).

Gender and GBV will be both treated like concept metaphors in this thesis. I will critically look at Gender in order to examine how the understandings of Gender and *jenda* (and sometimes violence and *vaelens*) change in different contexts within the gap.

"Women in Between" - Women's Groups in Port Vila

In the previous chapter I have outlined what I mean with translation processes. I have made clear that the process of translation of terms like Gender faces more than just linguistic barriers. The middle-ground of translation, the gap I am looking at in this thesis, is occupied by 'translators' of various kind, is multi-layered and charged with power/ knowledge differences, making the actors in the translation processes powerful and vulnerable at the same time. Because translation processes in the context of Development cooperation are dependent on the specific constellation of the translator group, I want to sketch out what this constellation looks like in the context of Port Vila.

Big international organisations are highly visible in Port Vila. They maintain fairly big office spaces in town and their logos are omnipresent as they furnish flyers, brochures, T-Shirts, tents, etc. But they do not exist alone. In 2015, there were allegedly more than 140 women's groups in Port Vila (Hilda Lini, 12.11.2015[35]). As Gender in Vanuatu is still considered a 'women's issue', it is mostly - but not exclusively - women's groups who address the topics. Therefore, "mapping the middle" (Engle Merry 2006) in Vanuatu means first and foremost, locating the "women in between" (Strathern 1972).

Women as roads, bridges and flowers

As I have experienced myself in Navitora, a person in Vanuatu is always placed into a relationship, e.g. as someone's child, grandchild, sister or *angkel*. This relational conception of personhood is well known in anthropology, especially in Melanesia (Lienhardt 1979, Strathern 1988, Mosko 1992) and is sometimes referred to as 'Melanesian dividual'. Accordingly, the person in Vanuatu has been understood as the sum and quality of relationships. These relationships need to be established and maintained through reciprocal exchange (e.g. goods, resources, knowledge and women).

In these processes of creating relationships, women play a central role that is acknowledged

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35 during a public forum organised by the VNCW about the topic of women in politics

by proponents of *kastom* as of Christianity alike. In an interview with the CEO of the Malvatumauri, for example, I was told that women function as creators of networks between groups of people through marriage: "*Kastom* is a bridge between people. This bridge is built by women, because when they marry they connect two families. Without women, there are no bridges." (Interview with Jean-Pierre Tom, August 6, 2015).

Furthermore, it is said that women maintain the harmony between two parties by producing and sharing food and valuables[36] with their relatives. Based on the idea that most women move to their husband's place (virilocality) after marriage, the president of the Malvatumauri Chief Seni Mao Tirsupe explained to me : "They are like flowers, flying with the wind" (Interview August 6, 2015).

Women are generally regarded as those who *i mekem rod*, the Bislama expression for creating relationships (literally: 'to create a road or path'). Also, women were presented to me as carriers of knowledge and, because they are seen as the one who move and *mekem rod*, they are also the ones distributing and sharing knowledge between places and people.

With this in mind, it seems less surprising why especially women in Vanuatu fill the middle ground between Development agencies and 'grassroot' Ni-Vanuatu women and men: also in this context, they can be seen as bridges, connectors and path-makers, as well as carriers of knowledge, e.g. knowledge of English, or of concepts like Gender, GBV, etc.

However, as I will show below, the women in "the gap" are different from the "women in between". Acknowledging the role of women in Vanuatu as creators of social relations, NGOs have been increasingly targeting women in their agendas. Established forms of women as 'go-betweeners' are reinforced and institutionalized by these organisations and therefore create somewhat different forms of sociality than the women as bridges, roads and flowers.

At this point, I would like to interrupt my argument for two observations:

(1) Although it might sound like women had the liberty to "build bridges" and "fly around", they were restricted by kinship and *kastom* obligations.

> "A woman walking down the road and meets a man, he is never just a man. He's a father, a grandfather, an uncle, a cousin, a son, and there are strict prescribed forms of behaviour for each of those relationships. A West Ambae example is if you're a woman and you meet a man down the road, if he is your grandfather, then you share a joking relationship with him, if he is your brother, then you, out of respect, will stir away from his path and not look directly at him or talk to him" (Bolton in Tor and Toka 2004:15).

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36 Mats made out of pandanus have a high value and are often given in customary rituals. However, nowadays, cloth and tissue, as well as other commodities like kitchen supplies are also seen as valuable gifts.

(2) I have been talking about "women" as if it was a self-explanatory category. However, with regards to the previous point, it becomes clear, that "woman" is never a simple, homogeneous group. We can reverse Bolton's statement and say: A man walking down a road and meets a woman, she is never just a woman. She is a mother, a grandmother, an aunt, a cousin, a daughter and there are strictly prescribed forms of behaviour for each of those relationships.

Can we even talk about women's groups in the first place, if there is not a category simply called "women"? The foundation of "women's groups", then, is the emergence of "women" as a social category. This, is said to be tightly connected to Christian missionary activities: "while attacking indigenous forms of sexual segregation, Christian churches often enshrined new forms of separation: segregated seating in churches, gendered church hierarchies, **and** 'women's groups'" (Jolly 2003:135). In these groups, women could "share interests distinct from or complementary to those of men" (ibid.).

The idealized Christian woman was "dedicated to a home whose preferred inhabitants were a nuclear family" (ibid.:137, see also Eriksen 2016:5) - an image that until today does not fully apply to Vanuatu. Women have continued to work outside the houses (e.g. in their gardens), and the nuclear family never replaced broader kinship structures.

It has been argued that, because of the role of women to create communities and share knowledge, Christianity spread through Vanuatu.

It was mainly the roads that women created, on which Christian values and practices travelled. And with them travelled certain ideals of what being a Christian woman (and man) meant.

Networking women

Jolly writes: "the efficacy of women's groups is mobilized as a series of **relations** between persons rather than a congregation of individuals" (2003: 136-7).

As I mentioned above, the Melanesian person is characterized by its relationships to others. If we use Jolly's statement, then, we could say that the Church women's groups, enabled women to relate to one another in ways aside kinship, marriage, trades or *kastom*. It is not a group of individual women, but the sum of their relations to one another, that creates agency in the

women's groups. These can be imagined as mainly **horizontal** relations, connecting women laterally with each other, rather than hierarchically (although the latter is not excluded from the former).

In the last few decades, there is an "increasing politicization" (Dickson-Waiko 2003: 98) within women's groups in Vanuatu (and Melanesia at large). The groups expanded their focus from spiritual and domestic matters, to political, social and especially to Human Rights issues.[37] Women's groups increasingly lament about the lack of realization of CEDAW[38], and in 2015 especially demanded the establishment of reserved seats for women in the parliament. This shift, however, is not merely a shift from "domestic matters" to "global matters", it changes the entire structure of and within women's groups.

"Networking" became one of the key expressions in public announcements and interviews.

Now, it might seem that networking of the NGOs simply builds on the "women as bridges" metaphor. And it is possible to say that the Development movement, in certain ways, continues the Christian movement in creating women's groups (now, with rather political themes) and channelling its messages through the 'roads' women created and maintain.

But there is also another way of seeing this movement, namely as creating differentiation between the women who occupy positions in NGOs and those who do not.

Probably the biggest difference between the Christian and the Development movement is the amount of external funding and regulatory mechanisms that nowadays, influences the agendas of women's groups.

Civil society organisations (CSO), are faced with several financial and bureaucratic hurdles in order to be recognized as a liable CSO. Book keeping and writing reports is one of the major tasks of CSOs in Port Vila. Stakeholders from abroad want to know, how the money is used. These reports, then, might determine whether or not an organisation will get funded in the next year or not. Everyone working in an NGO/CSO in Port Vila lamented about the insecurities of funding and about the fact, that some important things do not get financial support. "Our printer is broken for many weeks now. We need it daily", a woman working for an international NGO told me, "We have told this to our stakeholders. But they rather pay for the costlier expenses, like flyers - which we need to print somewhere else now. I guess, it is because nobody would see their label on our printer in the office."

A printer, an office - these are things that most local organisations do not even have access to. In order to meet the demands of funders, CSO and NGO need to be able to activate a lot of

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37 See for example the contributions in the special issue of *Oceania* (2003, Vol. 74 1&2) *Women's Groups and Everyday Modernity in Melanesia.*

38 Vanuatu ratified CEDAW in 1995 and implemented it into National law.

resources like material capital, financial capital as well as education and social capital.

I do not coincidentally use Bourdieu's terms and therefore an economic metaphor. The kind of relations that are created in the women's groups in 2015 were increasingly influenced by the acquisition of the resources (1) money and (2) knowledge.

In Vanuatu, women's groups are encouraged to work together and create networks in order to share knowledge and other resources, cooperate during public events and - so the declared ideal at least - to achieve the goals of "stopping violence" or "empower women".

The whole model of networks, however is not based on merely horizontal relationships, but has a clear vertical orientation as well. The ethos of cooperation exists simultaneously with the idea of competitiveness.

This is not necessarily a foreign concept in Vanuatu. Eriksen (2008) observes on Ambrym (North Vanuatu) different forms of sociality that she calls "female" and "male" forms. The female form, based on women's roles as connectors, is defined as creating communities, whereas the male social form is creating individuals and hierarchies: [39]

> "There is a constant tension between the two poles of the social structure. These Gendered poles can also be conceptualised as the hierarchical and the egalitarian, or the personalised and the communal. These rarely exist in their pure form, but one or the other of them seems to dominate in different situations "(Eriksen 2008:159).

Often, both forms exist at the same time. And depending on the situation, male social forms can be dominant and exerted by women as it seems to be the case with the women's groups.

In the Development movement in Port Vila, in 2015, communality is demonstrated, but the dominant form of sociality created in the middle-ground is based on differentiation: differentiation between the women's groups and between the women's groups and the 'grassroot women'. Thus the networks of women's groups in Port Vila create a sort of "emerging class" (Gewertz & Errington 1999).

From the middle-ground to the middle-class

About twenty years ago, Deborah Gewertz and Fredrick Errington describe in *Emerging Class*

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[39] It is important to emphasise, that Eriksen speaks of female and male form of social structure, which are ideal concepts that do not exist purely, and by which she does not mean that only women use female forms of sociality.

in Papua New Guinea (1999) major social and political shifts that occurred in the 1990s in PNG and facilitated the development of an elite middle-class. In ethnographic detail they explore how currents of global capitalism have created inequalities in PNG, "a place generally characterized by its egalitarian ethos" (ibid: 141).

The major criterion of this 'emerging class' in PNG is the access to education: "normalcy had become those relatively few Papua New Guineans wealthy enough to become educated and live modern lifestyles" (ibid.: 135).   Similarly, most Ni-Vanuatu women 'in the middle' enjoyed education, not rarely abroad, which most of Ni-Vanuatu families could not afford. In many cases, prominent women - the ones who are visible, and audible, in debates around Gender - were from a chiefly family. They wore boar tusks around their wrists (a symbol of power in *kastom*) and wore modern dresses or 'even' pants - which is, still in 2015, a debated topic (to lesser extent in urban Port Vila than in rural areas). They distinguished themselves visibly from the majority of women, the local *mamas,* and also in their rhetoric and manners.

The women in the middle (with maybe a few exceptions) are clearly a part of a middle-class, that is defined by "sharply differential access to economic and cultural capital (such as employment networks, educational opportunities, and sartorial, gustatory and conversational skills) " (Gewertz & Errington 1999:2).

From the outside perspective, however, these women are often perceived as 'local' and therefore they are the 'voices of Ni-Vanuatu women'. The statements and reports they produce are seen as 'authentic' representations of the status and desires of Ni-Vanuatu women.

In Vanuatu, there is a certain perceived distinction between the elite women and *grassroot mamas,* which is expressed differently, depending on the contexts. I would hear sentences like: "These women, they are not like us. They do not know us."[40] At the same time, a friend of mine would express: "*Mifala ol grassroot woman, mifala i no civilised.*" - "We grassroot women, we are not civilised." Statements like this revealed to me a certain ambiguous approach to the women in the middle: on the one hand they are not perceived as being connected to the grassroot but at the same time, the grassroot does not seem to be a desirable place to be. In contrast, it is them, the knowledgeable women, the "embodiments of development" (Gewertz& Errington 1999:15), who are desired - and at the same time criticised for being not Ni-Vanuatu.

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40 In East New Britain, PNG, Keir Martin observes the emergence of the category Big Shot as a critique of non-elite Tolai people towards an emerging elite: "The Big Shot is a person who is considered to have placed themselves outside of their moral obligations to others" (2013:178)

Urban women

With the increased stratification of women into elite and 'grassroot' in Port Vila, also multiple, new forms of femininity emerged. To make this clear, it is the easiest to give some examples of women I worked with.[41] These are just episodes and are not meant as life stories. The point is to show what these women stand for: the diversity of urban womanhood.

Catherine and Dora - "Stap long haos nomo"

Catherine and Dora are sisters. They come from an outer Island. Catherine is in her early twenties, Dora is a little bit older. Dora has a new born baby with her partner Jon, who is from another island. They are not married. They stay in a big, steadily growing suburb of Port Vila. The house, built of corrugated iron and wood contains four rooms of varying size (between approximately 6 to 12m²). Three couples live there with their children in pre-school age. Jon shares a room with his uncle. Dora shares a room with Catherine and the new born baby. In total there are 8 adults and 6 children living together. A little pipe is their only water supply, which they share with their neighbours. And the only light sources at night are solar-powered lamps and fire from the fire place. Whenever I visit the family, I would mostly see the women cooking on the open fire, cleaning and caring for their children, whereas the men are out, working or walking around.

In the perirurban settlement in Port Vila

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41 Parts of this text has been published in the chapter 'Vanuatu' of the ECOPAS report *Understanding Gender Inequality Actions in the Pacific: Ethnographic Case-studies and Policy Options*(2016).

Catherine does not have children or a husband yet. She came to Port Vila a few months ago to find work. She works as a cook in one of the resorts in Port Vila. She is a social, outgoing woman. She wears pants, and enjoys going to *kava* bars and night clubs. She dates men and does not think about getting married soon. She engages herself in the local church and takes boxing lessons. In one of our conversations we talked about partnerships. I asked her what a good partner in her opinion is. She shrugs her shoulders: "I don't know. Maybe a religious man (Bislama: *man blong jos*) ...?" She wants to be a mother, one day. "But only two children - one boy and one girl - because having children in town is just too expensive."

Because Catherine is neither married nor a mother yet, she describes herself as "free": "*Mi wokabaot nomo.*"- (lit. I am just walking around.) Dora, in contrast, because she is a mother, is expected to stay at home "*stap long haos nomo*". This shift from a mobile, free lifestyle to a stay-at-home mother is a recent and rather urban phenomenon. Eriksen (2016) observes that especially in the urban scene with the influence of Christianity, the "moral woman is the woman inside the house, the woman caring for her family by providing and maintaining the domestic space " (2016: 5). The image of women who *i mekem rod* and are flowers that carry knowledge with them, shifted and changed the understanding of femininity in town "from mobility to domesticity, from relation to individual" (ibid: 10).

