

## Nurturing Flows between Hands That Let Go



Through an exploration of understandings related to everyday practices of referring to and coping with an ever-changing world, we have seen the outline of an enduring and largely taken for granted perspective on the relationship between the natural and the social world. With this perspective, cultivation, orderliness and beauty are closely interrelated. We have seen that although what spontaneously crops up in and around people was perceived as essential for growth and vitality such natural force needs to be channelled and refined through cultivation in order to reproduce a society worth living in. Importantly for the current puzzle of people's attitudes and responses to unfortunate environmental changes, such a perspective strongly implies that a society worth living in cannot be expected to happen on its own accord but demands continuous efforts of cultivation and refinement as well as self-discipline. To my mind, then, the social and moral ramifications of the enduring perspective on the relation between the world and its workings and the human condition discovered in the foregoing ethnography is key to solving the puzzle of local response and attitudes at hand. In this chapter, then, I shall go on to explore how this perspective affected local sociality and ideas of morality, in order to produce an ethnography that finally enables us (in the conclusion) to understand why people responded as they did to the threats and environmental transformations taking place around them.

### 'The Doorway Is Open'

The food laid out on this table is the 'farewell meal' (*kai fakamavae*) for the 'foreigner' (*pālāngi*) who has come here from afar to become familiar with the 'manner of the land' (*anga fakafonua*). He shall return to his own land far away, but we have lived

together here on Kotu, and he has become familiar with the people of Kotu. I believe that he shall remember this meal in the future. We have all had a ‘strong fellowship’ (*’oku tau feohi*<sup>1</sup>) during the time of his stay. We have ‘helped one another’ (*fetokoniaki*). This is why I think that he shall not go abroad to disappear altogether from this land. There are such things as the mail and the telephone. Although he goes to live very far away, ‘the doorway remains open’ (*’oku kei ava ’a e matapā*).

Koloa’s farewell speech was a not too subtle statement that our relationship of ‘mutual love’ (*fe’ōfā’aki*) and ‘mutual help’ (*fetokoniaki*) should not end abruptly; that the flow of mutual interchanges between us in the form of giving and receiving ‘assistance’ (*tokoni*) and ‘gifts’ (*me’a ’ōfa*; lit. ‘things of love/compassion’) ought to endure separation. It may also serve as a point of departure for exploring motions constituting social relationships in the course of daily life interaction. Ideas about common origin and ideals about sharing, giving and mutual caring in the form of compassionate *’ōfa* and a willingness to ‘carry burdens’ (*fua kavenga*) and ‘do duties’ (*fai fatongia*) in favour of people of precedence were clearly cornerstones of both kinship ideology and social hierarchy. But more than identifying and characterizing kinship or exchange systems, I am out to understand the generative mechanisms and constitutive dynamics of sociality. Thus, I shall approach the issue of social relatedness in terms of *what people did* to constitute and renegotiate social relationships by whatever means they found appropriate and effective, rather than in terms of being related by kinship or holding positions in a system of exchange.

In this context, the significance of Koloa’s farewell speech is that, because the option of speaking about our relationship as one produced by common origin was closed, the moral obligation to keep on reciprocating and thus to contribute to reproducing our relationship was elaborated solely in terms of our common experiences of engaging one another in acts of ‘mutual assistance’ (*fetokoniaki*) in our short history of ‘companionship/fellowship’ (*feohi*). To gain a foothold for the understanding of the ongoing processes whereby social relatedness was produced, the image of the ‘open doorway’ will be central. Koloa chose this as an appropriate analogy to speak about the nurturing of social relationships in his words of farewell, and I shall examine it in some detail. Thus, I shall explore the practical significance of doorways on Kotu, as well as the wider semantic field in which the concept of the ‘doorway’ (*matapā*) may be meaningful.

## Using the Doorways of Kotu

The ‘public road’ (*hala pule’anga*) of Kotu enters the village from the beach of the *Fanga lahi* (‘Great landing’). After crossing the central ‘village green’

(*mala'e*), it turns sharply to the right and then runs to the 'low part' (*lalo*) of the village. The *'apis* or 'homes' were spaced neatly along this L-shaped road. Houses usually had two doorways: a 'frontal doorway' (*matapā 'i mu'á*), also referred to as 'the door facing the road' (*matapā ki hala*); and a 'posterior doorway'<sup>2</sup> (*matapā 'i mui*) facing the 'cooking area' (*peito/afi*). In terms of everyday practices, these entrances were not indiscriminately used.<sup>3</sup> People who were frequently involved in 'mutual assistance' (*fetokoniaki*) with those living in an *'api* ('home/homestead') preferred to 'enter from the back' (*hū mei mui*). 'Solicitations/requests' (*kole*) for things and services as well as offers of small gifts related to everyday consumption constituted much of everyday village socializing. 'Close kin' (*kāinga ofi*) or those who had gained a 'strong fellowship' (*feohi*) with the occupants of an *'api* would often make such requests through the back door; people who were on less intimate terms, coming to exchange news or make 'requests' (*kole*), would be expected to enter by the front door for everyone to see. The use of the back door by those expected to enter openly from the front would be considered somewhat suspect and would imply a 'disposition to twist and turn' (*anga 'amio*) away from obligations to reciprocate by attempting to keep the visit and/or the act of solicitation out of the public eye. Similarly, the use of the front door by someone with whom the people of the *'api* had a 'strong fellowship' (*feohi*) through frequent exchanges of 'mutual help' (*fetokoniaki*) was said to be avoided out of 'shame' (*mā*) because it might be understood to imply a questionable attempt to give oneself the 'appearance of importance' (*fiē lahi*; lit. 'wish to be big') by using the higher-ranked 'door of honour' (Toren 1990: 84). Secondly, it could give rise to shame by making public, so to speak, the balance sheet in one's dealings with the people of an *'api*. The main point, however, is that the use of the different doorways of a house by persons differently related to an *'api* was not neutral but charged with moral significance, making the doorway an appropriate idiom in a moral discourse related to the constitution and reconstitution of social relationships.

## From Face to Interface

Some of the properties of a doorway may seem well suited to make it an effective analogy of bounded social units' modes of relating to one another. First of all, a doorway may be described as an interface; a boundary through which something must pass or flow to establish and keep up a connectedness between what's 'inside' (*loto*) and what's 'outside' (*tu'á*). Indeed, the term *mata-pā* ('doorway'), itself, may perhaps best be translated as 'interface between a bounded entity and its environment or between bounded entities.' The last part of the compound word, *pā*, according to Churchward,

signifies boundary in the form of ‘fence, wall, enclosure’ (Churchward 1959: 339). The first part, *mata*, has a great range of significations, most of which have in common what may be described as potentially permeable *contacting surfaces* and penetrable or penetrating *points of contact* in the relationship between bounded entities. *Mata* refers to ‘face’, ‘eyes’ and also to the act of perceiving by eyesight, as well as to ‘front’ (as in ‘seafront’; *matātahi*, and ‘front of the land’; *matāfonua*), ‘top’, ‘point’ (of a spear; *mata-tao*), ‘edge’ (of a knife; *mata-hele*), ‘biting edge’ (of the teeth; *mata-nifo*) ‘battlefront/vanguard’ (*mata-tau*), ‘wound’ (*mata-lavea/mata-‘i-lavea*), ‘boil’, ‘ulcer’ (*mata-lava*), ‘bud mark’ (of a tuber) and ‘sprouting point’ (of a coconut).

The argument that a great number of the wide range of usages of *mata* may be semantically related by referring to an interface between bounded entities would seem to be consonant with Barnes’ argument that the multiple meanings of the Austronesian term *mata* may be regarded ‘as corresponding to a significantly interrelated family of concepts’ (Barnes 1977: 302). According to Barnes, the multiple applications of *mata* seem to show ‘persistent connections with the idea of transition ... the word often expresses ideas of spiritual influence, growth and the general movement of life’ (1977: 302). Although Barnes doubts that the extreme variety of Austronesian uses of the term may be united by one single unifying idea, he notes that ‘one or another connection with boundaries’ (ibid.: 309) seems to relate to a wide range of uses in which *mata* figures. The double association of *mata* to a general relationship between entities facing one another along a wide borderland or contacting surface *as well as* to specific relational points of contact is important in my approach to the ways Kotu people related to one another, and I shall examine it in some detail. Thus, it is my argument that such an examination may profitably be undertaken in terms of the dynamics of merging and separation that has been explored in the previous chapters.

## Fuzzy Borderlands and Sharp Points of Conductivity

The term *matātahi* refers to the ‘beach’ or the ‘seafront’ from the perspective of the land, while the term *matāfonua* refers to the ‘shore’ or the ‘face of the land’ from the perspective of the sea. The intermediate littoral zone may be described as an ever-changing borderland; a wide contacting surface. This borderland is where ‘sea and land unite’ (*tau ‘a e tahi mo e ‘uta*) as the ‘sea flows here to unite’ (*hu‘a mai ke tau e tahi*) and where ‘land and sea separate’ (*mahu‘i e tahi*) as the sea recedes to produce an ‘empty/almost empty’ (*maha/mamaha*) lagoon, with many significant features in the space that has opened between land and the ‘deep sea’ (*moana*). Likewise, the ‘front of the reef’ (*matahakau*), referring to its outer perimeters from the

perspective of the *moana* ('deep sea') along which the 'sea inside the lagoon' (*lotonamo*) meets the 'sea outside the lagoon' (*tu'anamo*), may be described as a contacting surface, the properties of which change with the changing tides. The sea that flows indiscriminately between the lagoon and the deep sea around high tide, making it possible to enter and exit the lagoon *noa'ia pē* ('without consideration'), flows strongly through 'channels' or 'openings' (*fo'i ava*) closer to low tide, knowledge of such points of contact being essential. *Mata* also refers to salient or particularly significant points or parts of a bounded entity that are potential openings or points of enhanced conductivity. Fishermen, for example, detach clams clinging to the coral formations or imbedded in fissures on the reef by way of piercing the *mata 'o e fingota*<sup>4</sup> ('the eye/opening of the clam') with a long sharp instrument like a 'spear' (*tao*) (the *mata 'o e tao* or 'point of the spear' thus penetrating the *mata 'o e fingota*) in order to pierce the strong muscle deep within the clamshell. Trying to pry it loose from the outside or missing the vulnerable spot of this 'eye/opening' at first thrust allows the clam to seal up, making it all but impossible to cut it loose from its coral environment. Such particularly significant points of enhanced conductivity, or interfaces in the relationship between bounded entities, may perhaps best be described as relational points of intensified exchange or communication. As may be recalled, the 'face of the person' (*mata 'a tangata*) may, according to Koloa, be 'built, composed' (*ngaohi*) to make what you feel 'inside' (*'i loto*) correspond with outward appearance. Likewise, the points of enhanced conductivity of the 'eyes' (*mata*) were clearly understood to be a privileged interface in the communication between persons. Koloa claimed: '*Lahi ako ai he mata pē 'a e kakai Tonga*' ('Tongans mostly learn by seeing'), such as when addressing someone hard of hearing, or in contexts where it was either very noisy or where silence was required.