Mary - The caretaker

Mary is in her mid-twenties. She is married and has three children, the eldest of which lives with Mary's parents in another island of Vanuatu. Mary is working as housekeeper for several private persons. She lives with her husband, and his parents and his sister in a village, close to Port Vila. Mary is working five full days a week and she earns about 6000 Vt (ca. 50 Euro) per week. With this income, she has to support herself, her husband and the two children, who live in their house. Her husband is a seasonal worker, who picks fruit in New Zealand for six months, the other half of the year he stays at home. Sometimes he would drive a bus or pick up one-day jobs, but he gives those up quickly. Mary complains, that he spends the money he makes occasionally for alcohol and *kava*[42]*,* instead of investing it into their children's school fees. She is in control of her own income, but her husband is supported by his sister, who is

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[42] *Kava* is a culturally important drink in Vanuatu and other parts of the Pacific. It is made out of roots from the kava plant and has a sedative effect. Originally, the consumption of kava was restricted to ceremonial contexts, but nowadays, especially in town, *kava* is popularized and can be purchased in so called "kava bars".

also employed. "She is giving money to him, when he asks", she says. The living situation with her in-laws is obviously tense. "His parents buy food and treat him like a little boy." Mary is frustrated. Her living situation causes a lot of arguments. In addition to that, her husband is jealous and beats her regularly. Mary is not allowed to talk or meet others outside her workspace. She openly expresses that she feels trapped. "When we fight, I stay at a friend's place, but the next day, I go back to him. What else should I do? ... My brother would kill him, if he knew. The police would put him to prison, but that does not help me. I still have to live in his family's home." Once, she went to her parents to the outer Island to seek shelter from her husband after a fight, when he beat her again. Her husband came a few weeks after and convinced her to come back: "He told me, he would change. But when I came back, nothing has changed." She tells me, that, now she cannot run away any more. Her family uses the money given as *braed praes* ('bride price') as a reason why she has to go back to her husband. Annie is trying to save money to be able to pay back the money. "I want to take my kids and go to my family on the island."

I have frequently met women with Mary's story and it is the story most highlighted in the Development discourse and in the gap - as I will show below. But, as I will also argue, women like Mary are mostly talked *about*, and rarely talked *with* or *listened to.*

Norma - The elite woman

Norma suggested that I meet her in one of the cafés in town that are usually frequented by honeymooners and tourists. She is in her thirties and comes from one of the outer islands of Vanuatu. She wears a modern blouse, some make up, designer glasses and is busy working on her laptop, while sipping her cappuccino. Norma is part of a newly created group of women, whose appointed goal is to encourage women to enter the field of politics. The initiators of the group, which I will anonymize as Women for Parliament (WFP), are well-established and well-known women, who ran for the previous elections, but did not succeed. Norma contested in Port Vila. Her husband is a politician as well. She describes her experience during the campaign: "It was very hard. I felt so alone in my campaign." The worst was the publicity and the news about the female candidates: "They wanted to know everything, every little detail of our private lives." Suspicions about corruptions, love affairs and badmouthing the female candidate were common. Norma: "When male politicians have love affairs or are suspected of bribery that is normal. But women get accused of it. Not by men only, but especially by other

women." Jealousy between women is often expressed as a big problem in Vanuatu. Running for elections is very risky for women in Vanuatu, Norma explains: "Most of the female candidates cannot return to their jobs, after they contested. This is like a stigma for them that they carry for a long time." Norma was unemployed for several months after the election as well, but had numerous job offers when I interviewed her. She explains as follows: "They [the employers] do not look at you as an individual; they look at your network. Who are you connected to? And how can they use that connection for their own profit?"

The WFP group repeatedly used a metaphor in public events, that illustrates the stratification of the society into classes. In this metaphor, Ni-Vanuatu society is compared to a pigeon: The head are the leaders, as they make the main decisions. The wings are men and women in Vanuatu. They make the bird fly as they are the driving forces of Vanuatu. The tail is the youth, as they are the steering mechanism of the society.

This metaphor is interesting in many regards. The idea is that pigeon is an organism that can only fly, when all its elements work together. The pigeon is divided into four parts. Commonly, the four elements of Ni-Vanuatu society are categorized as chiefs, churches, women and youth - who are all represented by their respective national councils. In the pigeon metaphor used by WFG, however, the four parts of the community are leaders, women, men and youth. The term "leaders" is supposed to encompass spiritual, *kastom* and political leaders.

Norma and WFG is an example for elite women in Port Vila. Her story reveals the risks of women, who are 'sticking out', not only in politics, but also in economy and/ or by being in organisations. The risk of losing one's prestigious position, of being an outcast and the importance of networks for the women in the middle is evident. At the same time, however, there is a difference between "leaders" and "women", expressed in the bird metaphor, which indicates that the elite women distance themselves from common Ni-Vanuatu women.

Power of knowledge

So far, I have tried to get a grip on the middle-ground through which knowledge and (mis)understandings traverse between Development discourse and local everyday life experiences. I have established that it is mostly Ni-Vanuatu women in women's groups who occupy this space. Furthermore, I have shown that this role of carriers of knowledge and creators of community is commonly credited to women.

Christianity is said to have spread throughout Vanuatu through the lateral networks that women created. Networking in the context of the Development, however, is a rather vertical network. Let us recall Foucault (1980:98): "Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organisation". In Port Vila, this can be taken literally.

Also, Lindstrom (1990), in applying Foucault's theories to Tanna, observes:

> "Typical Melanesian, the Tannese value knowledge as a source of power. [...] As elsewhere in Melanesia, restricted knowledge (technological and otherwise) is part of recognized requisite capital that supports the production of material goods [...]. People attempt purposely to control those procedures that order the production, circulation, and consumption of knowledge statements. They economize information." (1990:10)

Lindstrom uses the economic metaphor of knowledge as a commodity that can be produced, circulated, consumed in order to accumulate power. "Restricted knowledge" becomes a rare commodity and is therefore valuable. Gender belongs to a certain degree to the sphere of restricted knowledge, as its meaning not available for everyone.

Although certain knowledge about Gender and other concepts of the Development discourse is accessible through education, access to education, especially to secondary and higher levels is restricted by school fees, which only a few Ni-Vanuatu can afford.

Knowing about Gender, and knowing the Development language, stratifies the society into the ones who are part of what I call "knowledge network", and the ones who are not; the ones who know, and the ones who do not.

IV. Translations and Misunderstandings in the gap

To grasp the full spectrum of what happens in the knowledge network, in which translation processes and power dynamics are at work, is an ambitious venture that exceeds the limits of the present thesis. Nonetheless, I shall examine some examples of different communicative forms, in which Gender and GBV were 'translated' - directly or indirectly.

In this part of the thesis, I will move towards a closer examination of the discourse around Gender in Port Vila. I will critically point at the most common "acts of talking" in the gap, namely through numbers and statistics and in the context of so called awareness campaigns.

I will start with the *Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships*. Often, surveys and other publications that work mainly with text, numbers and graphs, create a certain sense of authority and universality, which has been critically addressed by anthropologists (e.g. Appadurai 1993). I want to take a closer look at the survey's content and approach to important aspects of everyday life (e.g. *kastom* and Christianity), as well as to its representation of Ni-Vanuatu women and men. As an often referenced source, the survey feeds to a great extent into the image of men and women in Vanuatu - especially, outside Vanuatu. The survey has been conducted and published by a local CSO, the Vanuatu Women's Center (VWC) and is therefore often considered to be more "authentic" than other reports - a perspective that is worth questioning. Furthermore, it has been translated and published in Bislama and is a good example for the translation, literally, of Gender and GBV.

As second example, I choose to take a closer look at the opening event of the 16 Days of Activism, a global awareness campaign against GBV. Awareness campaigns of that sort are organised frequently in Port Vila and they are usually presented as successful and relevant. A critical examination of the speeches made during these events shall shed some light on the efficacy of awareness campaigns on GBV. Do these events really share knowledge on Gender and GBV? To whom? By whom? And are those speeches causing understanding or are they confusing and cause misunderstanding?

I 'disturb' these two parts with two ethnographic examples, which challenge certain notions used in survey and speeches and highlight processes of misunderstanding.

Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships

The *Vanuatu National Survey on Women's Lives and Family Relationships* is probably the most quoted document, in Development discourses about the situation of women in Vanuatu. 246 pages present the findings of a nationwide survey, that was conducted by the Vanuatu Women's Center (VWC) in partnership with the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) in 2009. Allegedly "well-adapted to Vanuatu's cultural context" (VWC 2011:2), the survey questionnaire and methodology were developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO), making its findings "comparable to other international studies" (ibid.).

3141 household interviews and 2337 interviews with individual women between the age of 15 and 49 were completed in the six provinces of Vanuatu as well as in the two urban areas Port Vila and Luganville (VWC 2011:14). The questions focused on the following areas: the prevalence and types of violence against women by husbands/partners and people other than husbands/ partners; women's attitudes to violence against women and women's rights; effects of VAW; coping strategies used by women to deal with violence; situations that trigger violence. The "Women's Questionnaire" (original title) consist of 36 pages and more than 180 questions. A week-long training allegedly prepared the over 50 fieldworkers, who were from "rural and remote areas from all around the country" (ibid: 39).

The survey is surely the most comprehensive statistical data on women's experience with and attitude towards VAW. Nevertheless, the survey report - as every data - cannot be taken as bare fact without being the subject of critical scrutiny. Therefore, I want to take a closer look at the survey report and wish to examine its content, its narrative, its target audience. The objective of this analysis is not to undermine or disrespect the work of the VWC, but rather to reveal one link of the chain of translations of Gender.

As it is neither beneficial nor necessary, I will not critically examine the survey page by page, but want to emphasize a few observations that are worth a second look.

Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC)

Established in 1992, the VWC's acclaimed aim is "to work towards the elimination of

violence against women and children in Vanuatu" (VWC 2011:24), by raising awareness in communities all over the country and offering counselling services to women who are affected by violence. The national centre of the VWC is located in Port Vila, in a side street outside the town centre. There are additional branches on Espiritu Santo, on Tanna and Vanualava. Also, the VWC is present in all six provinces through over 40 Committees Against Violence Against Women (CAVAW). These local, VWC-trained women (and some men) "assist women and children living with violence in remote communities" (VWC 2011:24). The VWC is not only nationally connected, but spans a network to international agents in the region as a close partnership to the Fiji Women's Crisis Center, and a membership of the Pacific Women's Network Against Violence Against Women show. Main donors of the "independent civil society"(VWC 2011:24) are the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and the New Zealand Aid Programme (NZAID). The VWC is not an institution that is met without concerns - from other organisations, as well as from individuals, as it has a reputation of only selectively cooperating with other local institutions and organisations. This exclusive attitude causes manifold speculations about the methods and goals of the VWC are manifold. The VWC is thereby a typical example of an in-between cultural translator (in Engle Merry's sense). On this background, then, I shall take a look at selected content of the survey.

What language is used? Who is the target readership?

The first striking point is that the report is entirely in English and that thereby the intended readership of this report needs to be skilled in English. Moreover, the assumed reader of the report needs to have a certain education in order to interpret the elaborate charts and tables in the report, that visualize the survey's results.

Graphs, numbers, charts and other visualisations travel easily across borders, disguising the fact, that they are the results of interpretations and that they need to be contextualized in order to be understood.

Attached to the report is a copy of the questionnaire that was used to conduct the survey. Only the English version of the questionnaire is published, leaving open how the questions were translated into Bislama. Apparently, "[t]he Bislama translation was thoroughly tested and discussed (question by question) during the training of the fieldworkers, with a number of

modifications made to clarify certain questions" (VWC 2011.:39). Nevertheless, the report states, that even in Bislama, the questionnaire was not necessarily understandable for every Ni-Vanuatu man and woman (ibid.:40).

Acknowledging that the survey is (a) in English and (b) studded with numbers and charts, we cannot overlook the scientific and universalistic aura that this report created around its content.

The universalist tone is in fact something that continues throughout the report. The assumptions that the report is built on are, e.g. a Gender-dualism (Gender exists only in male and female oppositional form), the universality of violence as divided into three forms (physical, sexual and emotional violence) and the assumption that women are more vulnerable to violence by their partners than men. Furthermore, the report creates the impression, that it is possible to represent the situation of all women in Vanuatu in one comprehensive survey. Cultural diversity, different social status and the fact that women (and men) are embedded into kinship systems are rarely presented or waved aside as irrelevancies.

What definition of Gender is used? How are women and men presented?

The title indicates a survey on "women's lives" and "family relationships", while the content of the survey focuses on prevalence and types of VAW, as well as on its impacts on the well-being of women and children. Granted that survey and questionnaires are reductive by default, it is nevertheless questionable, if the lives of Ni-Vanuatu women can be so easily subsumed to "partner violence". There is a dominant image of women as generally discriminated and challenged by patriarchal structures and cultural norms that promote certain stereotypes of men and women, that place women generally into a "low status" (VWC 2011:28). They are often referred to as victims/ survivors throughout the report (pages 25, 32, 33, 187,189,190).

Men, especially husbands and male partners, are presented as a homogeneous group of violent individuals. The report presents several factors that are said to be related to violence against women by their husbands/ partners. Five characteristics are said to affect men's violent behaviour: (i)controlling behaviours by the husband/partner, (ii) alcohol or home brew consumption by husband/partner, (iii) Husband/partner having a relationship with another woman while with the respondent, (iv) violence towards other men, (v) Employment status of

the husband/partner (ibid.:174f).

The seven background characteristics of women relating to VAW, are introduced with the following sentences:

> "If a woman experiences several of these factors, particularly in her childhood, she is at greater risk of having a relationship with a husband or partner who is violent and controlling. It should be emphasised that most of these factors are largely beyond her control [...] and they should not be mis-interpreted as causes of violence" (ibid: 175).

It is astonishing how different men and women are presented. Women seem to be so heavily influenced by their childhood experiences with violence (e.g. being hit themselves or seeing the mother being hit), that they can almost not be held responsible for their choice of partners, because the causing factors lie beyond their control. Even if this was true, it is remarkable that this assumption does not apply to men in the same way. In the report, it seems as if men are not affected in the same way as woman by their childhood experiences and as if they, in contrast to woman, would have real choices, responsibility and agency. If the upbringing of women is taken into consideration when talking about the risk factors for violent behaviour, why is that not the case for men? In this regard, women are presented as 'child-like' and the report emphasizes the women-child-image by repeatedly talking about "violence against women and children". The Gender representation is obviously very simplified: men are the villains/ perpetrators, women the victims/ survivors; furthermore, men are the adults who are responsible for their actions, whereas women are like children.

This also shows a purely binary definition of Gender, defined as "men" and "women", a concept that has been contested in academia, as I showed before. Ni-Vanuatu concepts of personhood and relationships and their complexity are 'overlooked' in the report.

Instead, the "family relationships" that are looked at in the report refer mostly to a 'Western-style' core family, consisting of father, mother, child.[43]

How does the survey deal with kastom *and church?*

In the report, *kastom* is presented as a factor that can be used to excuse and facilitate the suppression of women. How exactly, is not further explained. The main example for

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43 Only once the different *kastom* roles of family members were mentioned (VWC 2011:148).

questionable customary practices that allegedly negatively affects the well-being of women is so called bride price (Bislama: *braed praes*). In Section 6 of the questionnaire, women are asked to state if they agree to a list of statements, some of which are the following:

> " It is all right for a woman or girl to be swapped or exchanged for marriage" (question 606 b)

> "If bride price has been paid, a wife becomes the property of the husband" (question 606 c)

The results state (VWC 2011:55):

- "More than half of the women interviewed (53%) believe that if bride price is paid, a woman becomes the husband's property; and almost 1 in 3 (32%) believe that the payment of bride price justifies physical violence.

- More than 1 in 3 (36%) believe it is all right for a girl to be swapped and exchanged for marriage."

The wording of the question is as interesting as the presentation of the results. First, it is remarkable that there is no proper mention of the fact how marriages in Vanuatu proceed and what role marriages play for the self-identity of many women, but also for relationships of kin groups. Instead, it is presented as "swapping" or "exchanging" women, who then become the "property" of their husband. These terms in context of marriage and women will be unfamiliar to people, who are socialized with a rather individualistic concept of personhood, and just the mere idea of "swapping" women will be very negatively connoted. For most Ni-Vanuatu men and women I spoke to, however, *braed praes* was an important part of marriage, as it shows respect to the parents (especially to the mother) of the bride. So "swapping" and "exchanging" or even "paying" women does not necessarily have the same connotation for the interviewees as for the readers of the survey. Considering that the VWS is a local organisation, it is surprising that this topic has not been reflected more variedly. Instead, the survey talks about bride price as a harmful tradition that has "often been used to justify violence against women and poor treatment by husbands and in-laws" (VWC 2011: 29). I, too, have encountered many women and men who told me about the restricting consequences of bride payment for women. At the same time, however, the simplified presentation of bride price falsely suggest it to be a bounded unit, an element of *kastom* that is unfavourable and could be cut out from the repertoire of customary practices. This view denies many aspects of bride price, as I will show in more detail below.