Similarly, some important cultivated plants such as coconut, taro and pandanus are furnished with a *mata*, referring to points or parts of particular significance for achieving plant regeneration by establishing contact between a plant and its medium of growth. The *mata'i niu* of the coconut refers to the indentations from which its new shoots sprout; *mata'i talo* refers to the top of a taro tuber used for planting, while *mata'i tofua* refers to the suckers/slips used for pandanus planting. That *mata* may describe a conductive interface, point of contact or source of a constitutive flow seems particularly well illustrated by a term such as *mata'i huhu*, which signifies 'teat/nipple'. *Huhu* signifies 'to pierce', 'to sting', 'to inject', as well as the child's act of sucking. The expression referring to the 'interface', or the point of primary contact between a new person and the person with whom it was originally physically united and from whom it has recently emerged as a separate being, includes the whole relational interchange between mother

and child by which well-being and growth is produced. *Mata* as a borderland – like that of the littoral zone along which sea and land meet – or a point of enhanced contact – like ‘a nipple’ (*mata’i huhu*) an ‘eye’, a ‘face’ or the ‘top of the taro’ (*mata’i talo*) – may both be described as interfaces in facilitating interchanges between interrelated but bounded (or periodically bounded) entities. But the *mata* as a wide borderland differs significantly from *mata* as a sharp point of contact by being a zone in which boundaries periodically break down in favour of merging. *Mata* as point of contact, in contrast, may be described as a channel or passage that facilitates interchanges that link bounded entities without a breakdown of the boundary between them or their total merging.

A perspective informed through the relational dynamics of everyday environmental engagements that were discovered in the previous chapters may be used to approach acts aimed at cultivating plants as well as nurturing and rearing children or to establish and reproduce social bonds as efforts feeding on and refining primary processes of nature. Such acts transform exchanges occurring ‘spontaneously’ (*noa’ia pē*) and along a fuzzy zone of contact into ‘well-ordered’ (*maau*) interchanges occurring at outstanding points of contact. A perspective informed by environmental engagement invites us to see all of these constitutive activities as efforts to order, focus or concentrate interchanges at certain (temporal and spatial) points of contact, by feeding on and potentiating a regenerative force produced by an all embracing ‘natural’ motion of merging and separation while, at the same time, retaining a certain degree of autonomy from the regenerative rhythm of this motion. With this perspective, it would seem reasonable to expect such efforts of transformation, refinement or the channelling of constitutive force to represent characteristic themes of cultural elaboration. Thus, the mode in which the building of ‘boards of beauty, order and importance’, explored in the previous chapter, was argued to be meaningful in the context of the dynamics of growth and regeneration and the multiple contingencies of everyday life may very well be described in terms of enhanced conductivity and concentration around specific points of contact. After all, the building of ‘beautiful’ (*faka’ofó’ofa*) tableaux of extraordinary ‘order’ (*maau*) that stood out against a backdrop of ‘ordinary, good for nothing, haphazard’ events ‘of no account’ (*noa’ia*) involved precisely a radical narrowing down of potential modes of relating and capacities in which to interact by the application of strict ‘taboos’ (*tapu*).

It is perhaps not surprising with this perspective that the doorway as an interface between a house and its environment should take on particular significance as being well-suited to speak about the establishment and nurturing of social relationships. But a doorway may be ‘closed’ (*māpuni ‘a e matapā*) or ‘open’ (*ava ‘a e matapā*), in the sense of allowing or denying

flows of interchange through them. This interface, then, may be described to exist in two possible states that either facilitate or bar the passage or flow necessary to establish and maintain the interconnectedness between what is inside and what is outside. Thus, the state of the doorway definitely has moral implications on Kotu. During the time when people were awake, a closed front door was usually a reliable sign that the 'api was empty. Thus, it was considered bad form to stay at home behind a closed door.<sup>5</sup> A closed front door would be interpreted as questionable in expressing a desire to withdraw. In terms of the current argument, then, it would be quite antisocial. It would be an attempt to stop up the passage between the 'inside' and the 'outside', barring the flows that constitute links between those whose 'strong fellowship/communion' (*feohi*) creates a sociality not wholly dominated by the 'dumb' and 'good for nothing' (*noa*) qualities of existence 'cropping up like wild weed' (*tupu noa 'ia pē*). As exemplified in the case of the *pālangi* couple who chose to withdraw to live peacefully in the plantation area, an individual's desire to close the door and refuse 'to come away from one's island' (*fakamotu*) seemed well understood on Kotu. But that was precisely what made keeping the door open a social imperative.

### ***Tauhi Vaha'a/Vā*: 'Nurturing the Space In-Between'**

Several students of Tongan society and culture have over the years used the Tongan expression *tauhi vā* or *tauhi vaha'a* to approach the characteristics of establishing and maintaining social relationships. The expression *tauhi vaha'a/vā* means, literally, 'to nurture/care for the space between' and has been used by scholars to approach the significance of reciprocity and networking in the reproduction of Tongan kin relations (see Ka'ili 2005; Leslie 2007; Poltorak 2007; Thaman 2008; Perminow 2018). *Vā* or *Vaha'a* is a term referring to the space/void between any two entities regardless of scale and whether the entities are people, objects or land masses. It can be used to refer to the void or deep space between the earth and the moon, the deep sea between two landmasses, the open ocean separating Tonga from New Zealand or the space or gap between groups of people or between one person and the next. Thus, the *vā* or *vaha'a* refers to the space in-between that separates things but also potentially connects them. In its sense of paying attention to decorum the use of the term 'nurturing/caring for the space' illustrates how not only material substances but also words and visual appearances are perceived to issue forth and flow in social spaces (see Perminow 2015: 129). The other part of the expression, '*tauhi*', signifies 'to feed', 'to nurture', 'to nurse' 'to tend' and 'to care for'. *Tauhi* is what you do in order to tend your garden to protect it from harm – that is, remove weeds and water it. It is what you do to assist and care for people who are

getting too old and weak to cope on their own. It is what you do to nurse people back to health when they are ill. And most of all, it is what you do to nurture and feed infants so that they become strong and 'healthy' persons (*sino*; lit. signifying 'body' and 'fat'). *Tauhi* is strongly associated with motherhood, mother's brother and the mother's side in general in Tonga. Thus, people should be able to rely on mother, the mother's side and 'maternal uncle' (*fa'ētangata*) in particular to nurture and support them. The father, the father's side and 'father's sister' (*mehekitanga*), on the other hand, should be expected to chastise you and teach you to act with respect and decorum.

*Tauhi* may be described as the primary component of childcare in the sense of being the only acknowledged ingredient in the first phases of child-rearing until weaning. After weaning, *tauhi* should be complemented with the other main component of Tongan child-rearing known as *ngaohi*. *Ngaohi*, as may be recalled from the previous chapter, signifies 'to build', 'to put together', 'to compose', 'to construct', which involves instruction/commands combined with discipline aimed at making persons *poto* or 'competent' and which is strongly associated with fatherhood, 'father's sister' (*mehekitanga*) and the father's side in general in Tonga (see Perminow 1993; Morton 1996 for analyses of ideals and practices of Tongan child-rearing). I would argue that the primary significance of *tauhi* in ideas about child-rearing and a very strong emphasis on the strength of the primary attachment between mother and infant makes breast feeding an act of *tauhi par excellence* in Tonga. Quite enduring notions and practices exist related to the naval cord as a primal bond and an enduring source of personal well-being throughout life, which may be seen as further indication of the perceived significance of this primary 'natural' mother-child attachment. All Tongan parents I spoke to claimed that they take care of the 'afterbirth/placenta' (*fonua*) and the naval cord, often burying them at the roots of a tree in their 'town allotment' (*api kolo*). People said that they should be put in a dry/warm place rather than in a wet/cold place in order for the person to remain in good health throughout life.

I have argued elsewhere (Perminow 2011) that there exists a very obvious and explicit cultural understanding of the higher status of father, father's side, and 'father's sister' (*mehekitanga*) in particular (which has been emphasized by several analysts of gender relations in Tonga (see Besnier 2004: 8)) that sits alongside a more implicit understanding of the 'natural' strength of the bond with the mother, the mother's side and the ever-supporting 'mother's brother' (*fa'ētangata*). Discussions with the Tongan carver Fe'ao Fehoko (with whom I worked as an apprentice in 2004) about parts of a tree in comparison with the stomach may illuminate the perceived natural strength and significance of this bond:



This part [of the tree] is harder because it is ‘in front/before’ (*mu’ā*), it ‘leads the way’ (*mu’ā mai*) and the other parts ‘follow after’ (*mui mai*). It is just like the stomach, which is the most important part of the human body. It is the preceding part of the body because in order to be strong and to think well you first have to eat. Just like the stomach, the preceding part of the tree is the part which is closest to its ‘place of origin’ (*fonua*).

Here he used the term *fonua*, utilizing the fact that *fonua* signifies ‘place of origin’, ‘land’, ‘territory’, ‘basis’ as well as ‘placenta’ (Churchward 1959). Thus, he elaborated how the stomach’s importance as the seat of vitality and strength was on account of its connection through the naval cord and the placenta within the body of the mother as both origin point and medium of growth. Finally, he emphasized how the mother and the mother’s side as the original source of the human body and its well-being were the people you could really rely on for support and the ones you really feel love, compassion and gratitude for.

A nurturing space may be understood, then, as one in which primary, ‘natural’ bonds are transformed into, and lend strength to, other social bonds that are thus secondary but also more highly valued in a system of cultural evaluation that generally prizes cultivatedness above naturalness (see Perminow 2018). To ‘nurture the space between’ (*tauhi vaha’ā/vā*) may be understood to involve paying attention to establishing and maintaining movements or flows that nurture and order the spaces between persons and groups. The Tongan description for living harmoniously within kin groups, neighbourhoods or churches is *vā lelei* (Leslie 2007), meaning literally ‘good space’, implying that ‘the nurturing’ (*tauhi*) turns spaces between social entities into something that unites rather than something that divides. Another metaphor – that of an ‘open doorway’, as illustrated by Koloa during my second fieldwork in Tonga 1991–92 – illustrates precisely the perceived importance of making an effort to maintain a ‘good space/harmonious relations’ (*vā lelei*) through long distance nurture.

## Imagining the Tongan House

The significance of the image of the doorway to talk about socially constitutive flows may be illuminated by the way in which the image of the ‘Tongan house’ (*fale tonga*) was used by some of my informants to talk about challenges of achieving enduring social cohesion. Although few traditional Tongan houses existed on Kotu going into the twenty-first century and the ambition of most people was to build wooden or concrete European houses, some felt that the ‘Tongan house’ worked well as an analogy to talk about sociality; as Koloa stated: ‘There is one thing that I find hard to understand

about Europeans ... Why do they have so few children? If Europeans have two or three children they seem to think that is much/enough, but here, a family with only two or three children is considered very small and poor'. He continued:

I can understand that if everything has to be bought for money, like the school-fees that we have to pay for the education of our children, then it must in truth be 'heavy/expensive' (*mamafa*) to support a large family ... One aspect of development has been bad. It has made it more expensive to have children. But still Tonga is different. Here the children are the support of the parents.

He likened the individuals that make up a 'Tongan family'<sup>6</sup> (*fāmili fakatonga*) to the parts of a 'Tongan house' (*fale tonga*) and preceded to explain how Tongan houses are made:

Several 'stakes' (*tokotu'u*), 'posts' (*pou*) and 'rafters' (*kahoki*) are needed to carry the 'foundation of the house' (*toka 'o e fale*), the 'loft' (*fata*), the 'inner ridgepole' (*tō'ufūfū*) and the 'outer ridgepole' (*tumu'aki*). If you have few stakes to use for 'walls' (*holisi*) and few posts to 'dig' (*kele'i*) into the ground, then the 'encircling coconut that runs around the outside' (*aoniu 'oku lele 'i tu'a*) [or beams] will encircle a very small house. The distance between the 'curved beams' (*kautā*) of the 'front end' (*tāmu'a*) and the 'back end' (*tāmui*) will not be very big, and the 'inner ridgepole' (*tō'ufūfū*) running along the 'inside of the house' (*loto fale*) at the 'exterior summit' (*tumu'aki*) will not be very long or stand very high. The inner ridgepole is very important and a 'chiefly thing' (*me'a 'eiki*) in the house. The position of the chief is directly below the 'front end of the inner ridgepole' (*mu'a 'o e tō'ufūfū*). There is only one inner ridgepole, and, like the important 'head' (*'ulu/tefito'i*) of a large family, it is supported by many stakes and strong posts that are all united by the encircling coconut that runs all around the outside of the 'roof' (*ato*). That is why it is said that there should be two 'interior beams' (*apai*) running around the roof on the inside of the house, but just as there may only be one king in Tonga, there may only be one 'encircling coconut' (*aoniu*) encompassing all of the house on the outside. You know the church building that was destroyed during the hurricane Isaac in 1982? It was such a large and beautiful *fale tonga* ('Tongan house'). It was built by my great grandfather Paula Polata. Now all that remains of that house is the inner ridgepole into which the name of my great grandfather and the year of the building of the house is carved. It was finished in 1886 and 'almost made it for a hundred years' (*mei lava ta'u 'e teau*). It is a pity, isn't it?

I agreed that it was a pity and asked why they had chosen to spend so much money building a European-style church instead of rebuilding a Tongan house; whether the technique had been forgotten. He answered:

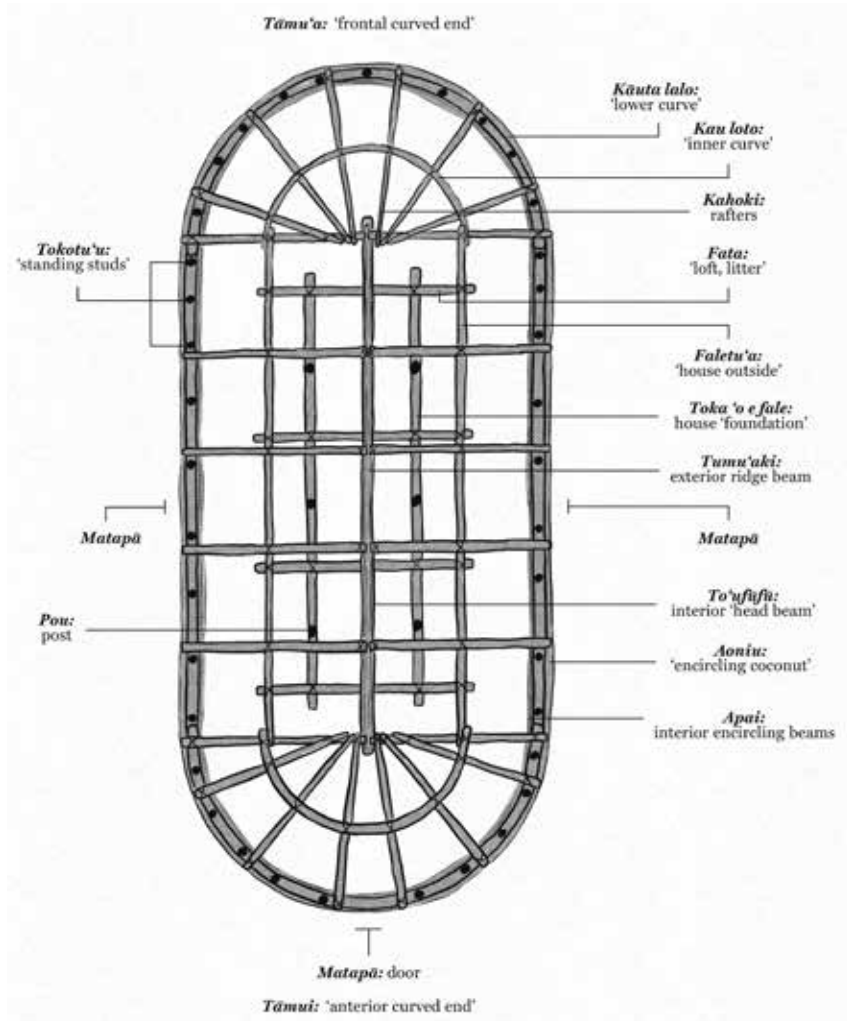
There are still some who are competent, but it is much more exhausting to build a Tongan house, starting from choosing the trees that are 'suitable' (*aonga*) to use for posts and 'curved beams' (*kautā*), making the 'coconut ropes' (*kafa niu*) for the 'lashing' (*lalava*) and the *hulu* ('coarse palm mattings') and the *takapau* ('green palm mattings') for the 'floor' (*faliki*), and the *pola* ('palm mattings') for the 'walls' (*holisi*) and 'roof' (*ato*). Taking care of the Tongan house is much work. After a few years, the 'coconut leaves' (*louniu*) used for floor, walls and roof must be 'renewed' (*fakafoʻou*). If 'reeds' (*kaho*) and 'cane thatching' (*au*) have been used instead of palm leaves 'to make walls' (*holisiʻaki*) and 'to make roof' (*atoʻaki*) or 'to make rooms' (*lokiʻaki*) within the house, the renewal may perhaps wait for eight years. It is much quicker and less exhausting to build and care for a European house.

I asked him about the cost of the building materials for a European house:

All the money comes from the work of men growing kava and fishing. I suppose that the women could also earn money by selling some of the mats that they weave, but they use the mats to 'exchange' (*feitongi*) for barkcloth. The building of a 'Tongan house' as church: all of the people of the congregation would have to work hard together to build it and also to take care of it. But the building of a European house: the burden is carried by those who earn money.

It seems, then, that the relationship between elements of construction of the house were made into analogies of social relationships. It would probably not be advisable to construct a Tongan house from the rough sketch below (Figure 5.1); it is useful, however, for understanding the imagery of Koloa's analogy. I drew the house under the direction of Koloa, who did not base his instructions on any existing Tongan houses nor from any observations of house building. Rather, the sketch resulted from his effort to visualize the old church that was blown away by Cyclone Isaac in 1982, in the context of elaborating on the analogy between the Tongan house and the *fāмили*. The choice of perspective and the strategy of committing the three dimensions of the house that he had in mind to the two dimensions of the paper were Koloa's, to the extent that I only gradually grasped the meaning of what I was drawing. Believing, for instance, that we were starting our reconstruction from the ground and building our way towards the summit of the house, I was slow to realize that the 'foundation of the house' (*toka ʻo e fale*), which served as Koloa's starting point, was the horizontal beams of the loft running lengthwise along the summit to carry the roof; the 'posts' (*pou*) and 'stakes' (*tokotuʻu*) were also elements of the roof construction. Koloa's approach thus appears to conform to what Fox has identified as an Austronesian mode of conceptualizing origin as a form of growth in terms of a '... derivation from a "source", "root", "base", or "trunk"' (Fox 1995: 218).