Interestingly, the survey mentions the role of chiefs and churches almost always in the same context and usually in an ambiguous way. Chiefs and church leaders are mentioned as

important confidants for women, as allegedly 24% of women seek help with a chief and 23 % of women tell their church leaders about their experiences with violence and ask for help (VWC 2011:152). But the church, as well as *kastom*, is also mentioned as an obstacle for women in Vanuatu (ibid: 28), as it perpetuates certain stereotypes of women and their roles. At one point, the report states:

> "the rate at which women seek help from chiefs and church leaders is quite high in Vanuatu compared to other countries where the WHO methodology has been used [...]. It underscores the need for chiefs and church leaders to fully understand the causes and consequences of violence against women, and to respond in ways which will protect women and their rights rather than increase the risk of further harm from violent husbands and partners. Chiefs and church leaders have enormous potential to challenge prevailing attitudes that condone violence, and to send a clear message that physical and sexual violence in intimate relationships is never acceptable, and not part of Vanuatu custom" (VWC 2011:163).

The role of chiefs and church leaders as important aid for women is acknowledged, but only in so far as they need to be taught "to fully understand the causes and consequences" of VAW. Chiefs and church leaders are not appreciated as sources for knowledge, but as potential consumers and distributors of knowledge.

This perspective is clearly **modernist.** It breaks with 'traditions' and religion, that are seen to be backwards oriented and in need to be 'developed'.

The translation

In 2012, the key results of the survey were published in Bislama in the form of a 32-pages short booklet. It could be accessed for free in the office of the Vanuatu Women's Center in Port Vila. The main translation technique used is 'naturalized borrowing'. So, the three forms of Violence that are referred to in the survey are translated to: "f*isikol vaelens*", "*seksual vaelens*" and "*emosonel vaelens*". The same applies to Gender. In Bislama, Gender turns into *jenda* and occurs a couple of times throughout the booklet, especially in combination with the terms power (*paoa*) and equality (*ikwaliti*) (VWC 2012 9; 11). None of the terms is really explained, but frequently repeated. This can have at least two (not necessarily mutually exclusive) reasons: (1) the intended readership of this booklet is educated about the topics and does not need to be introduced to the terminology any more or (2) these notions are intentionally not explained and remain opaque in order to be authoritative. Let me explain the

latter.

According to Lindstrom, there are important "conversational functions of nonsense" (1990:121):

> "Valuable Melanesian knowledge, such as formulaic songs and spells and dreamed revelations, typically includes a lot of nonsense words. Much serious talk is semantically opaque [...] People often refer to this nonsense, that sometimes consists of borrowed forms from neighbouring languages, as the "speech of the ancestors" [...] People suspect that nonsense, were it to be plumbed successfully, might actually reveal itself to be powerful information. As a corollary, they expect powerful knowledge to be difficult to comprehend."

This approach to knowledge sheds some light on to the processes of knowledge creation in the Gender discourse as exemplified in this part of the thesis. Just like the "speech of the ancestors", terminology of the Gender discourse get borrowed and 'Bislama-ized'. Although, no Ni-Vanuatu would claim that this is the "speech of the ancestors", they will probably identify the words as "white man's talk", with English being the language of the powerful. Powerful knowledge, according to Lindstrom's quote above, is expected to be hard to understand. Therefore, *jenda* and *vaelens* are often not questioned. They are accepted as powerful terms not despite, but *because* they are hard to understand.

Furthermore, Lindstrom observed, that true knowledge on Tanna "must appear to be revealed wisdom from some external source" (1990:68). These external sources, the "means of inspiration" (1990:83), were for example ancestors who revealed themselves in dreams, rituals or a state of drunkenness, but also the act of travelling and the ability to read were seen as sources of knowledge. And only if one had the access to either of these means, a person could express a 'true statement'.

> "A knowledge producer cannot originate or authorize his own statements. Instead, supernatural prolocutors and other authorities perform this function. If the latter are somewhat removed from the immediacy of everyday life [...], this externality and distance generally enhances their authority" (Lindstrom 1990:75).

To a big extend, then, Lindstrom's observations are applicable for the survey as well. It is not the VWC that states the information, but the survey itself is presented as rendering the 'true' reasons for violence visible. Knowledge therefore is not presented as created, but as achievable through the connection to the source of this knowledge. In the case of the survey, this source is the method and structure of a quantitative survey - itself a foreign "means of inspiration". Who knows how to conduct a survey, has access to the knowledge that the

survey conveys.

The VWC's "communicative relationship with an authoritative voice" (ibid.:75) is demonstrated symbolically: the national coat of arms of Vanuatu is placed on the cover of the booklet on a par to the logo of the VWC; and on the inside of the cover, the contact details of the VWC are surrounded by the logo of NZAid and AusAID. Hence, demonstratively, the VWC is on eye level with the government of Vanuatu, and it is embedded to agents outside of Vanuatu, which because they are external, enjoy greater reputations as 'authority'.

The claim for truth and the opacity of knowledge statements is further enhanced by showing the results of the survey in form of twenty charts and three tables filled with numbers and percentages.
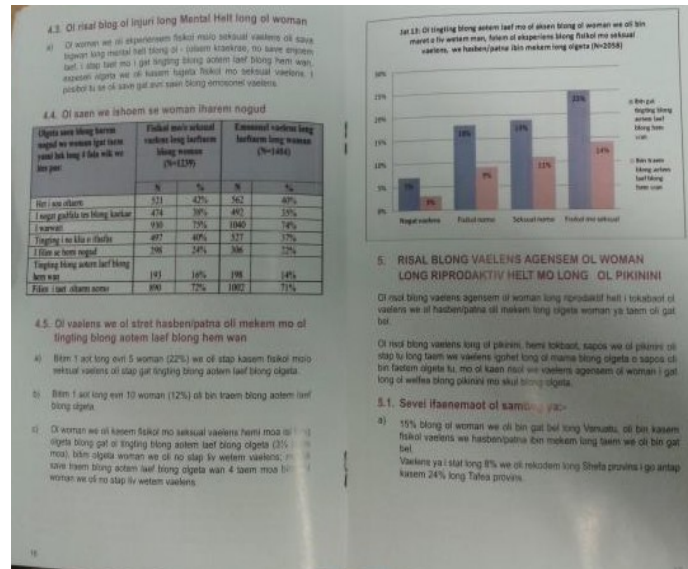
Frontpage of the survey & an exemplary inside page (in Bislama)

That leads to the question of the purpose of the booklet. What is it good for? Does it serve as information for women about the situation of GBV and VAW? Or is it a demonstration of the authority of the VWC that has access to knowledge, which is usually foreign to Ni-Vanuatu men and women (e.g. how to conduct a survey and report its findings). The terminology used in the booklet is not clear and the attempts to clarify it in a way that can be understood by Ni-Vanuatu men and women, who are not able to read charts or are not familiar with the definitions of the various forms of violence, are not efficient. Instead, by repeating and referring to unfamiliar concepts, the VWC implicitly (re)produces a differentiation between itself and the Ni-Vanuatu women who do not have access to the required knowledge in order to understand the survey.

Conclusion: Translation and (Mis)understandings of the Survey

The survey refers to VAW in Vanuatu as an explicitly Human Rights issue. It takes on the perspective of "women's-rights-are-human-rights" (Stivens 2004). Within this frame, the survey report adopts a perspective on "the lives of women and family relationships" that essentially builds on **universalism** (meaning that there are universally applicable values and rights, regardless of cultural diversity), **modernism** (understood as a subordination of traditional and religious values to scientific knowledge), and **humanism** (in terms of a focus on the creative powers of the individual, who is in the centre of all occurrences). In this regard, the image provoked through the report is the following:

In the centre of GBV and VAW are individual women and men. Men are the perpetrators and use violence against their female partners, family members or other women. Certain factors facilitate this behaviours, e.g. unemployment, the use of alcohol, and extra-marital affairs on the part of the men/villains. The women/survivors are the helpless victims. As it is custom, they get bought from their families to the violent husband. Their Christian belief furthermore pressures women to stay in violent partnerships because of the holy estate of matrimony. Measures on the levels of national government and NGOs can help women. The implementation and enforcement of policies (e.g. the Family Protection Act) and education of chiefs, church leaders and other community leaders is the task of NGOs and CSOs like the VWC.

Only at the end, and in a short paragraph, the report states:

> "it is important to remember that 2 in 5 women have not been physically or sexually abused by their husbands/ partners, and more than 1 in 3 women do not agree with any justification for a man to beat his wife" (VWC 2011:182).

The opposite numbers, however, circulate more frequent within the survey, its translation as well as in other contexts: "Three in 5 women (60%) [...] have experienced either physical or sexual violence or both by a husband or partner" (ibid.: 55).

Looking at the report in this light, it becomes evident that the pages full of charts, tables, numbers and survey questions are far from 'objective' or ' neutral', but that they reveal a very particular view on GBV that derives from the "global hegemony of the Western worldview" (Rottenburg 2009: xii).

Taking Weigand's *Dialogic Action Games model,* I wonder what kind of dialogue the survey

allows between whom and whether understanding was achieved.

The English and extensive report could be seen as a medium between the VWC and the Development agencies, whereas the booklet in Bislama creates a certain connection between the VWC and 'grassroot' Ni-Vanuatu - the VWC is in the middle of the gap.

The English survey feeds the expectations that people and Development agencies - unfamiliar with Vanuatu - have. Therefore, it resonates with a Western reader, as it suits with his (stereotypical) ideas about the situation of women in Vanuatu. But because the VWC is a local CSO, the report results have even more 'authenticity'. As a local counselling group for women, the VWC report is referred to by other (international) NGO, as they are seen as experienced and knowledgeable and 'authorities' from *within*.

The Bislama booklet, however, creates an aura of authenticity of the VWC, because of its connection to knowledge *outside* of Vanuatu.

The VWC report in English as well as in Bislama, however seems to control and maintain certain misunderstandings.

The English version, for example, downplays certain aspects of the lives of Ni-Vanuatu women, e.g. the role of kin, *kastom* and Christianity (other than confidants). In the Bislama version, on the other side, neither *jenda, vaelens* nor other concepts are explained. The VWC in the gap, then, works like a bottle neck, where information and misunderstanding get controlled.

Controlled misunderstandings, according to Weigand, express power relations. But who has the power? Let us recall Engle Merry (2006:40):

> "Translators' work is influences by who is funding them; their ethnic, gender, or other social commitments; and institutional frameworks that create opportunities for wealth and power. [...] Moreover, translators work within established discursive fields that contain the repertoire of ideas and practices available to them."

The power of funding and discursive fields is not to underestimate. As the funding of big scale projects like the national survey usually comes from the 'West', it seems not surprising that language and narrative get appropriated accordingly. These are the practices and vocabulary that are being heard and (seemingly) understood. It is a structural dilemma, as this practice limit the possibility to come to an understanding, but reproduces misunderstandings and maybe even miscommunications (where both dialogue partners are not aware of their misunderstandings).

When the survey depicts "women's lives and family relationships", the woman is an individual and family functions as her "social capital" (VWC 2011: 181). The complexity of kinship is mentioned only once:

> "The range of relatives mentioned reflects the different responsibilities of specific relatives according to custom - in some islands and provinces, parents or people appointed by parents are responsible to help someone facing difficulties [...]; whereas in other islands uncles or aunts may have this responsibility" (ibid.: 148).

The family in Vanuatu, however, is more than just a safety net that gets activated in times of difficulties. It is part of a person's identity, as I experienced myself in Navitora.

In this part of the thesis, I challenge taken for granted ideas of individualism, a sex-based definition of men and women and also the idea of the core family as basic social unit by looking at what I will call the *angkel* case. I will show that too easily we assume that *angkel* means 'uncle' and can be understood as a simple translation. I will show that by looking closer into the *angkel* case, we might get to an understanding of not only this term, but of personhood in general in Vanuatu.

The *angkel* case

After a long day Erica, Carolina and I waited for a bus home. The afternoon sun was quite strong and we sought some shade, while we waited in front of the busy central market house. One of the countless minibuses that operate in Port Vila stopped for us. The girls quickly decided, that we should take another bus and pointed at one of the colourful cars. "*Emi bas blong angkel blong mi*", said Carolina without even seeing the driver.[44]"This is my uncle's bus." We jumped in and sat down on the back seat. The driver was a fairly young man, I guess he was in his mid-twenties, only a few years older than Carolina. She pointed at him and smiled: "*Mi angkel blong hem.*" ("I am his uncle.") I was confused and asked Carolina: "You are his uncle?" - "Yes." - "But you are a girl...". Both girls were amused by my confusion, but at the same time they seemed surprised themselves. "True...", said Erica thoughtful and had a

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44 The buses in Port Vila are minibuses with usually nine seats. They are usually privately owned. Often, bus drivers/ bus owners (often the same person), would paint the outside of the bus in bright colours and/ or write catchy, sometimes political, phrases on the back of the car. Very often the 'name' of the bus would be written on the front or rear window. The inside of some buses is beautified with printed cloths (*kaliko*). In general, those minibuses are quite unique and easily identifiable from the distance.

'simple' explanation for this; an explanation I was usually given, when things were a bit complicated to explain: "*Em ia nao, kastom blong mifala. Vanuatu stael.*" (This is it now, our *kastom*. Vanuatu style.)

I was not satisfied with this answer. "So I asked: "The driver is you mother's brother?" Carolina nodded. "*Stret brata blong mama blong mi*", Carolina answered proudly. (lit,: "The straight brother of my mother.") And she added: "*Mi singaotem angkel long hem. Mo hem, tu, singaotem angkel long mi.*" ("I call him *angkel* and he calls me *angkel* too.")

I remembered the first time I heard a man referring to a woman as *angkel*. It was in Navitora, when Joseph the truck driver introduced himself as "*Bumbu Esther, hem i angkel blong mi*" (*Bumbu* Esther is my 'uncle')." And a couple of weeks later, I observed how a man called another elderly woman *angkel* during a separation ceremony in Freshwota. I realised my own misunderstanding of the term *angkel*.

Kinship & Calling

Kinship[45] is the basic concept through which all aspects of everyday life in Vanuatu are defined. In ethnographies about Melanesia, this is well-known[46] and it seems that every anthropologist working in Vanuatu comes to the same conclusion: "In order to engage in and comprehend any social situation [...] knowledge of the kin relations of the people present is pivotal" (Kolshus 2008:58), because "[w]ho one talks to, jokes with or how one behaves towards another person is in accordance with classificatory kin relations" (Hess 2009:6). With certain kin terms come certain rights and certain obligations.

Kinship systems are different in different societies in Vanuatu. Some islands are considered patrilinear, some matrilinear, and sometimes one part of the same island is different from the other. I have previously indicated the diversity of *kastom* and languages in Vanuatu, and also kinship and naming systems vary. However, the Bislama Dictionary (Crowley 2003: 27- 29) describes a set of kinship terminologies that can be visualized as follows:

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45 For a long time, anthropology treated kinship and marriage as the basic structures that 'primitive societies' are based on (Morgan 1877, Malinowski 1930, Radcliffe-Brown 1952, Lévi-Strauss 1969).
Nowadays, the totalizing assumption of kinship as the basis for 'societal order' on all levels - e.g. political, economic and religious - is outdated. Attention is rather paid to "ambiguity, process, the everyday, and a multiplicity of voices, rather than upon grand structures, rules and regulations" (Overing, e.a. 2015: 39). Kinship and marriage became a methodological tool to understand local concepts of personal relationships by investigating "people's use of relationship terminologies" (ibid.). Especially ethnographic research from Melanesia challenged notions of kinship-as-structure.