As we have seen in the Tongan variety of an Austronesian mode of conceptualizing origin as a form of growth, the idea of precedence appears paramount. With regard to the growth of plants, this order of precedence appears to stand trees on their heads, so to speak. Thus, the end that is physically lowest in the growing tree (*tefito'i*) (i.e. that which is below ground) proceeds that which is physically highest (i.e. the crown of the tree)



**Figure 5.1.** Plan of *fale tonga* ('Tongan house'). The plan was sketched by the author under the directions of Heamasi Koloa, based on his memory of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga on Kotu Island, destroyed during tropical Cyclone Isaac in 1982. © Arne Aleksej Perminow and Kristine Lie Øverland.

(referred to as its ‘tail end’ (*hiku*)) in terms of ‘leading the way’ (*mu’a mai*) and being closer to the point of origin. In Tongan terms then, natural growth is first of all referred to as an order of precedence whereby events or occurrences ‘leading the way’ cause later events to happen.

## The Tongan House as an Analogy of Social Relations

One striking characteristic of Koloa’s mode of elaborating the analogy between the elements of the material structure of the house and social relatedness is that the image of the house that emerged resonates strongly with Gunson’s graphic image of Tongan pre-Christian cosmological beliefs (Gunson 1990). It also resonates with the graphic image of what I have described as phases of separateness in a regenerative motion of tidal, diurnal and lunar dynamics presented in Chapter 2 and 3. The process by which growth produces a strong and enduring tree may be incorporated into the structure of the house. The ‘oldest’ or ‘senior’ end of the ‘chiefly’ *to’ufūfū* (‘inner ridgepole’) that has grown closest to the roots or the tree’s point of origin is the ‘front’ (*mu’a ’o e akau*) or the ‘cause, centre, essential part’ (*tefito*) and should be oriented towards the ‘front end’ (*tāmu’a*) of the house. Thus, the essential property<sup>7</sup> (for the purpose of building an enduring structure that may last for a hundred years) of ‘hardness/toughness’ (*fefeka*) diminishes with the ‘later’ or ‘younger’ (*ki mui*) sections of the beam that ‘follow’ (*mui mai*) towards the ‘softer’ (*molū*) ‘posterior end of the house’ (*tāmui*). Koloa’s imagery implies that the orientation of the chiefly beam, the ‘inner ridgepole’ (*to’ufūfū*), recapitulates the manner of growth of enduring things as the ‘old head of the family’ (*ulumotu’a*), the ‘cause/centre of the family’ (*tefito’i fāmili*), with posts and stakes of the house analogous to later generations that are thus naturally obliged to support or ‘carry’ (*fua*) their cause of existence. The construction of the Tongan house may well be approached in the same manner as the construction of other tableaux of ‘well-ordered beauty and importance’ (*maau, faka’ōfo’ōfa, mahu’inga*). In contrast to the frequent ‘building of boards of food’ (*ngaohi pola*), for example, the ‘building’ (*langa*) and ‘maintenance’ (*tauhi*) of traditional *fale tonga* no longer made up a significant part of the practical life world on Kotu in the final decades of the twentieth century. Only a handful of small *fale tonga* remained in 1992, and none were built during any of my field-works on Kotu. Thus, I cannot, as I did with the ‘boards of food’ (*kaipola*), explore in detail the significance of the *fale tonga* in the experiential terms of its making.

In contrast to the important occasion of preparing a ‘board of food’ (*kaipoloa*), the building of a house obviously results in something more enduring and stable. Together with the interrelatedness of its constituent

parts resonating with forceful regenerative dynamics, it is precisely the endurance and stability of the house (if properly maintained) that makes it appropriate to use as an analogy of the relatedness of social units. This is not because Tongan family groups, or groups at other levels of social integration, are inherently stable. Rather, endurance and stability seemed to be perceived as what makes some great or important families or groups stand out from other families or groups whose members (perhaps not being united by an overarching sense of a common purpose) might walk away from their positions as 'posts' and 'stakes'. People would quite often leave a house in order to be the 'inner ridgepole' (*to'ufufū*) of a greater house. Just as the significance of the 'building of boards of food' (*ngaohi pola*) lay in its articulation with the dynamics of the multiple flows of events of everyday production and consumption, so does the Tongan house.

In terms of the puzzle of local responses and attitudes to ongoing environmental change the significance of Koloa's house analogy is also that it demonstrates a strong awareness that in reality stability and enduring orderliness is not something to be taken for granted. And just like the assembling of tableaux of beauty, order and importance in the form of food presentations, it may only be brought into existence by people committing to the task of achieving it by a common, focused and often exhausting effort. Such a perspective has very important moral implications for what people ought to do, what happens if they do not and why things go awry, which is key to an experientially grounded analysis of understandings of environmental events and developments. Thus, it is also key to solving the puzzle of local responses, which is undertaken in the concluding chapter of this book.

### **Intensifying Flows by Limiting Freedom**

The 'door of the house' (*matapā*), then, is an image well suited to a discussion about the constitution of social relationships. It facilitates a flow interrelating what is inside and what is outside. Being a point of enhanced conductivity, however, the impenetrable quality of a house is emphasized at the same time. Thus, the door also denies the indiscriminate and haphazard flows by which boundaries dissolve. Attentiveness to strong or potent flows as well as impenetrable or strong boundaries seemed to run parallel through numerous fields of knowledge and interaction on Kotu and may be explored in terms of the dynamics discovered and discussed in the preceding chapters. For instance, Tongan ideals and practices of interaction among kin may be illuminated in such terms. Taboos constraining father-children, elder-younger, chief-commoner, brother-sister interaction may well be described as rules of respectful conduct that erect barriers

against indiscriminate interchanges along a broad contacting surface in favour of intensified flows of communication at some points of contact, by radically narrowing down the ‘freedom’ (*fa’iteliha*) to act impulsively or ‘haphazardly’ (*noa ‘ia pē*). For example, the so-called brother-sister taboo in Tonga restricts any form of intimacy among cross sex siblings and emphasises that crude words or deeds associable with hunger, anger or sexuality (Perminow 1993a; 1995) should not be communicated in their interaction. It was said to evoke a feeling of ‘shame’ (*mā*). Still, enduring ideals of mutual respect and support between cross sex siblings also emphasise that brothers and sisters should be strongly attached to one another. A brother should feel obliged to provide food for important events in the life of a sister, while a sister would often feel obliged to provide bark-cloth, mats and ‘Tongan oil’ (*lolo tonga*) for her brother. Also, a brother and sister are strongly attached by having lasting and specific responsibilities and privileges as ‘father’s sister’ (*mehekitanga*) and ‘mother’s brother’ (*fa’ētangata*) at important events in the lives of their children. On the current perspective the relationship between Tongan brothers and sisters, may be said to be an intensely cultivated relation produced by taboos that restrict indiscriminate interchanges along a broad contacting surface in favour of orderly and appropriate interchanges at certain points of contact.

I am not primarily concerned with the ideals and practices of kin relations as something constituting a privileged principle of social organization; rather, these are some among several different kinds of ideals and practices articulated within a general dynamic of constitutive flows. In the previous chapter, I argued that the importance of building and presenting culinary tableaus of ‘beauty, orderliness and importance’ that momentarily materialized something that stood out in sharp relief against a backdrop of the ordinary flux of everyday living lies with an articulation of fundamental ideas about the relationship between wild and cultivated growth. In a similar vein, I would argue that a part of the significance of key kin relations was the clarity with which they stood out against a backdrop of the ordinary flux and multiple contingencies of everyday socializing. Thus, very strict demands to act according to the restraints of ‘respectful conduct’ (*faka’apa’apa*) rather than ‘doing as you please’ (*fa’iteliha*) may be argued to make certain kin relations stand out as particularly significant for achieving a sociality not wholly dominated by qualities understood by all to characterize human nature. My primary concern, though, is the constitutive potency of the flows by which people related to one another not just as kin but as friends, neighbours or members of the same church or congregation.

## Slipping into the Flows of Everyday Living

The degree to which motility of persons and things dominated the quality of everyday living on Kotu can hardly be overemphasized. Indeed, allowing oneself to become an 'interface', so to speak, for the flows of everyday life exchanges represented the most challenging, exhausting but also rewarding aspect of doing fieldwork on Kotu. It was challenging not least because the relatively stable relationship between myself and my possessions, to which a life in Norway had habituated me, seemed under constant attack. Thus, it caused me to feel considerable discomfort as possessions on which I felt particularly dependent slipped out of my grip and into the flows of everyday borrowing. It was exhausting because of the energy demanded to respond to frequent 'requests' (*fai kole*) and because of the energy spent regaining access to things or getting hold of things to compensate their loss. Occasionally, the intensity of requests for the trifles of everyday life gave rise to an uncomfortable feeling of having lost control and my autonomy. Despite this, it was also quite rewarding to have things unasked for flowing through my own doorway from unexpected directions,<sup>8</sup> and I gained a degree of confidence that letting go of something need not mean having to go without and also the security of not being on my own; the trifles flowing out of my door connected me to networks of 'mutual support' (*fetokoni'aki*) extending from the 'api in which I was staying far beyond Kotu and Tonga. The following episode illustrates the extent to which the motility of trivial objects may characterize the routines of everyday village living.

Starting the day by drinking a cup of coffee was one personal routine that I was unwilling to forego. Thus, before going to bed, I always made sure that there was fuel in my stove, water in my cooking pot, coffee in my tin and a lighter nearby. Upon waking one morning, I went over to get the coffee going and, to my great disappointment, found that stove, cooking pot and lighter had all disappeared during the early hours of the morning. The only thing that remained was the coffee powder. Going over to our kitchen house, I found the stove and the cooking pot. But now it was just as empty of fuel and water as my can of kerosene and the rainwater tank of our 'api. Having spent some time trying to locate water and fuel in our 'api without result, I went over to our next-door neighbours with a jug and a bottle to 'make a request' (*fai kole*) to Koloa's 'ilamutu ('sister's daughter') for some water (which was in very short supply on Kotu at the time) and some kerosene. The request for water was readily granted, but they were out of kerosene themselves. Luckily, our other next-door neighbours still had some left and were quite happy to part with it. So in about 1 1/2 hours I had assembled stove, cooking pot, water and kerosene and would have been all set to start making the coffee if I had been able to locate my lighter or a matchbox. After a short investigation, I learnt that the lighter had



been borrowed by one of the children of the *'api* – a son of Koloa – and taken to near the waterfront, so Koloa sent one of his children who had been adopted to our *'api* to reclaim it. About 30 minutes later, I was able to perform the comforting ritual of drinking my morning coffee. While doing so, I soothed myself by reflecting on the fact that although I had spent about two hours of effort to achieve a rather trivial goal, the time and energy spent were not wasted. I had at least contributed to keeping up the flows between our *'api* and three of the *'apis* with which we routinely had 'close fellowship' (*feohi*) – not really a bad return for the short delay of a trivial habit. Nevertheless, I reminded myself that it would be wise to keep some matches and kerosene stashed away somewhere in reserve (a notion not altogether foreign I believe, even by Kotu standards).

Clearly people on Kotu, having grown up with it, would feel somewhat differently about the intensity of everyday exchange. The idiosyncrasies of personal habits did not seem to involve the same kind of reliance on a stable relationship between persons and personal belongings. Nevertheless, impulsive statements that all essentially relayed that 'the Tongan way is in truth exhausting!' (*Fakahela mo'oni 'a e anga fakatonga!*) seemed to indicate among those born into it that a certain yearning for such stability may give rise to an ambivalence that makes some aspects of the realities of 'mutual support' (*fetokoni'aki*) seem rather demanding. Indeed, the keenness with which possessions, in a very wide sense, including objects, beings and knowledge, were desired and emphasized as being attached to persons seemed to run contrary to the strength of their generosity and condemnation of miserliness and withdrawal. People would not allow that which belonged to them to flow indiscriminately out of their grip, and they clearly considered it a great 'folly/incompetence' (*vale*) not to pay attention to the movements of their belongings. Few things seemed insignificant enough not to be attached to individuals of an *'api*.<sup>9</sup> Thus, among the numerous dogs, seemingly stray and moving freely around the village, there were none that did not belong to an *'api* by being named and possessed by specific individuals.

Some durable belongings were clearly given more attention than others. Men would pay very close attention to their fishing gear, like swimming goggles, flippers, spear, fishing net, fishing hooks and 'octopus lure/stone' (*maka feke*), and to their 'digging stick' (*huo*), axe, bush knife, paddle and other useful tools. Koloa claimed that he had inherited his octopus lure from his father and aimed to 'set it aside to pass on' (*tuku fakaholo*) to his own son. Similarly, when I returned to Kotu five years after my first fieldwork trip and asked to use the knife I had given as a present of farewell to one of Koloa's sons, he told me that he had 'paid close attention' (*tokanga lelei*) to its whereabouts and had not allowed the knife to be used

outside his *‘api* in these five years. These ‘male things’ (*me‘a fakatangata*) were clearly among the most ‘stationary’ objects on Kotu and were only committed to the flows of mutual support with great reluctance. Typical ‘female things’ (*me‘a fakafefine*) of everyday use like pots, pans, plates and other kitchen utensils were more often on the move, as were prestigious ‘Tongan goods/valuables’ (*koloa fakatonga*) of ‘printed barkcloth’ (*ngatu*) and ‘plaited mats’ (*fala/kietonga*) on occasions of ‘outstanding importance’ (*mahu‘inga*). Finally, children understood to belong to particular persons and homes were also frequently objects of solicitation (*kole*) to ‘have’ (*ma‘u*) or ‘adopt’ (*pusiaki*). Both in terms of how common various kinds of fostering arrangements were on Kotu and their role in constituting relations between people, a focus on such arrangements reveals quite fundamental qualities of sociality and understandings about how ‘good spaces/harmonious relations’ (*vā lelei*) may be achieved. This also makes an analysis of the role of children to ‘nurture spaces’ (*tauhi vaha‘a*) between people key to an understanding of what people think, say and do when things threaten to go awry in the community, which is what the next, concluding chapter is all about.

Although children on Kotu were quite often ‘sent away for adoption’ (*ave ke pusiaki*), biological parents and children were clearly perceived to be strongly attached to one another. Indeed, as Firth claimed was the case on Tikopia (Firth 1936: 205–6), it would seem that precisely the perceived strength of this attachment made letting go of a child an event of extraordinary constitutive potency (see also Carroll 1970: 152; Levy 1973: 482–83). A Kotu father in his forties once explained:

Granting a request ‘to give up a child for adoption’ is not easy you know. It really makes you ‘hurt inside/suffer’ (*loto mamahi*). It is not like giving up dog or something ... Giving away *lī‘aki* (‘cast aside/sacrifice’) a child is different; if I ‘send away my child to be adopted’ (*ave ke pusiaki*) by some other person, people will really understand that we are ‘close kinsmen’ (*kāinga ofi*).

I shall return to the use of the term *lī‘aki* (‘cast aside/sacrifice’) in the context of adoption later to approach people’s attitudes towards events involving a sharp decrease in the flow of interchanges between that which has been strongly connected or united. But this informant’s use of the term *lī‘aki* warrants a short comment here. Its meaning varies contextually between ‘cast aside/neglect/ abandon’, on the one hand, and ‘lay down/sacrifice/devote’ on the other, depending on the individual’s prior experiences with adoption and the specifics of the situation at hand. There always remained a semantic ambiguity. This informant had himself been a *pusiaki* in his father’s second cousin’s *‘api* and was now the father of five children. In 1986, all of his

children lived with him and his wife, and he claimed to have refused numerous requests from people wanting to adopt them. He also said that he would deny such requests in the future. In 1991, however, two of the children had been adopted by his own foster parents. He emphasized that the main reasons he and his wife had granted their request was his gratitude that his foster parents had taken him in as a child and the fact that they were living in a neighbouring household so that the children would still be staying close by. Indeed, the amount of ‘hurt inside/suffering’ (*loto mamahi*) seemed generally to be perceived to increase proportionally with the distance between the ‘child-giver’ and the ‘child-taker’. Thus, the reduction of the possibility for biological parents and children to impinge on one another’s senses in the mutual flows of everyday communication of ‘seeing one another’ (*fēsiofaki*) and ‘knowing one another’ (*fe’ilo’aki*) and ‘understanding one another’ (*femahino’aki*) corresponded with an increase in the degree of ‘hurt inside’. His use of the expression *loto mamahi* to emphasize how it ‘hurts inside’ to send away a child to be adopted by others serves also to stress the magnitude of the sacrifice; an act of ultimate devotion and generosity. For mothers who had given up children for adoption, the magnitude of the sacrifice and the *loto mamahi* was often described by other people, as well as by the mothers themselves, through statements like: ‘*Osi ave tama ke pusiaki, na’aku tangi lahi pē*’ (‘When I had sent away my child for adoption, I cried a lot’) or ‘*Osi ave ’ene tama ke pusiaki. ’Oku tangi pē e fa’ē he taimini!*’ (Her child has been sent away for adoption. Now the mother cries all the time!’) People would expect mothers to express their sense of loss by ‘crying’ (*tangi*), but not for too long. Tears would be appropriate for expressing *loto mamahi* at such a great sacrifice for a week or a fortnight. If the *tangi* of the mother continued, it would be interpreted as negating the initial act of generosity nurturing a relationship between child-giver and child-taker.

## The Way of the Hand That Lets Go

The understood desirability of keeping hold of one’s possessions or persons whose existence one has caused, and the inherent strength of the attachment between the person and that which belongs to him/her or issues forth from him/her, constituted an important part of the background for ideological statements people from Kotu made about themselves. One Kotu woman once compared the *anga fakatonga* (‘Tongan way of life/manner’) and the *anga fakapālangi* (‘European way of life/manner’) precisely in terms of generosity:

The Tongan way of life is the way of the ‘hand that lets go’ (*nimahomo*; lit. ‘hand from which things easily slip’). It is not like the European way, which is the way of

'clenching the hand' (*puke 'a e nima*). Unlike abroad, things never stay for long in one place in Tonga but 'move about a lot' (*lahi 'alu*).

Although ostensibly about the difference between 'our way of life' versus 'the way of life of foreigners', her statement was clearly not made by one who had first become aware of the human capacity to act without generosity and to hold onto belongings by interacting with Europeans. On the contrary, it seems more reasonable to regard her understanding of the characteristics of a way of life with which she was not very familiar as one informed by her familiarity with a human capacity to act without generosity and a 'natural' human tendency to clench the hand around belongings. The Europeans of her statement, as in most statements involving the self-conscious comparison of the Tongan and the European ways of life on Kotu, seemed to serve as a prototype against which representational notions of what ought to characterize the acts of a 'true Tongan' could be elaborated (see also Perminow 1993a; 2003). Thus, for Kotu people, the lack of generosity and tendency to engage one another less extensively in 'close fellowship' (*feohi*) were prominent points of comparison when looking at other individuals on the island, from one island to another and from one *api* to another, as well as when comparing people from Ha'apai with people from Tongatapu and Nuku'alofa. Indeed, the woman who made this statement was herself talked about a couple of weeks later as one for 'clenching her hand' (*puke 'a e nima*) around valuable possessions. People felt that she was not 'distributing the Tongan goods' (*tufa he kakai 'a e koloa fakatonga*) that had been brought by most *apis* of Kotu to the funeral of her brother, stopping them from flowing on in order to secure these valuables for herself.

I would suggest that the combination of an understood human tendency to become strongly attached to things and persons, the natural desirability of holding onto possessions and the moral imperative to be generous lies the socially constitutive potency of the multiple flows by which people relate to one another. An exploration of practices of exchanging children indicates that the multiple relational flows were interconnected on Kotu. Thus, by focusing on local exchanges of children on Kotu we shall in the following explore how decreases in material and communicative flows running through primary bonds and points of contact may go with increases in material and communicative flows between bounded entities at other levels of closure and other points of contact. This analysis of the interconnectedness of relational flows is an important part of the puzzle at hand because it will be used to illuminate local perspectives on why things go awry and what to do about it when the final part of the puzzle is laid out in the final chapter of the book.