46 Amongst many others see: Rivers 1914; Jolly 1995; Eriksen 2008.
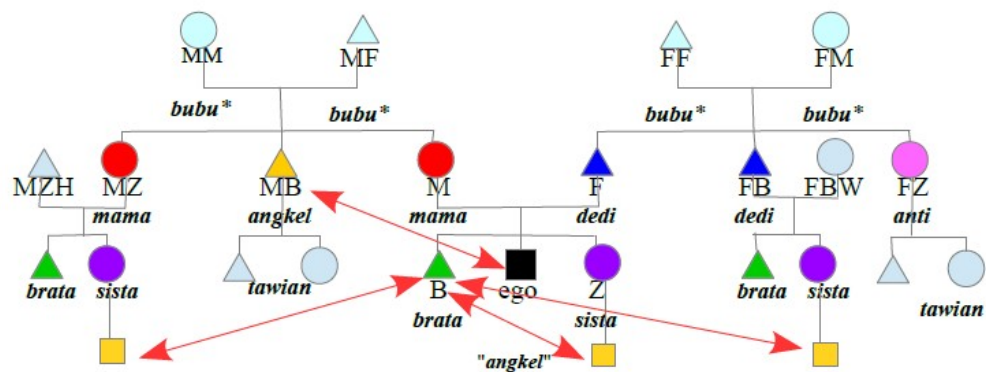
MB   - descriptive kinship position
angkel   - classificatory kinship position; appellation
⟷   - reciprocal appellation *"angkel"*
△   - male
○   - female
□   - male or female

same colour - same appellation

* *bubu* is also sometimes refered to as *"abu"*,*"tabu"* (or *bumbu*)

Figure 1: Kinship I

The kinship system is a typical classificatory, which means that kin "are classified into categories[...]and the same term of relationship is applied to all the persons in the same category" (Morgan 1877 : 394).

For example, the terms father and mother are not privileged for two people, but also for the same-sex sibling of one's biological parents - meaning that the father's brother (FB) is also called father (*dedi*), and the mothers' sister (MZ) is also called mother (*mama*). Consequently, parallel cousins are classified as brothers or sister. The father's sister (FZ) and mother's brother (MB) however, have different titles, which are in Bislama *anti* and *angkel*. *Bubu* or *abu* are reciprocal terms between grandchildren and grandparents. That indicates, that the classificatory kinship categories repeat themselves after a few generations.
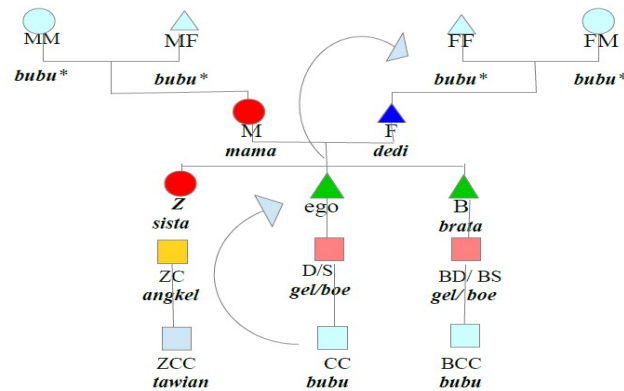
Figure 2: Kinship II

When one tries to read the diagram from another person's perspective, e.g. from ego's sister's point of view, the titles and relations change. In order to understand the kinship system and proper calling of each other, the perspective is therefore, very important (see Eriksen on the Six-Class System on Ambrym 2008: 19ff).

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One day I walked with Catherine through the central market house in Port Vila. It was very crowded and people were pushing each other through the narrow space between the vending tables. A young man came towards Catherine and me, lifted his eye brows and squeezed past us. In the eye of my corner I saw Catherine passing a 200 vatu bill to the man. The transaction was done almost unnoticeably and no verbal communication was necessary. I was curious. "What did just happen?", I asked Catherine. She answered: *"Hem brata blong mi*." (He is my brother.) This did not explain much. "Why did you give him money?" - "Because he is my brother. He did not have money and I gave him something, so that he could buy something to eat." The man and Catherine were classificatory brother and sister and in their *kastom* that meant they could demand of each other automatically, what they needed.

After our shopping at the market, Catherine and I went to her house. The children ran around, trying to get my attention. One of the women living in the house prepared bread. Catherine pointed at her and told me: "The mother of Jonny (Bislama: *mama blong* Jonny) is making bread to sell later." First, I thought, she was avoiding the name of the woman to make it easier for me, as Jonny was one of the boys running around me. But then, I heard her talking to the woman directly, addressing her in the same way: "*mama blong Jonny*".

Proper naming of others is a form of identification of oneself and others, always through

others. An important address for women is the title "*mama"* or more precisely*: "mama blong..."* (mother of...). My Ambae mother explained to me: "Husbands and wives, for example, are not supposed to call each other by name. They call each other 'woman' or 'man'. But, when they have a child, then the man can call the woman "*mama blong pikinin*i" - mother of [my] child." Motherhood is therefore an important part of a woman's identity as she will be called, not only by her husband, but also by others in reference to her children.

The perspective of who is calling whom is crucial and the perspective is defined by one's position in the genealogy. And this position might change, as for example in the case of motherhood.

<p align="center">*</p>

Why is kinship important when thinking about Gender?

From a eurocentric Gender perspective it should seem peculiar that two people with the same sex in the same generation - like FB and MB - should have different titles. Especially, when it is assumed that one's sex defines one's Gender and therefore one's person as either woman or man. Easily dismissed as irrelevant system only interesting for anthropologists, kinship structures, do not enjoy much attention in Development discourse. However, a closer look into the impact of kinship structures and practices, would help to unravel our own presuppositions and misunderstandings. Especially since kinship terminologies are frequently used in order to address one another. *anti* and *angkel*, for example are the polite forms to address a (Ni-Vanuatu) men and women, even though they might not be related. Men and women from the same generation can often be referred to as *sista* or *brata*. These are more than just kinship terms. They reveal a connection between the speaker and the receiver, which is based on respect.

Taking a closer look at the reciprocal term *angkel*, for example, we will discover that it is not primarily the sex of the title holders that decides, but rather his or her relation to another person. Let me elaborate on this.


Back to the *angkel* case

Angkel commonly denotes the mother's brother (MB). The MB has in many societies a very

important customary role and has struck anthropologists for a long time.[47] With the Port Vila *angkel* case I would like to indicate some taken for granted assumptions that occur and reoccur in Development discourse.

The Bislama term *angkel*, does not only refer to the biological mother's brother, or as it is often referred to in Vanuatu, the "*stret angkel*" (lit. straight uncle) , but also every person that falls under the classificatory group of MB (yellow squares in the graphic above).

Furthermore, in the case described above, *angkel* is a term used reciprocally between Carolina's MB and her, regardless of the fact that Carolina is a girl. We can see, that not only MB are *angkel*, but also a man's sisters' children (ZC). In some *kastom*, the reciprocal term is used regardless of sister's children sex. In this case, then, *angkel* is a title that is defined foremost by a classificatory kinship position and not so much by the sex of the title holder. *Angkel* is furthermore, a title that is characterized by numerous social rules and norms. *Angkels* and *antis* are said to be the "teachers of the traditional knowledge" (Tor& Toka 2004: 37) and as such play important roles in maintaining one's *kastom* (and thereby one's identity).

One could say that *angkel* is a socially defined category that is based on the kinship positions of two people. It is relational and does not need to conform to a binary sex-Gender-equation. Therefore, women can be *angkel* too.

In two other cases, in which I observed that women were referred to as *angkel* by male speakers, the elderly women were widows. Their late husbands were the categorical MB (*angkel*) of the speakers, and after the men's deaths, the widows were referred to as *angkel*.
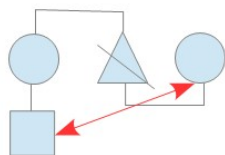
In some ethnographies of Vanuatu and Melanesia it is mentioned, that widows are still considered to be tied to their husbands, even after their death.[48] The title *angkel* seems to be applicable to wives only after the death of their husbands. Widows become the representatives of their late husbands and adapt also the status of the *angkel.* This means, that in ceremonies, a woman might be holding many titles at once, including the *angkel* title.

This case of the widow *angkel* illustrates just like the case of the niece *angkel* that the term is not the equivalent of the English term 'uncle', although it evidently derived from it. 'Uncle' in the Western context addresses mainly a male sibling of one's father or mother and only

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47 At this point, I cannot enter debates around whether the MB is, as proposed by Claude Lévi-Strauss, a universal element "of relations produced by the incest taboo and the resulting exchange of women" (Gillison 1987: 167) or whether the MB is resembling a motherly relationship and is therefore a "male mother" (Radcliffe- Brown 1952: 19).

48 For Melpa women and men in Papua New Guinea Strathern (1972) describes similar ideas: "Women say that after death the spirits [...] of husband and wife find each other again." (1972:60)

marginally prescribes obligations and code of conduct one has to follow. In the case of *angkel* in Vanuatu, the situation is reversed. Seemingly a mere kinship terminology, the Bislama term *angkel* hides complex vernacular concepts of sociality and identity that in some cases can breach a simple man-woman dichotomy.[49]

Furthermore, as the widow *becomes* the *angkel* after the death of her husband, it becomes clear, that the kinship system in Vanuatu is more than just a system, but it is also a *process* to place a person inside a kinship network. Common mechanisms to do so are through marriage and adoption and compensation payments.[50] It seems as if the process of kinship and its structure adjust to each other relatively flexible.

These observations support the view of Gender as a process of contextual (re-, de-, en) Gendering of a person, rather than a "natural" constitution. This approach to Gender is well known in anthropology since Strathern's pioneering work in Mount Hagen, Papua New Guinea (1972, 1988). But neither the *angkel* case, nor any other kinship relation for that matter, is taken into much consideration in Development discourses around Gender, personhood and/or family relations in Vanuatu. The preoccupations with ideas of individuality, Gender dualism and nuclear family are so strong in the 'Western' worldview promoted by Development agents, that other alternatives are not recognized.

This could be a point of departure for the organisations and (women) groups in the middle, the translators, who are Ni-Vanuatu themselves. But as we could see in the survey, these kind of conceptual differences and misunderstandings are not explicitly uncovered. The persistence of the misunderstandings might have several reasons. It might be a form of controlled misunderstanding, but it might also be an unconscious process, a miscommunication: the women in the middle might be trained to think in a certain frame (e.g. the human rights frame), that they might not be aware of the importance of e.g. the *angkel* case, for the dialogue with their international Development partners.

<div align="center">*</div>

I will now turn to the second example of a communicative form that has been chosen often to convey messages of Gender, namely awareness campaigns. During my six month in Port Vila,

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49 The case of the *anti* (categorical father's sisters FZ) is similar to the one of the *angkel*. *Antis* play important roles in ceremonies and I frequently got told that as *antis*, women receive a lot of respect. Other than with the *angkel* title, I have not come across a case, in which a man would be called *anti*.

50 As for example Eriksen (2008:26) describes the case of a couple, who wanted to marry, but did not fit the ideal *kastom* relation. Their relationship was then appropriated by compensation payments.

I have attended numerous public fora, workshops and meetings of groups to debate "women's issues" like the question of female politicians, the role of women in economy and the role of women in times of disasters. These platforms were usually attended by the same people – often women, and often from the elite, who were already educated in the terminologies Gender, Human Rights, VAW, etc. Therefore, the following part is spotlighting a typical process in the gap.

Awareness Campaigns: Empty words and empty chairs

One major problem of VAW is often said to be the problem of ignorance. Sentences like "Women do not know about their rights" and "women accept the status quo and thereby normalise VAW" are frequently stated. Therefore, one key practice of organisations advocating for the elimination of GBV/ VAW is to organise so called awareness campaigns. During these campaigns political issues are publicly debated. The idea is, as the name says, to raise awareness of issues that are thought of to be unknown or ignored. One of the most renowned awareness campaigns on GBV is called 16 days of activism against Gender-Based Violence (16 DoA). It is an annual event that takes place in multiple locations around the world; so too in Port Vila.

In this chapter I will describe the launching of the 16 days of activism campaign week in Port Vila as an example of public speeches and public venues concerning topics related to Gender. In this analysis, I shall move from textual representation of Gender and GBV to processes of translations in public rhetoric. Guiding questions will be: Who is speaking, where and how? Who is the target audience? And how is the audience's reaction to the speeches?

The last question is of special interest. The survey and other text-bound and print material do not enable a dialogue with the reader, meaning that the reader's immediate reaction to the text will not be known to the authors of the texts. In public venues however, the audience - as mere listeners or as engaged participants - comments immediately to the speeches or performances, with questions, laughter, applause, by leaving the venue, etc. Looking at these actions, allows a further step along the chain of translation towards a better understanding the power-laden processes of creating (mis)understanding.

Vignette: The Marobe Market House

The Marobe Market House stands in the middle of a wide open field. A fence with barb wire surrounds the spacious area. A handwritten sign informs that there is a market on Saturdays and Sundays. For the rest of the week, this area is closed. The Marobe Market House is placed about 3 km away from town, in between two settlements, but not easily accessible for either of them. A bus ride is the most convenient way to get here, if one wants to avoid walking along the busy Highway. In the past, the Marobe market was a pure livestock market. During my stay in Port Vila, however, I have not seen it operating frequently.

The market house is a sturdy, open construction. A metal plate declares: "Marobe Market House. Funded by UN Women & Shefa Provincial Government Council 2014". The logos of the two institutions decorate the sign.

The Marobe Market House is a part of the Market For Change Project, which launched in 2014 in Fiji and a part of UNWomen Pacific's Women's Economic Empowerment programme (unwomen.org 2014, May 06,).

Despite its fairly remote location and infrequent utilization by local people, but because of its ties to governmental and UN bodies, the Marobe Market House was the venue of an awareness week, connected to the global 16 DoA campaign.[51]

Background: 16 Days of Activism

The 16 DoA campaign officially takes place between the International Day Against Violence Against Women (November 25) and the International Human Rights Day (December 10), in order to "symbolically link violence against women and human rights and to emphasize that such violence is a violation of human rights" (16 DoA campaign homepage). Thereby, the 16 DoA uses an explicit Human Rights approach to GBV.

A suggested theme, information and tool kits (in several languages) are available on the 16 DoA homepage. The campaign does not provide monetary support, but works as a platform to link multiple local actions to a global network.[52]

Because all information is provided online, knowing about the 16 DoA and registering campaigns on its platform, requires certain technical conditions and know-how. In Port Vila, as elsewhere, this might become the first hurdle for the majority of local women's groups. Only the already well-connected groups with ties to international organizations will get informed about events and campaigns.

Therefore, in Port Vila in 2015, the leading organizations in the 16 DoA campaign were UNWomen, Red Cross and the Vanuatu Women's Center. Other international organizations and groups contributed to the programme with panel discussions, games, songs or theatre plays.

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51 Originating from the first Women's Global Leadership Institute in 1991, the 16 Days of Activism Against Gender-Based Violence is an international campaign, mobilizing individuals and groups all over the world to raise awareness and call for the elimination of GBV/ VAW.

52 According to the campaign's online profile "over 5,478 organizations, policy makers, governments, UN agencies and countless individuals from over 180 countries worldwide" have been taking part in the 16 Days campaign since its beginning.

The campaign lasted 5 days (November 30 - December 4, 2015) and each day was themed and chaired by differing organizations.[53]

The programme - entirely in English - was circulated a few days before the campaign's opening day. The majority of the public was not well informed about the events, as the low participant numbers for most of the days indicate.[54] Furthermore, the awareness week took place during workdays, when men and women are at work and/ or care for their children and family at home.

The timing, the lack of information and the difficult access to the venue made the 16 DoA campaign in Port Vila an event for empty chairs.

16 Days of Activism Launching in Marobe Market

When I arrived at the Market House in the morning, the opening speech was scheduled, but the event has not started yet and only a few women and men were there. The market house was decorated with orange cloth and orange balloons - the main colour of the UN campaign called "UNiTE to End Violence against Women"(UNiTE). Inside the market house, a professional sound system was built up and a few plastic chairs were arranged. Outside the market house, white plastic tents provided sitting space and shade for the expected audience. The market house became a stage, separated from the audience.