## Composing Children

One of the routines of ‘composing/assembling/building’ (*ngaohi*) a child may be used to illustrate that modes of conceptualizing how important social relations may be established imply the interconnectedness of relational flows. The Tongan term for ‘baby’ (along with *pēpē* of English origin) is *valevale*, which signifies ‘unable to think for oneself’. The first few months of a child’s life were described in terms of a gradual development of the ‘mind/understanding’ (*‘atamai*) in an existence dominated by *tauhi* or ‘nurturing’ through interchanges of *huhu* (‘sucking’) and *fakahuhu* (‘suckling’). This gradual growth of awareness was said to consist of three phases or stages, indicated by the degree to which the child’s ‘face/eyes’ (*mata*) shows signs of her being impressionable by responding to sudden movements close to the face. The child would be said to be *‘atamai noa* (‘of an undiscriminating mind’) if she did not ‘flinch’ (*papaka*) when a ‘sham thrust’ (*fakapoi*) was made towards her face. This stage was said to be succeeded by a stage of *‘atamai manu* (‘animal mind’), when the child starts to flinch at sudden movements. Finally, the child is said to be *‘atamai ‘i tangata* (‘of human mind’) when it starts to cry when the mother leaves. Such a response was understood to show that ‘the small child distinguished/knew its mother’ (*‘ilo ‘e he tamasi ‘i ‘ene fa‘ē*). Although breastfeeding could continue much longer, several practical circumstances tended to combine to make most ‘weaning’ (*mahu‘i*; ‘to detach/wean away’ or *mavae*; ‘to be separated/weaned’) occur during the first year. ‘Breast inflammation’ (*mahaki‘ia ‘a e huhu*), new pregnancy/birth resulting in ‘undernourishment’ (*fē‘ea*), the ‘sending away to be adopted’ (*ave ke pusiaki*) and the child simply losing interest were all factors said to make weaning take place around the time when the child had become of ‘human mind’ (*‘atamai ‘i tangata*). Weaning was said to occur by physically removing the child from the presence of the mother: ‘in order that it may no longer pay attention to its mother and her breast’ (*ke ‘oua ‘e toe tokanga mai ki he‘ene fa‘ē pea mo ‘ene huhu*). Sometimes this removal would be achieved by the child temporarily being looked after by ‘grandparents’ (*kui*), ‘father’s sister’ (*mehekitanga*) or other close relatives. For numerous children, however, weaning would take place by being ‘adopted out’<sup>10</sup> (*ave ke pusiaki*) to another *‘api*, when they were between 6 and 8 months old. Either way, an important part of the task of separating mother and child (*faimavae*; ‘to wean/bring apart’) was said to be achieved by starting the work of ‘composing/assembling’ (*ngaohi*) the child by exposing its ‘mind’ (*‘atamai*) to the presence of all the living beings of the *‘api*. The person weaning the child would routinely encourage it to face away from him/her and try to make the child ‘pay attention’ (*tokanga‘i*) to specific persons and animals of the *‘api*. This was routinely done by softly

repeating the proper name of persons, pigs and dogs as they entered into the visual field of the child, which was at the same time said to make the child stop crying for its mother.

This practice may be described as part of a process where the separation of that which has been strongly joined through a life-giving flow at the point of enhanced conductivity with the mother's 'teat' (*mata 'i huhu*) goes with the intensification of flows of impressions/communication at other points of enhanced conductivity such as the 'face/eyes' (*mata*), constituting new bonds. Using shared concepts about the development of the mind as a point of departure, I shall argue that it is illuminating to regard other acts and events particularly significant in the process of composing or assembling a child as involving a similar redirection of flows or interchanges.

In the context of child-rearing, the term *ngaohi* was used to refer to the forming of a child by making explicit the limits of the child's freedom to act 'haphazardly' or without considerations of appropriateness (*noa'ia pē*). Verbal instructions about how to proceed and behave, and scolding and severe physical punishment in contexts where it was felt that the child transgressed these limits, constituted everyday techniques of child-rearing. These limits clearly contracted as the child grew older. Behaviour described as *pau'u* or 'naughty' was perceived to stem from 'ignorance' (*kei vale*) in a 3-year-old child but would be described as *talangata'a* or 'insubordinate' if encountered in a 5- or 6-year-old child. The perceived transgressions of rules limiting the freedom to act *noa'ia* would often be described as resulting from a 'lack of building' (*ta'engaohi*). 'Naming' (*fakahingoa*) and 'teaching/educating' (*ako'i*) a child/youth were described as particularly important strategies for the 'composing/building' (*ngaohi*) of children.

## Building by Naming and Teaching

*Fakahingoa* or 'naming' was described as 'an important thing' (*me'a mahuinga*) in two ways. First of all, the named child was expected to be formed by receiving some of the characteristic qualities of the person after whom the child was named. Thus, a Kotu child named after my own son (who stayed with me on Kotu during my fieldworks) was quite consistently referred to in terms of being similar in behaviour and looks. The two were described as being *pau'u tatau, poto tatau mo e mata tatau* ('just as naughty, just as clever and of similar face'). They were even said to have the same food preferences. Secondly, the naming of a child was understood to open up the possibility for establishing a bond between the child and the one choosing its name, as well as between the child's parents and the name-giver. Giving someone the task of naming a child would thus imply that a future request by the name-giver to adopt the child would more likely be responded to favourably, the

name-giver thus becoming child-taker. Similarly, consenting to name a child would imply that the name-giver might be expected to take on some responsibility for other important events of 'composing/building' a person, such as 'teaching' (*ako'i*) him/her a skill or helping to give him/her 'schooling' (*ako*) by contributing to pay the school fees for secondary education, for example. Quite often a name-giver would become a child-taker by paying the school fees for secondary education. Then the youth would be referred to as being 'adopted' and expected to stay with those paying the school fees when returning from Nuku'alofa for the school holidays.

These events of particular significance in the process of 'composing/building' a person – that is, 'naming' (*fakahingoa*) and 'teaching' (*ako'i*) – 'involve the increased intensity of some relational flow *at the expense* of other relational flows. From the point of view of biological parents, the best way of making sure that a child is 'composed' properly by receiving education often involved establishing points of contact between a child, a namesake and a name-giver. In terms of everyday 'close companionship/fellowship' (*feohi*), it would mean a decrease in communicative and material interchanges between a child and its original caretakers but would open up possibilities for the child through a 'close fellowship' (*feohi*) with new caretakers.

Doing a village census in 1991 to collect information about who had been asked to name a child on Kotu or who had had a child named after them, I became familiar with naming as a means of opening up a passage for flows of interchanges in the present as well in the future. One of the last *'apis* I visited to do the survey was one of our closest neighbours, whose youngest son had been born in 1987 a few months after my first fieldwork and who had been named after my own son. This fact had obviously not escaped me and had been emphasized on several occasions during our stay on Kotu. Nevertheless, I diligently enquired about the circumstances of his naming in my survey. I was told that I had written a letter to the 'family head' (*'ulumotu'a*) of their 'family' (*fāmili*), requesting that the child should be named after my son. Although I was unable to recall making this request, in accepting this story of name-giving, I clearly contributed to the child's biography as well as the history and flows of interchanges between us. I suspected that part of the significance of naming as an event of child-building was the potential it pointed to in the future. Therefore, I followed up by saying that I hoped his parents would encourage him to work hard at school so that he would be well prepared for secondary education away from Kotu and that I would offer to help with the school fees when that time came. This offer was well received and led to a marked increase in the frequency with which the little boy was encouraged to sleep in our *'api* and the number of occasions on which he moved between our *'apis* bringing and receiving food and other trifles of everyday use.

Although events such as these are perhaps most significant in terms of the child's future potential, they involve the establishment of contact points for flows of interchanges that may profitably be approached in terms of utilizing or 'sacrificing' something of unique and intrinsic value to achieve some other uniquely valuable good. Said differently, the establishment of any kind of relatedness or belonging may be approached as something feeding on or transforming other kinds of relatedness and belonging. Before going on, however, to elaborate further on the sense in which transactions involving children can be approached in terms of sacrifice, it is essential to provide a sociological outline.

### Ad-option

The term *pusiaki* was used as a general term referring to the act of adopting a child, the act of adopting out a child and also to the child itself. This term was used indiscriminately to refer to acts and relations of adoption whether they involved transactions among people living within the same 'api, next door, on different islands or in different countries. Also it was used indiscriminately to refer to both seemingly temporary and seemingly enduring or permanent arrangements. According to some students of Tongan culture (Gifford 1929: 26–27; Beaglehole 1944: 71; Urbanowicz 1973; Morton 1976), the two terms *tauhi* and *ohi* differentiate between acts and relationships involving the relocation of children much as the terms fostering and adoption do in English. The former refers to a less stable arrangement and a less total transfer of parental rights and duties, and the latter to a break between child and biological parents that is more fundamental and lasting. Although all of those with whom I discussed it felt that *tauhi* and *ohi* both referred to the same sorts of acts and relationships as *pusiaki*, they were unable to agree among themselves about the specific nuances of these terms. Some understood *tauhi* ('nurture/care for') to refer to a situation whereby someone takes on the task of nurturing and looking after a child, or alternatively where a child supports and takes care of an older relative. As the term *liaki* ambivalently connoted 'cast aside/neglect' as well as 'sacrifice/devote', *tauhi* would signify the kind act of taking in, nurturing and caring for a child for some people while for others it would mean the child's devotedness to support and serve someone to whom it had been given. The latter, however, would also potentially imply that the child may have to forego involvement with other constitutive flows of impressions such as secondary education. Because there was a general agreement on Kotu that formal education was of high value, the latter sense of *tauhi* would also potentially imply parental neglect.



The term *ohi* was generally described as synonymous with *pusiaki* but was never used spontaneously to refer to acts, persons or relationships on Kotu. When I proposed that there might be some semantic relationship between *ohi* and the term *fe-ohi*, used to describe close companionship/fellowship, Koloa disagreed. He felt that the term *ohi* when used to refer to children was related to the term used to refer to a banana or plantain plant, or its fruit, which has been developed by detaching a part of an old plant and transplant it. In principle, the terms *tauhi* and *ohi* seemed to be terms by which temporary arrangements of caring and nurturing and more enduring arrangements based on detachment and transfer may be elaborated respectively. The fact remains, however, that neither of the terms were much used on Kotu to refer to the transfer of children from one person or home to another or the moving children themselves. The formal registration of adoption was extremely rare, and the term *pusiaki* was used to refer to a wide variety of acts, relations and persons, both in terms of the extent to which rights and duties were transferred and in terms of the permanence of relationships over time. Still, the use of the term adoption in a very wide and open sense suits my purpose better than using the term fosterage or trying to differentiate between such transactions in a manner that people on Kotu seemed to avoid. Indeed, the term *ad option* or 'by choice' itself, without the other connotations of adoption produced by Western legal rules and practices of a permanent transfer of rights and duties with children, makes it particularly well suited to a very wide range of Tongan transactions involving children in motion. The events establishing adoptive relations were produced *ad option*, or by the multiple choices of differently situated persons. Furthermore, a general diffuseness in transfer of rights and duties and an uncertainty as to the permanence of the arrangement made the reproduction of adoptive relations the outcome only as long as the differently situated parties to the transaction kept on choosing in a manner reproducing that outcome. The fact that Tongan 'adoption' seldom involves a transaction done once and for all, establishing permanent relationships in a sense makes the term *ad option* better suited to refer to Tongan transactions in children than Western transactions of adoption.

In 1987, I did a census on Kotu showing that out of 139 persons under 28 years of age originating or staying in the 40 'homes' or '*apis* of Kotu, 36% were referred to as *pusiakis* or 'adoptees'. The sociological significance of adoption practices seems well illustrated by the fact that more than 90% of the '*apis* were involved in such transactions as either child-givers, child-takers or both. The remaining 10% of the '*apis* were quite young in the sense of being in an early stage of a cycle of household regeneration. Given the general extent of involvement in such transactions, there can be little doubt that the involvement of these '*apis* was only a matter of time. Sociologically,

the material clearly indicates that one of the effects of the transaction of children was that it made for a remarkably equal distribution of children in the 'apis of Kotu. At the time of the census, the mean number of children born to the child-givers' 'apis was 5.8, with the number of children still referred to as belonging to the 'api (whether staying there or not) at 4.2. On the other hand, the mean number of children born to child-takers' 'apis was 1.9, with children still belonging to the 'api at 4.3. These distributive effects were produced mainly by the fact that about half of the child-takers did not have biological children at all. Infertile married couples, as well as some single women, were able to 'enlarge the 'api' (*fakalahi 'a e 'api*), setting up and reproducing more or less autonomous 'apis by adopting children of various ages and both male and female from their pool of potentially close relatives (transforming *kāinga* or 'kin' into *kāinga ofi* or 'close kin' in the process).

Although every pregnancy and birth on Kotu evoked several 'requests' (*kole*) for the expected child, and these requests continued to be made frequently during the first months after birth, biological parents were clearly much more reluctant to respond positively to requests to adopt the first-born child/children than children with higher sibling numbers. The mean biological sibling number of children referred to as *pusiakis* was almost 5, whereas they became, in average, one of three children in the adopting 'api. Not surprisingly then, adoptions moved children from 'apis in which there were many children to 'apis to which fewer children had been born and/or in which few children were currently living. This sociological characteristic was further enhanced by the fact that older married couples who had 'sent away children to be adopted' in earlier stages of their married life and whose own biological children had moved away to other islands or had set up 'apis of their own on Kotu were among the child-takers. Thus, the average age of child-takers on Kotu in 1987 was 50 years, while the average age of child-givers was 40 years.

The group of unmarried persons under 28 years of age consisted of 50.5% girls and 49.5% boys, while the group of *pusiakis* consisted of 55% girls and 45% boys. Given the limited extent of quantitative material, the preponderance of female *pusiakis* is too slight to indicate that gender was a significant variable at the level of aggregated outcomes. From the point of view of individuals engaging in such transactions, however, a consideration of gender was clearly significant for people wanting to 'enlarge the home' (*fakalahi 'a e 'api*) by balancing the personnel of the 'api. Thus, would-be child-takers who had only male biological children (or who had previously adopted a boy or boys) would seek to correct the imbalance by adopting a girl, and vice versa. Similarly, child-givers would be far less likely to send away for adoption a child whose birth contributed to balance the personnel of their own 'api. The variety of compositions of child-taker and child-giver

homes would thus tend to work against the preponderance of one gender among *pusiakis*.

On the other hand, one of the characteristics of the distribution of the ages at which adoptions were reported to take place clearly shows a considerable preponderance of transactions taking place during the first year of the child's life. More than half of the adoptions on Kotu were reported to have occurred before the child's first birthday. In contrast, about a third were reported to occur between age 4 and 11, with less than a tenth happening during the second and third year of the child's life. In general, there were clear peaks in adoption around the time when children are described as having attained a 'human mind' (*atamai 'i tangata*) and become receptive to 'building' (*ngaohi*), but adoptions were less likely to have taken place in the period between first birthday and the time when children had become more competent (*poto*) – that is, approaching another event of particular significance in the process of becoming 'well built' (*ngaohi lelei*), namely that of entering secondary school away from Kotu.

Finally, *pusiakis* predominantly moved among kinsmen. In 98% of the cases, child-giver and child-taker were relatives. In almost 3/4 of the cases, the kin relationship referred to as the basis of the transaction was patrilateral. Almost 2/3 of patrilateral child-takers were the *pusiaki's* 'father's sister' (*mehekitanga*) or 'father's brother' (*tamai/tamai'aki*), while another third were more distant relatives of the *pusiaki's* father. Of the remaining 30% of the cases, about 2/3 of the child-takers were the *pusiaki's* 'mother's brother' (*fa'ētangata*), 'mother's sister' (*fa'ē*) and 'mother's mother' (*kuifefine*), while another third were more distant relatives of the *pusiaki's* mother. All in all then, about 2/3 of the *pusiakis* belonged to the '*apis* of the siblings of one of their biological parents among whom the *mehekitanga* or 'father's sister' was the greatest taker, having adopted a little less than one third of all those referred to as *pusiakis* on Kotu. The pre-eminence of 'father's sister' as a child-taker seems to reflect a combination of her outranking her brother, according to Tongan kinship ideals, and the expectations that the youngest daughter should stay home to care for her parents when they grow old. For example, a single woman in her forties on Kotu claimed that she had not married because she was a youngest daughter and had stayed on to care for her parents. When her parents died, she stayed on in their house as the head of an '*api* to which belonged seven *pusiakis*, ranging in age from 3 to 24 years in 1987, four of whom were her brothers' children.<sup>11</sup>

The main aim of this exploration of the practice of adopting children on Kotu is to discover and foreground shared understandings about the natural force of primary bonds/attachments, which are redirected, cultivated and transformed into highly valued new bonds, making transactions of children constitutively potent. An ethnography sensitive to enduring and

shared perspectives on how the world works (explored in the three first chapters), what is beautiful and valuable (explored in Chapter 4) and how to cope with one another (explored in this chapter) is quite essential in order to understand how people respond to whatever changes and challenges the world has to offer (which is the subject matter of the final chapter). Before laying out the final part of the puzzle, then, of local attitudes and responses to ongoing environmental changes and challenges, it is necessary to delve more deeply into ideas and values shaping everyday sociality and informing moral judgements as well as notions about what may be the best way forward when things go awry.

### Constitutive Force of Mutual Sacrifice

As noted earlier in this chapter, the act of sending away children to be adopted was sometimes referred to by the ambiguous term *li'aki*. This term signifies, on the one hand, 'devotion/sacrifice' and on the other 'casting aside/neglect'. I have implied that transactions involving children may profitably be approached in terms of sacrifice. But if the constitutive potency (to 'build persons' and to establish lasting social relationships) of flows of communicative and material interchanges related to moving children may be approached in terms of sacrifice, what is it that is sacrificed? I think it would be too simple to understand this in terms of adopted *children* being sacrificed to achieve something of greater value. Rather, I would suggest that it should be understood as one *relationship* of intrinsic value sacrificed in favour of other relationships as one constitutively potent *flow of interchanges* is transformed into other flows of interchanges constitutive of new relations.

The field of naming/building/adopting on Kotu was made up of a complexity of the aims, gains and losses of child-givers, child-takers and the children themselves. It would be misleading to identify the parties engaging one another in these flows of events as the one making the sacrifice, the one receiving the sacrifice and the sacrificed. Consensus among people in terms of losses and gains would be extremely rare and would depend on their personal experiences with adoption and how they were situated with regard to specific events related to adoption. Thus, some would emphasize the kindness of the one taking in a child to 'care for it' (*tauhi*), helping to 'build' (*ngaohi*) a child, paying for schooling etc. Others might accentuate the kindness of giving up a child to someone unable to have children of their own or of supporting (*tauhi*) someone in need. Also, as with the father of six who had sent away two of his children to be adopted between 1987 and 1992, views were not necessarily consistent or stable over time. What people did agree about, however, was that flows of events involving moving

children turned ‘relatives’ (*kāinga*) into ‘close relatives’ (*kāinga ‘ofi*<sup>12</sup>) and was accompanied by an intensification of other flows of ‘mutual assistance’ (*fetokoniaki*). Also, people shared an understanding of the fact that flows of interchanges related to moving children could stop quite abruptly if any of the parties involved failed to curb the understandable desire ‘to close their hand’ (*puke ‘a e nima*) and thus ceased acting with the generosity of the ‘hand that lets go’ (*nimahomo*), which was needed to keep up the constitutive flows of social interaction.