Next to the market house/ stage, NGOs and CSOs could exhibit their information material in provided tents. However, only UNWomen, Red Cross and also the Vanuatu Women's Center were represented and shared their brochures, pamphlets and print material. The VWC was the only CSO holding an information table.

The image of an open palm of the hand with all five fingers spread out dominated the opening event in Port Vila. The symbol reminds of a Halt or Stop gesture, but it could also be interpreted as an invitation to clap the hand (a so-called 'High Five'). Within UNiTE, both images of the hand are used in the campaign's slogans "Join hands to end violence against

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53 30.11.2015 Launching of 16 Days of Activism
        01.12.2015 World Aids Day
        02.12.2015 Women's Human Rights Day & International Women Human Rights Defenders
        03.12.2105 International Day of People with Disabilities & Anti-Corruption Day
        04.12.2015 Peace in the Family
54 Exceptionally well-attended was the Day of People with Disabilities, organized by the Vanuatu Society for People with Disabilities (VSPD).

women and girls" and "Strong hands stop violence against women and girls". The latter slogan was printed on orange T-Shirts and caps, which were sponsored by UNWomen and given to their volunteers in Port Vila.

The other organisations had their own T-Shirts, turning the parade and the audience into a colourful group as well as into messengers and advertisers for the organisations.

The presence of the participants, can be interpreted as a sign for their willingness to "come to an understanding", in Weigand's terms. However, it is also a demonstration of one's membership to a group and its knowledge:

> "People mark the fact of their membership in a group, and their ascription to that group's knowledge and points of view, by attending events at which group knowledge is revealed, discussed, and circulated" (Lindstrom 1990:141-2).

Not surprisingly, then, most of the participants of the launching event were affiliated with at least one organisation or association (local or international). The audience was largely already part of the knowledge network, and therefore already "aware" of the problems of GBV and VAW. The "knowledge consumers" and the "knowledge producers" (to stay in Lindstrom's metaphor) belonged to more or less the same group.

Participants of the 16 DoA launching, Port Vila, October 30, 2015

Rhetoric

The event opened with a parade, led by a marching band. When the parade finally entered the premises of Marobe Market, the midday sun was hot. The procession consisted of about 100 people - some foreign aid workers, but mostly Ni-Vanuatu women, some men and also children. They held up banners and chanted, while they approached the market house/stage.

After the march, political representatives[55] and members of local and international organisations took their seats inside the market house/ stage,[56]while the other participants sought shade underneath the provided tents.

Five opening speeches were given, followed by eight contributions to a panel discussion.

The panel discussion had three objective: 1) the issue of Domestic Violence in times of disaster; 2) awareness of VAW in general and 3) awareness of the role of women during disasters. And although the topic of disaster was fairly timely - a few months after cyclone Pam (category 5) hit Vanuatu and was followed by a rough draught period (El Niño) - most panellists decided to focus on the second topic.

Quintessentially, the speeches were structured similarly. After a long welcome, during which guests of honour were addressed by name, the objectives of the 16 days of activism were given. By referring to UNWomen and underlining that the event is an international one, the events at Marobe Market were linked to global framework. All but one speeches were given in Bislama.[57]

The rhetoric used by most speakers was fairly similar, so that I will group the contributions according to their central topics and rhetorical styles, highlighting a few outstanding contributions. These rhetorical changes were not drastic. There was no 'western/ modern voice' versus a 'Ni-Vanuatu/ traditionalist voice'- or whatever clear cut distinction one might expect. Instead, most speeches were saturated with hybrid arguments. In this regard, the speeches are significant examples of speeches inside the gap.

Women's Rights are Human Rights

Most of the speeches took a universal frame to argue about GBV/ VAW and women's rights. To back this position up, most spokespeople chose to refer to numbers and statistics. This was very striking in the speeches by the Director General of the MoJCS, by the director of UNWoman and especially in the speech of the Australian High Commissioner. The latter referred extensively to the findings of the report by the VWC:

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55 The Australian High Commissioner, the Deputy Lady Mayor, the director of the MoJCS, the five female municipal councillors
56 In total, there were more women than men on stage, and only three non Ni-Vanuatu.
57 The only speech in English was the contribution to the panel discussion by a member of an international NGO, who originally comes from India.

> " I gat 50% o 3 aot blong evri 5 woman we husban o patna blong olgeta i mekem filim olgeta nogut, o usum seksual vaelens agensem olgeta [...] 90% [he repeats] 90 % blong ol woman eksperiensem vaelens; phisical, emotional o seksual violence. 1 aot long evri 5 woman i kasem wan disability from vaelens yia. 1 out long evri 5. 1 out long evri 3 ol gel eksperiensem seksual abuse bifo ol i kasem 15 yia. 15 yia. Vaelens hemi wan bigfala problem long rural area, 63%, bitim long taon area we i gat 60 %[...]."

It is not necessary to even translate this passage into English, as a quick read of it already suffices to see the amount of numbers and percentages that are listed in this part of the speech. It is basically a reading of the survey data and creates a feeling of universal truth and comparability. The Australian High Commissioner compared the findings of the survey to international data. He claimed that in Australia every week one woman dies because of violence and that in the whole world 1 out of 3 women and girls had experience some form of sexual violence or other abuse. It is a list of numbers, a verbal form of statistics, but there is no explanation of what those numbers and terms mean. Human Rights got merely explained to be "*ol raet blong yumi evriwan*" - the rights of us all.

And not only were explanations lacking in his presentation, but also concrete suggestions. Instead of proposing concrete actions, he finished with more generalisations: "We have big work to do in countries like Vanuatu and Australia" (my translation). Thereby he emphasised that VAW is an issue that needs to be addressed by governments.

With regards to the previous chapter, it is noticeable, that the authority of numbers, and the allegedly universal images of women as victims of violence, men as perpetrators and governments as saviours 'survive' the translations from text to speech mostly unchanged and unquestioned.

GBV as disease

Another common motive, aside from the women'-rights-are-human-rights frame, was the description of violence causes disease and is, in fact, a disease itself - sometimes described as an epidemic. Several representatives pointed out that violence made people - especially women and children - sick and caused disabilities.

Amongst others, one female speaker claimed: "Worse than physical violence, emotional violence makes you sick." And she continued: "And we *are* sick "(my translation). Framing VAW as a disease in this way, is very striking. It victimizes women, who "catch the sickness" (Bislama: *kasem sik*) and are therefore needy. Becoming sick, also means, that it is not the sick person's fault to catch the disease. It is her responsibility, however, to get rid of it, e.g.

with the help of outside specialists. The "doctors" for the childlike, sick women in Vanuatu would be policy makers, who can prescribe "medicine or treatments" in the form of laws and policies that protect the women.

This is an imagery that does not empower non-elite women, but impoverishes them even more. Underlying and implicit in this imagery is furthermore an understanding about class. Violence happens, so the presumptions, especially to women, who live in the rural areas or in the periurban squatter areas, lack higher education and are jobless. It is then, the perceived role of the women, who are better off, to help the other women. The discourse is then individualized and "comes to replace a more radical and socialized discourse" (Scheper-Hughes 1993: 169) on VAW. Social structures that might cause or reinforce violence (e.g. school fees, underpayment, etc.) are not questioned. By highlighting the individual reasons for VAW, the new local 'experts' on Gender issues, the educated women of the social elite, justify their position in the new social order as the helpers and the ones who can bring about the 'real' change.

What is also striking in the VAW-is-a -disease metaphor is the fact that women are seen as the only ones affected by it. There could be another way of looking at it, namely that men catch the disease and are therefore 'violent'. This view would shift the focus from women to men as victims and it would demand another approach to end VAW. It would build on the assumption that men need help to change their behaviour towards women. But this view is neglected in the rhetoric around GBV/ VAW in Vanuatu.

Many spokes(wo)men state that the inequalities between men and women start at home. However, women are claimed to be unaware of this: "In Vanuatu, women do not know how to exercise their Human Rights", a representative of the VWC claims in her speech and states that "women say that violence is alright", because they do not know better. As a consequence, children, who grow up in families, where domestic violence is exercised, are said to "internalize it" (representative VWC, orig.: *ol pikini ol i internalisem vaelens*). This corresponds implicitly to the imagery of the woman being sick, and passes on the disease called "violence" to her own children. In some regard, this is an implicit form of 'victim blaming', as women are presented as victims and reason for the perpetuation of GBV and VAW.

GBV and kastom

One spokesman presented the problem of GBV as a structural one in the context of patriarchy. According to this position, Ni-Vanuatu men and women still support men rather than women in their endeavours, because of a social "Big Man Syndrome", as he calls it. He does not further elaborate on this term, but it seems to be somewhat commonly known, as I have come across it multiple times during my fieldwork. "Big Man Syndrome" is a rather sarcastic comment on what is thought of 'traditional' leadership. The Big Man is said to be a 'traditional' leader, who gained his authority through the support of his community and therefore strives to keep his powerful status by creating relationships to other community members. Big Man Syndrome, then, refers to a certain attitude to follow and support powerful, mostly male, individuals and to strive to become powerful individuals. It is presented as being pathological (a syndrome), and 'traditional' (Big Man) and therefore, from a modernist point of view, undesirable.

The only rather pro-*kastom* oriented contribution was given - strikingly - by a white woman with French origin. She is a renowned person. Married to a Ni-Vanuatu chief, she has been a key figure in founding the VNCW and was the council's director for many years. Furthermore, she ran a Health Clinic in Port Vila, travelled through Vanuatu to arrange Health Awareness campaigns in the rural areas and has engaged herself in many other local activities, especially focusing on health and empowerment of women. At the Marobe Market, her contribution to the panel discussion revealed a broad spectrum of topics, one of which was the appeal to "go back to your roots" (orig.: "*Yufala i mas go daon long ol rut blong yufala*"). She repeats this several times during her speech. With passion she states: "Often I hear that people say in *kastom*, man is God. But this is not *kastom Vanuatu* this is the *kastom* of the world (*kastom blong wol*)." She argues that patriarchy and male supremacy is a problem of the world. She appeals to the women: "When you talk about *kastom*, you need to go down to the roots." She continues: "I am from Pentecost. [...] And there are women who are chiefs; next to male chiefs." The island of Pentecost has the rumour of having "strong kastom", which means that people still adhere to *kastom* values. But although this implies certain restrictions in behaviour of men and women, she argues that: "In the past, we got a better situation than today" and means that women in *kastom* are more respected and less restricted than in modern life. She is aware of her obvious non-Ni-Vanuatu appearance and claims knowledge about

kastom on another way: "I am a white-man (*waetman*), but I know what I talk about. I took my rank as chief too. It is a beautiful ceremony; only women are present, no man, and they manage the whole ceremony." Corresponding to her pro-*kastom* position, she comments only briefly and rather depreciatingly about Christianity: "You say that Christianity is a part of Vanuatu. But even in the Constitution it says, that Christianity **and** *kastom* are the ground for Vanuatu." It might seem almost ironic, that the argument to strengthen one's *kastom* came from the only white women in the panel group. But her experience in talking to Ni-Vanuatu men and women helped her to find the right rhetorical key words. And the audience responded in frequent applauses.

The subsequent speech could not have been any more contrasting.

The feminist preacher

Although a feminist tone could be detected in the majority of the speeches, one female speaker was explicitly using feminist rhetoric. She is a middle aged woman from chiefly family, enjoyed higher education, is divorced and re-married to an Australian man. She is also the founder of an organisation that focuses on education, as well as a CSO for young women, and runs a Health Clinic. In her appearance she is a very 'modern' woman, who likes to wear make-up, jewellery, and pants - which is still a conflict-laden topic in Vanuatu.

With her background and education and in her appearance, she distinguishes herself deliberately from the majority of women in Vanuatu. Nonetheless, in her talk, she created an atmosphere of solidarity with the other women in the audience, a sense of *communitas*, by frequently using the inclusive 'we' (Bislama: *yumi*), when talking about women in Vanuatu. This way, she rhetorically presented herself as a fellow sufferer. In the beginning of her speech, she stated that "until today, parents do not know that girls have the right to education. [...] Until today, people think that girls belong in the kitchen, wives belong in the bedroom, but they do not belong in the class room." But instead of indulging in this metaphor and talking about the 'poor' Ni-Vanuatu women, she appealed loudly and in the style that reminded of preaching: "We need to stop tearing each other down, but start to lift each other up. [...] Amen sister. Tell the woman next to you "you are beautiful. And you are strong. Tell her!" The audience applauded loudly. "I work in an office, I take care of an organisation, and it is beautiful to [...] sit in an office. Life is beautiful, Amen?" More applause came from the audience. She continued: "Let us start building one another. Let's start building the life of a

sister, not just today, but every day for the rest of our lives. Let us build one another. Let us build each other to the parliament. Unity. Amen? [...] Let us respect one another. Amen?"

This speech certainly provoked the most visible (and audible) reaction from the audience, who, as I want to remind, were in most cases part of the emerging class. The appeal "let us start building each other up" interestingly creates the precise image, of what I discussed in the context of networking in women's groups: on the one hand, the importance of working together as a group, a sense of community of women, that "builds each other" can be understood as 'horizontal networking'; but then, there is also a clearly expressed vertical movement upwards "to the parliament". According to this argument, only women who leave their kitchen, can be powerful - an image that belongs to the almost classical repertoire of 'Western' feminism: the domestic sphere of home and kitchen are seen as oppressive and limiting for women, and they need to escape this to expand their full potential as individuals. Therefore, although the speech carefully creates a sense of group belonging through the strategically used "we", it also reveals a modern, feminist and individualistic undertone. Furthermore, unequal access to education of women is caused by discriminatory opinions about where women "belong", not because of structural obstacles, e.g. school fees, that prevent parents to afford education for all of their children.

In this regard, it is a fitting example for the rhetoric used by women in the emerging middle class in Port Vila, who tend to justify their achievements by their own right choices and imply that "those unable similarly to prevail have (largely) themselves to blame" (Gewertz & Errington 1999:9).

What is fairly remarkable in this contribution of the panel discussion is, that it uttered nothing more than slogan-like, motivational evocations, e.g. "life is beautiful", and "let us build each other". But although it contains not much more than 'empty words', it creates an enormous reaction from the audience. This has not been achieved by the spokespersons, insisting on a women-are-victims image and used statistics to back up their arguments.

Summary

All of the speeches worked with similar and yet quite different rhetorical means.
Virtually all talks were based on certain premises: (1) VAW/GBV is a global problem, (2) it is a Human Rights issue, (3) it is like a disease, (4) women are the victims of VAW, without even knowing it, (5) children are affected by violence and learn violent behaviour from their

parents, (6) governments can and should help women. Only one argument was explicitly pro-*kastom*. Surprisingly, as I have witnessed that in many other public speeches, no religious idioms were used to argue for the rights of women, not even by the representatives of Faith-Based Organisations and institutions.

Remarkable is also, that although it was declared a panel *discussion*, every perspective was "aired, but not really argued" (Gewertz & Errington 1990: 113). The arguments were, although partially diametrically opposite, treated with respect, which "meant that there was little opportunity for a critical edge"(ibid.) by the spokesmen and -women.

However, after the presentations, a woman from the audience challenged the event and the speakers with a comment: "My question is, [1] what is violence now? It is a lot that effects the lives of women and men, girls and boys. My question is: [2] Why do we, every time we talk about VAW, focus on women? I think, it is true that violence goes mostly against women, but I also think that the first [to address] are men. Also, you Big Men there, you need to ask yourself 'Why am I here? [3] We all, who stand up and talk about violence, know that there is one [in the audience] who thinks 'Who are you?' and he is pointing fingers at you. And then, they all point fingers at you. You have to know, that once you are up there talking, you are by yourself. My question is then, also: [4] What is it that you are doing here? You come from the parliament over there and you have to come down to the grassroot level."

With this statement, the female commentator points to a lot of relevant aspects, which is (1) the concept of violence is not made really clear, (2) the focus of the discourse lies on women and their role on GBV, while men are not addressed or talked about much, (3) every person that stands up to talk about Gender issues is in danger to be singled out and isolated because of that, (4) the coordinators and participants of the Marobe event are detached from the grassroot and need to "come down" to the grassroot level. Otherwise their real motives should be questioned. Unfortunately, but not really surprisingly, these questions were not further commented by the panellists.

Talking something to death

By the end of the panel discussion it was around 12.30. The midday heat was at its peak. Children fell asleep on the laps of their parents. Some teenagers were busy with their mobile phones. If it is true, that one's presence "symbolizes a person's willingness to hear - to take part in communicative relations of inequality, consuming statements produced and circulated

in local conversational forums"(Lindstrom 1990:141-2), especially the young people in the audience did not show much enthusiasm about the event. At noon on a Monday, just before lunch and after more than two hours of talking, the attention of most of the audience was virtually gone. After the provided lunch, the biggest part of the audience left the venue. The same question occurred to me as to the commentator: What is it that we are doing here? A German concept came to my mind: *etwas totreden* literally means "to talk something to death". It refers to the act of talking about something so much and so often in the always same terms, that the subject loses its meaning. In the 21st century, media is saturated with news about wars and miseries from all around the world; in fact, it is said that there is more information available than ever and modern technology makes it easy and fast to share knowledge. Yet, most people become blunt to this news and they begin to care less.

In some way, I could observe this paradox during the 16 DoA event at the Marobe Market as well. The more often it is claimed that the lack of knowledge about women's rights caused an attitude of "normalizing" violence, the more awareness campaigns of the kind of the 16 DoA are organised. Paradoxically though, the more 'awareness' is available, the less attention was paid and the imagery of the women/victim and man/perpetrator got normalized in people's mind. Furthermore, as the comment of the woman after the panel discussion also reveals, a divide between the people who talk about violence and the ones who allegedly experience it, the divide between the emerging upper-middle class and the grassroot, gets normalised as well.

So, although awareness campaigns are ideally addressing 'grassroot' Ni-Vanuatu, they do not create a forum in which understanding could be achieved. Instead, there is "a class of *elites* who believe they have been called upon to modernize their own society" (Rottenburg 2009: xiii). And it is not necessarily a charitable motivation. The status quo is not maintained by ignorance, but by a power structure that does not allow coming to an understanding. One Australian volunteer in a big international NGO told me once: "Frankly, I do not care how culturally sensitive our campaigns are or not. I just want it [GBV] to stop." In fact, it should be of great interest for any campaign to open up for real dialogue in order to come to an understanding of concepts that are continuously misunderstood.

<p style="text-align:center">*</p>

In the next part, I shall look at one of those concepts that are seemingly understood, but so fundamentally important for Ni-Vanuatu sociality, that they need to be revised: the notion and practice of *braed praes*.

During my fieldwork I frequently heard women say: *"Marit hemi las ting long laef"* - Marriage is the last thing in life". When I asked, what is meant by this, my friends would usually describe marriage as the final goal in life.

In Development discourse, marriage seems to be of importance, when it is perceived to violate Human Rights or other 'Western' values, e.g. child marriage or arranged marriages. Especially the aspect of bride price is often presented as an issue that needs to be changed, as it is said to transform women from persons to objects, that can be purchased with money. Women are turned into commodities. This mere idea goes against an individualistic understanding of humanity.

Commodities and gifts are commonly used concepts in anthropology (especially since Mauss 1954) to try to grasp exchanges during wedding ceremonies and are hard to circumvent when talking about bride price. The common distinction is that "gifts are inalienable objects embedded in relations of reciprocity and mutual dependence, saturated with the person of the giver; commodities are alienable objects, detached from social relations and anonymised" (Jolly 2015:65). Often, the involvement of money in an exchange is seen as the tipping point to define the transaction as a gift or commodity exchange. This is very simplistic and contested in academia. In Development discourse, however, the appearance of money is precisely the point of departure for arguments that all bride price payments are commodifying women.

In Vanuatu, the terms *pem woman* and *braed praes* literally mean 'paying/ buying the woman' and 'bride price'. The Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs set a maximal limit of 80 000 vatu (about 800 Euro), which the groom's family pays to the bride's family. Focusing on this monetary aspect, women activists especially criticised the practice of *braed praes*: "That is not good. Women were given a price tag." But the monetary transaction is just one of many parts of the wedding ceremony.

Do the terms in Bislama, in a Ni-Vanuatu context, really address the same as their English equivalents? Most recently, Margaret Jolly wrote about *Braed Praes* in Vanuatu:

> "The debate about braed praes in Vanuatu has clearly gone global. [...] there is a pervasive, shared set of binaries - between gifts and commodities, between women as persons of value in local kinship exchanges and women as being like things with a price tag, between women as agents of benign customary practices and women as victims of commoditisation, violence, and invented traditions" (2015: 64, original highlighting).

Jolly points to the ambiguity of how *braed praes* in Vanuatu is debated and points out that binaries should not be seen as exclusive, but "their co-presence, their mutual imbrication, and their creolisation need to be better appreciated" (Jolly 2015: 65).

Ni-Vanuatu women themselves could easily shift the arguments about *braed praes* from one set of binaries to the other.

Most (not all) of my informants would state that:

"*Pem woman, emi no olsem pem ol banana long maket. Pem woman, emi soim respek i go long mama blong woman. Long susu blong hem.*" (woman, in her mid-40s)	"Paying/buying a woman is not the same as buying bananas at the market. Buying a woman means showing respect to the mother of the bride. To her bosom/milk."

From that point of view, *braed praes* is seen as a form of respect given to the mother of the bride, who has nourished and educated her to become 'a good woman'. It would be shameful for a bride, if her family was not 'paid'.

This view seems to be shared especially by *kastom* proponents. But also most of the younger women I spoke to would agree that *braed praes* is a form of respect towards the parents. They would also agree that it made a fundamental difference for the relationship whether a husband had paid for his wife. The consequences of having paid *braed praes* could be positive, as well as negative.

"When a man paid you, you have right to use all his land and you own half of his possessions", I was told. More often, however, I heard women expressing a rather negative picture of *braed price* (as for example Mary's case mentioned above).

Other women explained to me: "With *braed praes* you pay for the woman's grave." First, I thought this was meant figuratively, but my informant explained: "Because when a woman dies, she will be buried in the soil of her husband."

And because of these ambiguities, *braed praes* is a powerful notion that can be used to argue for women's repression and for the respect that women receive, depending on how *braed praes* is understood.

In the following part I shall argue, that *braed praes* **is and is not** bride price depending on the perspective one wants to take (see Jolly 2015).

I will uncover three common misunderstandings about *braed praes* that are frequently expressed in Development discourses:

(1): Marriage is the union of two individuals.

(2): The amount of cash money given as *braed praes* reflects the evaluation and 'pricing' of a woman.

(3): The practice of paying *braed praes* is an outdated tradition that can and should be stopped.

To make the complexity of the misunderstandings more palpable, I will base my argumentation on certain observations I made during a wedding in Teouma, a village just outside of Port Vila.

An urban wedding

My friend Ruth from Tongoa invited me to the wedding of her male cross-cousin (*tawian*) in Teouma, about 40 minutes' drive out of Port Vila. Three couples got married at the same time and the ceremonies took two days. On the first day, the *kastom* ceremonies took place, followed by a church wedding on the next day. The three grooms came from Tongoa, while the brides came from Paama, Pentecost and Malekula. Inter-island marriages are not uncommon, especially in town, but they entail certain complications. In several moments during the *kastom* ceremony, namely, the various *kastoms* from the different islands got mixed together.

The weddings took place outside in an open space, referred to as *nassara*.[58] I arrived with Ruth and a part of her family in the morning at around 9 am. Around 100 people were already there and the atmosphere was fairly busy. We carried our presents into a stone house and divided them into three piles of the equal amounts of pandanus mats, boxes with tea cups, big plastic bowls and plastic drinking containers, which were bought in the supermarket. Although they are wrapped in colourful paper, the shapes of the containers and bowls were uncanny. One of the grooms examined our presents and wrote something into a booklet. "This is a diary", Ruth's father explained to me. The groom notes the name of the gift giver, the receiver of the gift and the value of the gift. "If there is a next wedding or something, he will

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58 These public spaces that are used for ceremonial purposes are called *nassara.* Usually the belonging to a *nassara* is also linked to one's identity. However, in the case of this *nassara* in proximity to Port Vila*,* it seemed that it does not belong to one clan in particular, but is used and maintained by residents who live in the area (mostly Tongoan, but not exclusively so).

look at his diary and see what his family member has given him. Then, he will give a present according to that. He needs to give more back, however, then he received. This is how the circle goes around." Ruth's father used his hand to indicate the last sentence. Familiar with the concept of reciprocal gift exchange, I was still very surprised to see with which precision book keeping was conducted.

We left the house to seek some shade under a prepared canopy made of leaves. Some women and children sat down on mats, talked or fell asleep while waiting for the next event to happen. Other women were busy peeling sweet potato, yams, taro and other garden fruits - as preparations for the feast meal on the following day. Most of the men dispersed in the area. "They hide in the bush to drink *kava* and alcohol", I got told. Some men were preparing the meat of bulls (Bislama: *buluk).* [59]

Men skinning and dividing bulls (buluk)

Women preparing root vegetables for the wedding meal

At around noon, some women started to prepare the *pem woman* ceremony[60] for one of the grooms. They stacked up mats on three heaps, one of which was significantly higher than the other two. One dead pig lay on the ground. On each stack, an envelope was placed: one was for the mother of the bride (*susu*; lit. breast and breast milk), one was for the child of the couple (*pikinini*) and one contained the 80 000 vatu. Some *kava* roots and sugar cane were placed next to the mats.

As the gifts were prepared, a bench was put up and six people sat on it - they are the bride's

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59 In total, seven big bulls were skinned, hung up to dry and cut into pieces. The bulls were bought by the groom's family and the pieces were eventually distributed to everyone who came and contributed to the wedding. This, however, took a couple of days.

60 *Pem woman* ceremony is how my friends called it towards me, therefore I will use this notion. It is very likely, however, that there are other vernacular terms for the ceremony.

relatives: the *anti* (the father's sister), her mother from Efate,[61] her mother from Pentecost, two of her brothers and a chief from Pentecost, who is also the bride's *angkel* (MB). The bride herself was not present, but that is rather uncommon, as I was told afterwards.

Facing the people on the bench, a group of men stood in line: a chief of the *nassara*, a pastor, the groom, the groom's *angkel*.

First, the pastor had a short speech and asked the chief of the *nassara* to come to the front. The chief walked towards the highest stack of mats and officially opened the ceremony by touching the envelope. The chief, too, had a short talk. The speeches of the pastor and the chief were serious or 'heavy' as it is often described by Ni-Vanuatu. They were both in Bislama. As the marriage was an inter-island marriage and the guests spoke different languages, Bislama was a rather convenient choice. Both addressed the chiefs and families from Efate and Pentecost, who witnessed the ceremony and both expressed their appreciation about the fact that this *kastom* was still upheld. Especially interesting was the emphasise on the "bridge" that was created between Efate and Pentecost through this marriage. The well-being of the couple was not particularly highlighted. Instead, the marriage was framed as a inter-island issue that connected families and communities, not two individuals.

The chief took one envelope, from the biggest heap and asked the mother of the bride from Pentecost to take it. The woman stood up and silently, with a neutral facial expression, shook the chief's hand and received envelope and mats. After she sat down, the chief asked one of the bride's brothers to receive one envelope for the couple's child. The young man, without any word or facial expression, received envelope and mats and sat back down again.

Eventually, the bride's *angkel*, declared that the bride was "paid for" (*pem finis*). The mats and the pig got carried away by other family members.

The whole procedure took about 20 minutes. [62]

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61 Because the bride is from Pentecost and her biological parents still live there, she needed to be adopted into a family that resides nearby. This is why, next to her biological mother, also the bride's "mother from Efate" was present during the ceremony.

62 In other ethnographic descriptions, weddings in urban Vanuatu have been described differently (e.g. Eriksen 2008: 64ff). As wedding procedures and ceremonies are connected to *kastom* they can vary significantly. Furthermore, the wedding ceremony I observed can be considered an urban marriage, and might therefore be very different from the weddings that happen on the islands.

Preparing the pem woman ceremony

Three bundles of mats and kaliko are prepared. In the background: dead big, kava roots, sugar cane and a sack of rice

Envelope for the bride's mother

The writing on the envelope says "susu", which means bosom as well as breast milk

Misunderstanding 1: Marriage is the union of two individuals

Article 16 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states on marriage:

> (1) Men and women of full age, without any limitation due to race, nationality or religion, have the right to marry and to found a family. They are entitled to equal rights as to marriage, during marriage and at its dissolution.

> (2)Marriage shall be entered into only with the free and full consent of the intending spouses.

Underlying of these statements is the idea that marriage is a union of two individuals, "men and women of full age", who are deciding to be married "with [...] free and full consent".

With this assumption, begins the first conceptual difference of what *kastom* marriage in Vanuatu is often described as. Frequently I got reminded: "When a couple in Vanuatu marries, it is not just two individuals, but the two **families** that become one" (Chief from North Ambae, personal conversation). In the speeches of both the chief and the pastor, the emphasise was not on the union of two people, but on the connection between Efate and Pentecost that is established through the marriage exchange (*pem woman*). It is therefore also not surprising that both families were represented by several people, not by the bride and groom or other individuals.

On this note, it is important to emphasize that the bride's paternal family was not represented by her father, but by her *anti*. The bride's *anti* and her *angkel* sat on the opposite outsides of the bench, perfectly visualising both lineages of the bride.

The role of the bride's brothers during the ceremony is a relevant one. It was the bride's eldest brother who received the mats and money that were prepared as exchange for the couple's child. Without this 'payment' the child would not be considered as part of the groom's lineage.

Virtually nothing of this part of the wedding ceremony would support the notion of marriage is the union of two individuals.

However, during the Church ceremony on the following day, the couples were addressed as future husband and wife in the speeches of the two pastors who lead the church ceremony, not so much as representatives of their communities. Furthermore, the couples had best men and maids of honour, who witnessed the ceremony and children who were the ring bearers. The atmosphere on that day was less heavy. People took photos of the couples and laughed at the couples, when they exchanged some shy kisses as they were asked to do by the pastor. A big buffet with *Aelen Kaekae* (Island food) was prepared, as well as several big wedding cakes. Therefore, it seems that that *kastom* marriage ceremonies like *pem woman* "reconstitute collective kinship and economic links recreating 'dividuals' [...], whereas the church wedding is 'more ostensibly individual' and a more joyous celebration" (Jolly 2015: 71).

Pem Woman
The bride's brother receives the envelop for the couple's child. The bride's kin is sitting on the bench.

Misunderstanding 2: The amount of cash money given as *braed praes* reflects the evaluation and 'pricing' of a woman.

The commodification of women through *braed praes* is often mentioned and criticized in Development discourse. Indeed, Ni-Vanuatu men talk frequently about *braed praes* in economic idioms. They comment how "expensive" (*sas*) women became, that women on the islands are cheaper than women in town and some are genuinely concerned that they might not be able to afford a wife.[63] Also, *braed praes* became the subject of some chauvinistic jokes, referring to women as "second hand" or broken commodities.

Proponents of *kastom*, however, criticize this development of understanding bride price."It was meant as a token of appreciation from the bridegroom's parents and relatives to the bride's family to strengthen the relationship between the two clans" (Tor & Toka 2004: 29). If we look at the wedding at Teouma, this becomes clear too. The *braed praes* was not handed to the bride's mother as an exchange for her daughter in the same way as one buys a product. It is presented as the beginning of the alliance of two groups, not as the conclusion of a sale. In fact, although *braed praes* is often termed in idioms of buying women, it is never said that women are sold (Valeri 1994).

It is furthermore worth questioning what is really evaluated with *braed praes*. It is striking that the limit of 80 000 vatu from the Malvatumauri usually does not apply in rural areas, outside of Port Vila. Ruth explained to me: "On the island [Tongoa], you do not have to pay so much money. Men have to pay maybe 30 000 vatu for a woman." I wondered why that was and asked provokingly: "Are women on the islands not as good as women in town?" I thought about the access to education that women get in the urban area and that maybe school fees needed to be compensated by the groom. But Ruth was puzzled and answered: "No, of course not. On the islands you need to pay less money, because everything else is better (B.: *moa gud;* could also be understood as *'more valuable'*)." She argues that the food on island weddings comes from the gardens and needs to grow. This demands a lot of work. Also, on the island, women need to make the mats themselves. Usually the whole kin group works for a couple's wedding. "But in town, you just need to go to the store and need to pay for rice and *kaliko* (cloth). You just need money", Ruth says in an indifferent voice.

According to Ruth's explanation, the labour that goes into the preparation of a wedding is (1)

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63 One USP student moaned once - half jokingly, half seriously: "Until I am out of university, women will probably cost 100 000 vatu."

a communal effort and (2) more valuable than the store-bought mats and groceries. Money is in this view not the most valuable item in *braed praes*, but the labour that goes into the mats, the rearing of the pig and other gifts. The total value of *braed praes* is the same as in town, but on the islands, the most value lies in the gifts, not in the amount of money given.

A wedding from this point of view is a communal effort, in which all kin members (of the groom) contribute with their labour. Cash money would be rather a compensation for the lack of other valuable objects (as mats, pigs, certain garden produce, etc.).

This is a stark contrast to how *braed praes* is presented in mainstream discourse about bride price, where the amount of cash money given is interpreted as the 'price tagging' of a woman.

Misunderstanding 3: The practice of paying *braed praes* is an outdated tradition that can and should be stopped.

The Bislama terminology *pem woman* is a somewhat misleading notion. We can see that *braed praes* and *pem woman* are 'typical Bislama' in the sense that they adopt English expressions, but are built upon local conceptions. Therefore, when translating them back to English, we assume that we understand what bride price and buying women means. What needs to be pointed out, however is that the notion *braed praes* is embedded in a series of wedding ceremonies, which in total make a marriage complete. Furthermore, the conceptualization of *braed praes* has a particular history. However, that history is not straight forward. There are several factors that are interwoven in this development, which Jolly calls "the twin agents of modernity" (2015:66), namely commodity economy and Christianity. But let us first take a look at the ceremonial embedding of *braed praes*.

Blokum, pem, tekem woman

In fact, there are three kinds of marriage that are accepted and often combined in Vanuatu: *kastom* wedding, church wedding and civil wedding. As marriage in Vanuatu is connected to *kastom,* the procedures vary accordingly. In general, however, I was told, that a *kastom* marriage usually has three parts: *blokum woman* (blocking the woman), *pem woman* (paying the woman), *tekem woman* (taking the woman).

"Blocking the woman" means that the man asks the woman's family to marry her. Sometimes it is not the man himself, but a male relative or chief that speaks to the woman's family, which is in most cases her *angkel* and/ or brother. I was told that, on Ambae at least, the man's family usually prepares some food and some presents for the woman's family. A piece of jewellery - a necklace or a bracelet - is given to the woman as a sign that she is 'blocked'.

In the urban setting of Port Vila, when I asked my friends, if they were 'blocked', they laughed loudly. They told me that the male partner should ask for permission if he wants to marry a girl, and there might be some kind of feast, but he does not 'block' her in the same sense as on the islands. "It is more like a statement that you are together now", Catherine explained to me and pointed out: "I choose my partner, not my family. They can just say if they accept him or not." Almost all women I worked with knew their *kastom* men - a group of men that by *kastom* are potential husbands. It is commonly a man out of the group of cross-cousins (MBC) or a man that is chosen by the woman's *angkel*. Arranged marriages of that kind are more common on the islands than in Port Vila, but even in town, most of my informants and friends were not opposed to the idea of a *kastom* man. Catherine's view was commonly shared: "This way, if I am old and I have not found a partner, I always have a *kastom* man to marry and have a family with." In this understanding, a *kastom* man is rather a backup plan; women, at least as I observed in Port Vila, are rarely obliged to marry their *kastom* man.

Whether the partnership is arranged or chosen, many years can pass by before the next step of the wedding is performed, namely *pem woman*. The reason for the delay is often caused by the lack of money, especially in town. Often, couples live together and might even have kids before they arrange the ceremony. As I have described above, the ceremony of *pem woman* is in fact fairly short. Without the *braed praes*, however, marriage is often perceived as incomplete. It is an important part of the marriage procedure, but it should not be mistaken for the sole ceremony during a wedding.

Tekem woman usually happens at the same day or shortly after *pem woman*. The newly wed bride is brought to her husband's house/ village, accompanied by her kin, who might sing and dance, dusting each other with baby powder and scented deodorant spray. A wooden box or, as a modern alternative, a suitcase is carried, in which the women's relatives packed some presents[64] - kitchen utilities, pots, pans, bedding, clothes, etc. Other gifts and mats are also carried by the bride's entourage.

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64 Eriksen (2008) describes a *sakem presen* ceremony as a relatively new and modern part of the wedding procedures.

In Teouma, the new brides were adopted into the local families. They received new names by their 'new brothers' and where thereby placed into new kinship relations. So, whereas *braed praes* is often presented as commodification of women, this part of the marriage procedure could be seen as the 'personification' of the brides - they became new persons with new kinship ties and new names.

The *tekem woman* ceremony in Teouma took about two hours and was significantly longer than the *pem woman*. Speeches were given by several chiefs (in Bislama), educating the newly wed couples about their duties in a marriage, and mostly, in the community. During the whole time neither the brides nor the grooms said anything but they sat next to each other with bowed heads listening to the teaching words of the chiefs.

Gifts

A red chest, mats, and wrapped kitchen utensils as presents for the bride

Tekem woman

The two brides just received their new names. They are dressed in new island dresses.

The point I want to carve out is, that *pem woman* is but one element in a larger ceremonial procedure. The assumption that it is a unit, which can be separated from other ceremonies or that it is the *only* element of wedding ceremonies, cannot hold true. But also the assumption that *braed praes* is an out dated part of *kastom* needs to be revised carefully. The first wedding day (of two) in Teouma finished with a prayer and two hymns that the guests sang together. Also, during the *braed praes* exchange, a priest - as a representative of the church - was present as a witness. Furthermore, a church wedding was conducted on the following day. Therefore*, braed praes* is a part of a kastom wedding, which-again- is part of a larger wedding ceremony as such.

The over-emphasise of the *braed praes* by the Development discourse silences the other aspects of a Ni-Vanuatu wedding, e.g. the appreciation of motherhood, community and (peaceful) alliances.

The focus on *braed praes* leads especially young Ni-Vanuatu men and women to believe that this is what marriage is about. "He paid for me, so I am his" or "I paid for her, so she is mine", are sentences I have heard plenty of times in Port Vila, making *pem woman* the central point of defining a marriage. "Young people these days do not know how to choose the right partner", a middle-aged Ni-Vanuatu woman lamented, "they do not know what marriage is."

The shift from marriage as the creation of communities to marriage as defined by *braed praes* is a shift that emerged in the context of historical and political movements in Vanuatu.

Changing understanding of *braed praes*

 As I have pointed out at an earlier point in this thesis, Christianity, *kastom* and Colonialism share a common history in Vanuatu. And in accordance, certain ideas developed and spread throughout Vanuatu, e.g. the 'moral Christian person', the idea of 'good governance', the idea of the nation, and of commodity economy, etc.

For the notion of *braed praes,* these developments are significant, as the enhanced participation in global economy, introduced commodity values and the notion of 'price' (Jolly 2015: 65 f). Moreover, the "process of individualisation" (Eriksen 2016: 9), which is said to accompany Christian missionization in Vanuatu furthermore enhanced the understanding of a person as individual and of a marriage as a union between two persons. The practice of bride price was increasingly understood in economic terms. "Europeans literally translated the meaning of *braed praes* according to the Western concept, with a monetary value" (Tor & Toka 2004: 29).

Notions of " I paid for her, therefore she is mine" work with certain conceptualisations that derived from these processes (of increased monetary economy and individualisation): (a) there needs to be an understanding of an 'I' and 'her' - as individuals; (b) there needs to be an idea of 'paying for' or 'buying'; (c) there needs to be an understanding of possession - all of which are said to have developed in Vanuatu since the 19th century.

The practice of *braed praes* is, in this light, not at all an outdated part of a traditional past, but it is a practice that has been changing and differently understood in the last centuries.

To condemn *braed praes* therefore as a practice that belongs solely to *kastom* and should be given up, is a simplification of a complex historical development that this notion has been part

of. Only a few publications refer to the original idea of *pem woman* as a token of appreciation, that in contemporary Vanuatu changed its meaning as "indicative of slavery" (Tor & Toka 2004: 30).

Summary

Summarizing the issue of *braed praes* in contemporary discourses around Gender and especially women's rights I want to point out that there are some fundamental misunderstandings at work.

(1) the practice of *pem woman* is commonly interpreted by Ni-Vanuatu men and women as **both** (a) the expression of respect of the bride's mother and (b) as the commodification of the woman. Therefore, contrary to how the Development discourse often presents, there is no clear answer, whether *braed praes* is 'good' or 'bad' .

(2) The example in Teouma revealed that a Ni-Vanuatu marriage consists of many parts, which *braed praes* is but a part of.

(3) In current urban setting of Port Vila, *braed praes* is often presented as the 'bad part' of *kastom*, that could be disposed of. Thereby, however, discursive genealogy of *braed praes* in the course of several centuries is hidden.

(4) With the prominence of *braed praes* in discourses on women's rights or GBV, the image is created that this is the main aspect of marriage. Other aspects of wedding ceremonies and ideals (e.g. the aspect of communality) are rarely mentioned.

(5) The assumption that the practice of bride price is commodifying women and causes violence in homes is so dominating, that attempts to understand *braed praes* form a cultural relativistic point of view often get denied from Development workers, who express a "I-just-want- it- to -stop"- mentality.

(6) The women in the middle, advocating women's rights and empowerment more often than not take on the assumptions of their 'Western' audience, rather than attempting to create a (public) dialogue about *braed praes* that could facilitate to "come to an understanding".

I have invited the reader into the gap - the space in between the two ideal-type ontologies of global Development cooperation and Ni-Vanuatu lived experiences. I have looked into the gap as a space of translation and communication between the two poles, inhabited by various actors. I have shown how the notion of Gender gets Bislama-ized into *jenda* but that its meaning does not necessary become understandable to a majority of Ni-Vanuatu men and women thereby. Similar with other terms, Gender and GBV became - in Port Vila - a powerful tool of stratification. The ones who know the term and how to use it are mainly educated women who are seen as belonging neither to the one nor to the other sphere. From the Development cooperation point of view, they are seen as local women and therefore their voices are referred to as 'authentic'; however, from Ni-Vanuatu men and women themselves the Gender advocates and female politicians are often not considered to be *womanples* (local).

The discourse analysis of the language and concepts used in the survey as well as during the 16 Days of Activism awareness campaign revealed that their rhetoric was mainly built on certain premises (universalism, modernism, humanism, the individual, gender binary) that were promoted by the global Development discourse around Gender. However, as I have challenged these premises with the *angkel* case, emphasising a concept of gendered relatedness that is based on kinship titles rather than on biological sex. Eventually, I pointed out common misunderstandings in the discourse around *braed praes*. In this last chapter now, I want to conclude my argumentation and I pose some questions that have not been adequately answered at this point, but provide interesting starting points for further thoughts.

Speaking up, but not listening - teaching, but not learning

The gap is, ideally, a zone of dialogue, as this is the only way to come to an understanding (according to Weigand's Dialogic Action Game model). However, in a dialogue both sides have to be able to (1) speak up and (2) to be *properly listened* to, in order to come to an understanding. Ideally, the translators in the middle of this dialogue facilitate the transmission of information (like in Chinese Whispers). In the case of Gender, the direction in which information flows is marked by the imbalanced relationship between Vanuatu as one of the Least Developed Countries, and the wealthy, universal Human Rights frame. The information

around Gender, for example, travels in a one-way direction, which is not even doubted. The role of the UN as knowledge provider remains unquestioned and is evident in the recently published article "*Vanuatu: translating human rights standards into actions*" (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner; March 18, 2016) about a capacity building training for 11 Vanuatu State officials, shortly before the obligatory CEDAW report. Excerpts from the article state (my highlights):

> "The training was aimed at **helping** government **officials** to better handle the **interactive dialogue** with CEDAW **experts**. [...]
> In the training, officials were **taught** to **understand** the **international standards** on women's human rights and **shown** how to **translate** those standards into tangible action, said [...] acting head of the UN Human Rights Office in the Pacific. [...]
> And it seems the training **helped** the Vanuatu delegation **impress** during their CEDAW review session this past February. " (ibid.)

The highlighted words make explicit that "the interactive dialogue" happens between experts and officials, who got "taught" and "shown" "how to understand" Human Rights and CEDAW . The UN bodies had the role of the helper and teacher.

These power dynamics are reproduced in a downwards slope: as the Development agents treat Vanuatu government officials as being in need to learn, so, these government officials treat CSOs and emerging elite, who in turn presents the 'grassroot' women as passive and uneducated 'victims', who need to be taught how to live 'better' lives. This image, then, gets easily internalised as the feeling of being 'uncivilised'.

Coming to an understanding, would require not only to "empower" women to "speak up", but also the provision of a space where they can be heard in their own language with their own terminologies and concepts.

One could argue that the cultural translators had that ability to represent Ni-Vanuatu men and women in an 'authentic' way. But as I have shown above, these translators, the women's groups, activists, politicians, etc. are on a very vulnerable positions, as they need to 'play by the rules' in order to keep their privileged access to expert knowledge and funding; meaning that they need to be able to speak the Development language, to be able to conform to bureaucratic regulations (e.g. book keeping, writing of project proposals and reports), and to be able to create convincing data (e.g. in form of surveys, charts and tables). If they do not succeed, they might lose their privileges and their networks and might end up as outcasts of their own communities. Facing these comedowns, the middle- (wo)men can use the languages of the powerful in order to keep their own positions, as we could see in the survey as well as in the speeches. Whether these are controlled misunderstandings or miscommunications is hard to say, but either way this structure does not allow for a dialogue.

Instead of focusing on making people "speak up" in vocabulary that has been taught to them, another approach is the empowerment through "respectful listening" (Braithwaite 2003: 36):

> "You can tell how much power a person has by observing how many people listen attentively to his or her stories. It follows from this that we can empower the powerless by institutionalising more effective listening to their stories of injustice."

As we could see, surveys and awareness campaigns seem to speak *about* Ni-Vanuatu women and men, but not necessarily *with* them.

The lack of respectful listening (from the side of the more powerful) is caused by the assumption that the Human Rights frame of personhood and Gender is universal and superior towards other concepts. But not only does this hubris prevent dialogues, it also silences important structures and perspectives.

What is being silenced?

In his critical article, Pala Molisa (2015), son of Grace Mera Molisa and university lecturer, claims against anti-violence campaigns: "they are too white and too polite". He convincingly argues, that campaigns focus on individualised forms of violence and silence the power structures that cause violent behaviour in the first place: "patriarchy, white supremacy, and capitalism" (Molisa 2015).

According to this position, awareness campaigns do not go far enough in their claim to stop violence, because they systematically silence the structural reasons for it.

I argued similar above, that grassroot women in rhetoric about GBV often get infantilised and pathologised and therefore talked about as if they are lacking agency - they get objectified. But the reasons why women are in this position is not expressed.

> " Anti-violence campaigns aren't just too polite. They can often be too white. They seem to treat violence against women as if it's a problem men can address without facing up to three realities. One is the effect of colonialism. Another is the institutionalised racism of white supremacy. And a third is the impact of corporate capitalism which concentrates wealth in the hand of the few [...]" (Molisa 2015).

I have pointed out these aspects in various parts of this thesis. The fact that the government is often depicted as the social element that can bring about equality for women hides the fact that structures of colonialism have set up these governmental structures and the notion of governance and nation in the first place. Hidden is also the fact that Bislama derived from colonialism, as well as Christianity and *kastom*. White supremacy and a hegemonic

knowledge system is almost tangible in rhetoric about Gender in Port Vila, when the dominating concepts of personhood and Gender dualism from the West get adopted as universals. Furthermore, the power imbalance between expats and Ni-Vanuatu men and women is constantly reproduced, especially in the urban setting - let alone by the addresses *master* and *missis* for Caucasian men and women. Capitalism and the access to money in the Development sector play the probably most important role in the adoption of certain knowledge and the reluctance to share this knowledge widely, as it might challenge one's own privileged position. I have shown how an elite class (of women) emerges out of the influence of capitalism and western hegemonic knowledge regimes.

But not only structural reasons for social inequalities are silenced, but also one important social group is not explicitly looked at in activities targeting Gender issues: the group of men. Presented as naturally urge-driven, violent villains, there was not a single campaign in Port Vila that focused on trying to help men, e.g. not to react aggressive. Even in prison, there is no adequate rehabilitation programme for detainees, of which sex offenders compose the majority (Vanuatu Correctional Service 2012).

The only anti-violence campaign for men in Port Vila, was the White Ribbon Campaign.

The central police station in Port Vila is all-yearlong decorated with a big poster. White letters on black background state: "Break the silence. End the violence" next to a white ribbon - the symbol of the global campaign.

The White Ribbon Campaign originally aimed to engage men and boys into the discourses and awareness campaigns around GBV and VAW. They are encouraged to "pledge to never commit, condone or remain silent about violence against women and girls"[65]. These kind of pledges or statements like "Violence against Women is not my culture" are also used by other big organisations. But as other awareness campaigns, projects targeting men focus rather on teaching than on learning, rather on speaking than on listening to local understandings and concepts, that only seemingly are easy to understand (see *braed praes*). But there are alternative means and approaches to create space for active listening and understanding.

What else is possible?

Theatre, dance and clowning is thought of as a powerful tool to tell stories and to challenge dominant practices, especially in the Pacific (e.g. Hereniko 1994, Hoem 2004). The most

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[65] http://www.whiteribbon.ca/who-we-are/

popular theatre group in Port Vila is affiliated with the youth centre *Wan Smolbag (WSB),* which grew since its foundation in 1989. [66] The youth centre, which also runs a Health Centre, is located just outside Port Vila and occupies a surprisingly big area. Funded by AusAid, NZAid and other international donors, it became its very own institution and all of my friends, local as well as expats, would know it. The shows are said to be socially critical and politically relevant. The popularity of performances has been recognized by other international NGO, as well as by local CSOs, so that on public events multiple sketches, short plays, songs and dances are performed by youth groups, NGO members or string bands. The performances do attract a big audience. However, multiple questions arise: Who writes the screen play? Whose story is this really about? Who are the actors? Do they come from elite families or are they 'grassroot'? Where is the show performed - do people need to get there and maybe pay entrance or is the show integrated in everyday life of its audience?

Social Theatre: *Aelen Gel*

In October 2015, the social theatre project named Island Daughters (later: *Aelen Gel*) was initiated by the Italian performer and writer Marilena Crosato.

The first performance took place on November 25, 2015 inside the central market house in Port Vila - not usually a space for performances, but an everyday space for men and women in Port Vila. The "actresses" were women who usually cook or sell food in the market house - *market mama* as the call themselves - as well as some younger women, most of whom are unemployed. As the performers did not belong to the typical elite, the *Aelen Gel* performance offers an interesting platform to explore another form of communicating issues relating to Gender and GBV. It is, so to say, an example for an alternative discourse around Gender and GBV.

<div align="center">*</div>

When I first met her in Port Vila, Marilena wanted to work with the women vendors at the market; give them a platform to express themselves through performance. No script, no text, no given topics - this would evolve out of the cooperation with the women themselves. This was very important to Marilena: "It is a communal process" (Crosato personal conversation).

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66 The series *Love Patrol* is probably the most famous production of WSB and is available on YouTube. Different youth groups have formed- from theatre to dance, sports and more. WSB produces DVDs, information material for schools and comic books.

The project had only minimal financial support[67], and relied heavily on the voluntary participation and commitment of a group of eleven women. Besides seven market mamas, also four younger girls from a local CSO took part in the project.

The 30-minute performance was created in a month-long workshop led by Marilena. Through theatre techniques, she encouraged the women to talk about their personal experiences as mothers, market mamas, young girls, and whatever they wanted to talk about. Constantly aware of her prestigious position as a European woman, Marilena cautiously created dialogues with the participating women themselves. Together, the group designed the content of *Aelen Gel*.

The performance allowed the women to express their everyday life experiences in a way that differed from the image of women as "vulnerable group" in their own society.

The final product consisted of several parts:

- Playful introduction of the individual *market mamas* and welcoming the audience
- Reciting a recipe for a meal that is usually sold by the *market mamas.*
- Storytelling I: five market mamas tell their stories of how they became market vendors
- The Boiling Water Scene: Enactment of a scene, in which two women **almost** fight over a man
- Storytelling II: three women tell various stories of their personal encounters with the threat of violence and the support of their family in the everyday
- Final Scene: Recitation of Grace Mera Molisa's poem in Bislama and English, and an enactment, in which the group strongly calls out for women Vanuatu to speak up

Stage and target audience

First, it needs to be said that the 'stage' was a part of the usual kitchen area of the central Market House. Five tables were put in a long row and benches provided seat for about 35 people. This was not only the audience zone, but also the centre 'stage' of the performance, as the *market mamas also* took their seat at the table. There was no clear cut stage, no distance between the speakers and the listeners. Other than at the Marobe Market, for instance, the women who talked are not on a platform in front and slightly elevated of the audience. This

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[67] The project got funded by the French Ambassy as well as the Alliance Française - an institution that promotes cultural exchange between France and countries all around the world. In Port Vila, it is a central institution for exchange between mostly francophone artists and musicians, but it also organises Bislama language classes and other cultural event supported the project.

setting created a feeling of being on eye-level.

Marilena promoted the event on different channels: posters were hung out in different public spaces around town, and information about *Aelen Gel* was circulated via Facebook and the email list of the Alliance Française. Therefore, the majority of people who *actively* came to see the performance were expats or local politicians. They took the seats around the table.

Ironically, the majority of the 'privileged' audience was not able to understand or talk Bislama fluently, which was the language in which the stories were told. But the messages of the performance are not for them, who sit around the table. The real target audience, the people *Aelen Gel* really wants to talk to are the Ni-Vanuatu men and women who stand around the table (Crosato personal communication).

Because the first *Aelen Gel* performance took place in the central Market House during busy hours, where people do their daily shopping or sell their produce, a crowd of more than 100 Ni-Vanuatu men, women and children was quickly created. They stood in a big circle around the kitchen area/ scene, and most of the audience stayed for the whole performance.

This stands in stark contrast to, for example, the awareness campaign at the Marobe Market, which took place outside the city, outside of everyday life activities, on a Monday morning during work hours.

The performance

The performance began with a strong imagery. In proximity to the table, a piece of wood was tied on both sides and hung up on a beam from the ceiling of the market house. It was a simple swing. Jane, one of the kitchen *mamas*, sat on the swing and started to rock back and forth. First silently, then with more confidence, she sang a song. It was a French children's song,[68] simple and cheerful. The other women waited in a line behind the swing. One by one they ran towards Jane and whispered something in her ear. Jane yelled out the name of the women and the island she came from.[69] Everything was in Bislama. This way, all *market mamas* and girls got introduced to the audience, not only by name, but also by island of origin, which is important for the identity of Ni-Vanuatu women and men. The whole scene reminded of a children's game. The *market mamas* were playful, they laughed, when they ran towards Joanna and when they ran away from her, too. The swing is an element, that created

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68 Jane is from a French speaking part of Malekula and she chose this song herself.
69 For example: "This is Linda, she is from Tanna. She likes Tanna, because there is a big volcano on the island."

attention. But it also breaks the bleak picture that is usually drawn of women as 'poor' victims of patriarchal societies. Furthermore, it plays with the commonly stated proximity of women and children as "vulnerable groups" and transforms it to the image of children and women as happy, creative humans.

The main element of communication in the performance was storytelling. The *market mamas* shared diverse aspects of their personal live stories, which were about 5 minutes each. Through their own experiences how they deal with the struggles of school fees, unemployment, jealousy and threat, in their own words, the women described clearly that they are not 'poor women in the kitchen'. All stories revealed elements of agency and showed that women are important providers for their families. The rhetoric was not universal or generalizing; in no moment, the women stated something like "Ni-Vanuatu women are.." or "women in Vanuatu experience...". Instead, they used their personal experiences to fill the empty words of mainstream rhetoric with content, which the audience could relate to.

Aelen Gel contained one skit, which indicated a potential violent scene. However, it was not a man who almost beat his wife, but the story was about two women, who argued over a man. This scene came to be after long conversations with the *mamas* and girls, in which they would repeatedly say: "Ni-Vanuatu women are too jealous of each other. They always gossip about (*tok bihain*) each other. And they steal each other's men (*stilim man*) and betray their partners (*go behain*) just like men do."

In contrast, in the survey jealousy and adultery was presented an issue that only men would do. *Aelen Gel*, however, showed that also women can beat and insult each other, whereby the man/perpetrator: woman/victim dualism is challenged. The scene ended before the women could beat each other, with a moment of comic relief. The audience laughed out loudly.

The final scene of *Aelen Gel* is probably the most powerful in its imagery and message. Two *market mamas* stood on the opposite sides of the table and read Grace Mera Molisa's poem *Delightful Acquiescence* (in the beginning of this thesis) - once in Bislama (a translation), once in English (the original).

"Vanuatu loves self-effacing, acquiescing, submissive, slavish, women."

When Miriam finished reading the last verse of Molisa's poem, her sharp pronunciation of the s-sounds cut through the room. The audience was silent. Miriam walked calmly, yet confidently towards the other ten women, who stood very close to each other, holding each other's arms, while facing to the front. Led by a young woman, the group started to walk. At first, the 'knot of women' tumbled a little bit, but soon they found their pace. The group looked straight to the front, serious, strong. After a few steps, the women - all but the young

woman in the front - started to laugh. Together, loud and strong. A few steps later they started whispering words. At first, it was hard to understand what they said, but as the volume increased, the words became identifiable: "Cabbage, tomato, capsicum, banana" and other vegetables and fruits were repeated. Suddenly, the group stopped. The women, who had peered into the distance until now, looked into each other's faces. They smiled at each other.

Miriam shouted: "*Mifala woman Vanuatu i wantem se yumi no mas stap silent.*" - We women of Vanuatu want that we stop being silent. Erica, the young woman in the front, added: "*Tokabaotem...*" (Talk about...), and the other women, one by one, shouted out: "politics", "school", "health", "love", "money", "peace", "family", "religion", "sport", ...

Eventually Miriam shouted even louder: "*Evriting! Woman long Vanuatu i no mas stap frait!*" [Everything! Women in Vanuatu should not be afraid!]

The women laughed happily, released the grip and gave each other euphoric high five claps, before they walked into different directions.

The applause of the audience was deafening. Some Ni-Vanuatu women in the audience were moved to tears - a reaction I have not seen in any awareness campaign.

The idea behind the scene was: The women appear as group, as unity. They mumble the names of the fruits and vegetables they sell on the market. It is the only thing they say, the only thing they are - market vendors. But once they see each other in the face, they start laughing and they realise each other's potential and power. They call Ni-Vanuatu women to speak up. In breaking lose from the group, clapping and laughing, the image also tells the simultaneous story, that Ni-Vanuatu women are powerful as a group, as well as individuals. After the performance, an all-women string band played and the *market mamas* as well as the audience started to dance.

What did the market mamas themselves think about the project?

On the day after the performance, the *mamas* could not stop smiling and spoke in high terms of the show. The scepticism at the beginning of the project was forgotten and the women already thought about the next shows. Linda, one of the *mamas*, told me happily: "You know, usually, the only conversations we have is with our customers. 'Hello, how are you?' and so on. But yesterday, we could talk more and we were listened to. That felt really good." Another

woman stated: "We got so much good feedback from the other market vendors. They want to take part in the group now too."

Erica, one of the young women, was extraordinarily happy. She admitted that she was nervous at first, but as soon as the show began, her anxiety just vanished and she felt confident. Development experts might interpret this as an act of 'empowerment'. What should be acknowledged is the need for a *real* space for communication, expressing their *own* voices, and being *listened to*.

The project is not restricted by a certain time schedule as many other Development projects are and activities of the group have been continuing in 2016.[70]

In many ways, the *Aelen Gel* project is an example for a promising approach of how to enter a dialogue with non-elite Ni-Vanuatu women on topics that concern them and on how to reveal these topics in the most comprehensible way. Small scale projects like *Aelen Gel* and their effects need to be explored more as potential alternatives to mainstream "empowerment" activities.

In the end: *Wanem ia jenda? Wanem ia vaelens? Wanem ia...?*

I want to end my thesis on this high note.

I do not intend to set the impression, that Gender or GBV are mere concepts and are not part of reality in Port Vila. The problem of GBV is reality. I am not saying that Development cooperation is completely harmful or the like. Nor do I want to devalue the work of the women and organisations in the gap. In this thesis, I merely wanted to shed some light on the processes and structures that restrict GBV from being stopped. What I have tried to point out is, that the underlying problem is a fundamental misunderstanding of ontological concepts (e.g. Gender).

These are rather *misunderstandings* than *non-understandings*, as both sides assume to know what is meant with terms like Gender, Human Rights, Violence or *jenda, braed praes* or *angkel.* These assumptions prevent to ask the important question: "What does that mean?"

Instead of creating a dialogue, however, most awareness campaigns I have seen just reproduce power indifferences - between global organisations, local CSO and 'grassroot' women and men. And the agents in the middle, cause - willingly or unintended - certain

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70 After two performances of *Aelen Gel* in 2015, activities continued in 2016. A photo exhibition about the show and the launching of a short video were organised on the International Women's Day on March 8, 2016. Most recently, the group composed a script of the theatre in Bislama (forthcoming) and presented it in the end of April 2016, on the first book fair in Port Vila.

information to be stuck in a 'bottle neck', that makes it hard for the dialogue to flow from one side to the other.

The issue of GBV in Vanuatu is certainly not an issue of the quantity of information on Women's rights, Human Rights, etc. It is a problem of the distribution and accessibility of these materials and of their understandability.

It seems, however, that there is a recent recognition about the shortcomings of these approaches from national as well as from international policy makers.[71]

Dialogues between Ni-Vanuatu and policy makers need to be facilitated and misunderstandings uncovered. To recognize that Gender is not simply *jenda*, that *braed praes* is not simply bride price and that women are not only vulnerable victims, but *mamas*, *sistas* and sometimes also *angkel*, will change how we talk, think and act about Gender and GBV in Vanuatu. This is a potential area for anthropologists. We, too, are part of the gap. We, too, are go-betweeners. Ethically and morally committed to our informants and friends, but with the vocabulary to speak to policy makers, we ought to keep pointing out misunderstandings and encourage the powerful to listen respectfully, not to assume universality or supremacy. We need to explore old and new forms of communication (e.g. the power of gossip and opinions stated on social media) as sources for understanding. And we constantly need to pose the questions: "What is actually meant by this?" – or in Bislama: *Wanem ia ...?*

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[71] The National Gender Equality Policy, for example states: "The Government of Vanuatu, together with development partners and CSOs have been delivering a multitude of awareness and advocacy campaigns to stop GBV, often without consistent messaging on GBV issues. A key approach is to link GBV education to understanding about culture, faith and human rights to strengthen the effectiveness of community awareness and advocacy programs." (2015:13) And ECOPAS, for example shows, the recognition that sensitively conducted research can benefit the EU in order to create context-specific projects.

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