I do not, then, understand the constitutive potency of events involving the movement of children to establish and reproduce social relations in terms of a clear-cut distinction between those making the sacrifice and those sacrificed. Rather, it should be approached in terms of what may be called *mutual sacrifice*. The establishment of adoptive relatedness seemed to demand that all the involved parties forego or let go of something of inherent value and was thus described as a mutual willingness to keep on making the sacrifices that reproduce adoptive relatedness. Vagueness as to whose interests were best served by the flows of interchanges whereby adoptive relatedness was established and reproduced characterized the discourse on adoption as long as the adoptive relatedness continued and all parties were ‘satisfied/thriving’ (*lata*). But in case of the discontinuation or redirection of flows of interchanges in the ‘spaces between’ (*vaha ‘a/vā*), resulting from one of the parties refusing to keep on making the necessary sacrifices, this discourse of mutual generosity would be replaced by one dominated by the imbalance of the interests of the involved parties.

The socially constitutive potency of mutual sacrifice to transform primary bonds, or to redirect inherently strong flows of interchanges, may seem to constitute a cultural theme of quite general significance in Tonga. Reflecting on one of the most widely known myths of Tonga, that of the origin of kava, Queen Sālote once explained to the anthropologist Elizabeth Bott that: ‘... the myth expressed the *mutual sacrifice and understanding* between ruler and subjects that was essential to keep Tonga united and strong. It was this mutual sacrifice and understanding the kava ceremony was commemorating’ (my emphasis) (Bott 1972a: 226). A Kotu version of the myth goes like this:

An old couple living on the Island of ‘Eueiki had a single daughter named Kava‘onau (‘their kava’), who was a leper. One day, the Tu‘i Tonga came ashore on the island, but there was a famine, and they had no food to offer him. While the King was resting, the King’s servant saw the parents kill their daughter and put her in the earth oven for the King to eat. The servant went to the Tu‘i Tonga and told him what he had seen. The Tu‘i Tonga was deeply moved by their generosity and told them to bury their child, instructing them to pay careful attention to the grave. After some time, two

plants grew up from the grave. A plant with bark like the skin of a leper grew from the place of the head, while a red plant grew from the other end. The plants were new in Tonga, and the old couple did not know their use. A little palm rat came to the grave, and it started to eat the plant growing at the head. The rat was not able to walk straight and zigzagged over to the plant growing from the other end. After having eaten from that plant it was able to walk straight again. The plant growing from the head was the kava. It is strong and bitter. The plant growing from the other end was the sugar cane, which is sweet. This is how they learnt that after becoming drunk from drinking too much kava it is a great help to eat sugar cane.

In the version of the kava myth quoted by Bott, the figure of Lo'au (turning up in Tongan legends at times of institutional establishment and change) comes along to instruct people to show their gratitude to the Tu'i Tonga by sending him a part of the kava: 'And so kava was made for the first time and the rules and procedures for making it were established' (ibid.: 216).

The enduring potency of events of kava drinking to constitute social relationships has been explored in some detail elsewhere (Perminow 1993a; 1995). In the context of the current analysis, however, I would draw the attention to the significance of the mutual sacrifice, whereby connectedness constituted by a strong flow of interchanges between parents and that which has issued forth from them is transformed into another kind of social connectedness redirecting or feeding on the primary flow. The kava as a socially constitutive medium thus originates in a selfless act of giving up a relation of inherent, 'natural' and unique value and a willingness to forego the close, day-to-day 'companionship' (*feohi*) of engaging one another in 'mutual seeing' (*fēsiofaki*) and 'mutual understanding' (*fēmahinoaki*) that goes with it. This was reciprocated by the King's selflessness of foregoing to close his hand around what was offered by eating it. It may be argued that the act of killing a daughter to feed the King is a rather more demanding act of generosity than foregoing to eat her. However, just as producing children and having rights in them is what makes people parents, receiving tribute and being fed by the people may be said to be a fundamental part of what being a king is all about. Thus, the constitutive potency of kava may be said to have been produced in 'the gap' (*vaha'a/vā*) or pipeline between the open hands of the King and his people.

To the extent that adoption produces transformation in two senses – the people intimately linked to the process whereby children are 'composed/built' (*ngaohi*) are changed as are the children themselves – it may be described in the sacrificial terms of the kava myth, in involving mutual sacrifices. Simultaneously, like the mutual sacrifice whereby Kava'onau was transformed to play a constitutive role in the establishment and reproduction of the interrelatedness of King and people, the *pusiaki* may

be described to transform the interrelatedness between child-giver and child-taker by bringing them closer together through intensified flows of interchanges constituting 'close companionship' (*feohi*). Although the kava myth is about an original constitutive event of mutual sacrifice, it should be emphasized that the kava did not gain constitutive potency once and for all but is kept potent by continually involving mutual sacrifice in the frequent events of kava drinking. Similarly, the constitutive potency of the multiple and mutual sacrifices of adoption was not gained once and for all on Kotu but was kept potent by continuing to involve mutual sacrifice. As with regard to the kava myth, it may be argued that the act of 'sending a child away to be adopted' (*'ave ke pusiaki*) or 'sacrificing' (*li'aki*) a child is a more demanding act of generosity than 'taking in a child in adoption' (*omi ke pusiaki'i*), and indeed the act of 'responding to a request' (*tali 'a e kole*) was described as a very open-handed act of 'love/compassion' (*'ofa*). But so was the act of making the request to 'care for' and 'build' a child as long as the child-taker refrained from 'closing the hand' (*puke 'a e nima*) around the child or other things that the flow of adoption had opened a channel for.

Refusing a *pusiaki's* request to seek out the *'api* of its biological parents and siblings *noa 'ia pē* ('according to the child's whims and fancies') would be considered quite appropriate on Kotu. But refusing a child and biological parents 'to see one another' (*fēsiofaki*) and 'understand one another' (*femahinoaki*) altogether would be considered to be the 'unloving' (*ta'e'ofa*) act of someone 'closing the hand'. This does not mean that all *pusiakis* stayed in touch with their biological parents. Clearly, numerous events crop up to make this impracticable or undesirable. Additionally, people did sometimes act in 'unloving' ways. After all, the fundamental human capacity and the understood temptation to 'close the hand' is what makes it meaningful or even possible to talk about social relatedness in terms of an 'open hand' in the first place. If adoptive relatedness may be described as constituted by the intensification of flows in the gap between open hands (feeding on strong flows of prior existence), and if adoptive relatedness is not established once and for all, then the endurance of the relatedness demands that hands are kept open. This must necessarily put the stability of adoptive relatedness in constant jeopardy by the 'unloving acts' of someone 'clenching their hands' or 'closing their doors' that constitute the points of relational contact potentially facilitating strong flows of interchanges.

Indeed, one of the characteristics of adoption practices on Kotu was that numerous 'facts' of biography related to the complex of relatedness among name-givers, name-takers, child-givers, child-takers and children were continuously in the making. Some of the children living in *'apis* referred to as adopted in 1986–87 had moved back to their parental *'apis* in 1991–92. Not only were they no longer referred to as adopted but people

were quite insistent that they never had been in the first place. Thus, givers, takers and children, as well as other Kotu people, would usually say about returned children that they/I 'just used to go there/come here a lot' (*na'a ne lahi 'alu ai/ha'u mai pē*) but that they no longer do so. People tended to refer to relational flows that had come to nought in a manner that reduced the significance of the history of that flow. Instead, they would concentrate on remaking relational histories and personal biographies in terms of flows of greater current potential. This does not, however, mean that the dilemmas related to increases, stability and decreases in relational flows were of no account. On the contrary, the complex of flows constituting relatedness among givers, takers and that which was given and taken in the field of naming and adopting constituted a moral and emotional minefield. Numerous conflicts of everyday interaction resulted as the intensity of some relational flow increased at the expense of others or decreased in favour of others.

One Kotu couple with no biological children of their own adopted a boy from the husband's brother's son in the 1970s. They made several requests to adopt a girl over the years, and it was finally granted in 1986 by the wife's mother's brother's daughter and her husband, from whom they received a girl six months old. At the same time, they were granted a request to adopt the 7-year-old son of the husband's mother's brother's son, who used to visit their 'api a lot. In 1987, their 11-year-old *pusiaki* went with the husband to Tongatapu to enter secondary school. He stayed on Tonga for a fortnight while the wife remained on Kotu with the 7-year-old boy and the baby girl. In the absence of the husband and the 11-year-old boy, the 7-year-old *pusiaki* quickly started 'feeling homesick/discontent' (*ta'elata*) and stayed more and more in the 'api of his biological parents and siblings. The adoptive mother kept sending for him. At first the boy reluctantly returned to sleep in his adoptive 'api but kept returning to the 'api of his biological parents and finally remained there. This was described as making the adoptive mother 'hurt inside/suffer' (*loto mamahi*) and making her 'cry a lot' (*tangi lahi*), but since the kin relationship on which the request to adopt had been based was one between biological and adoptive father, she did not feel that she could go and get him back and felt obliged to wait for the return of her husband. Upon his return to Kotu, the husband did go to his kinsman and returned with the homesick *pusiaki*. The boy kept on 'running away/fleeing' (*hola*) to his natal home, however, and was finally allowed to remain there. According to the adoptive father, the boy was obviously so set in his mind about wanting to return that forcing him to stay with them would perhaps 'destroy his mind' (*maumau 'a e 'atamai*).

During the flow of these events and for some time after, people voiced different opinions about the reasons, motives and morality of the acts



involved. According to one theory, the boy's wish to return was a reaction to what was described as the adoptive parents' lack of 'sincere love' (*ʻofa moʻoni*) towards the boy. Others felt that he had been adopted first of all to help look after the infant girl adopted at the same time, or that he had been 'taken' (*maʻu*) because he admired the 11-year-old adopted son of the *ʻapi* and liked being around him; when the 11-year-old boy went away for secondary education, his motivation to stay on in the home might have been drastically reduced. Yet others felt that the reason why he returned was the sharp increase in chores and a corresponding lack of opportunities to play with the other children, resulting from the fact that he had to do alone the work he had previously shared with the 11-year-old boy who had left for school in Nukuʻalofa. There were some who felt the problem was that the boy's biological father had been too 'receptive' (*tali lelei*) when the boy returned; they said that the biological father should have taken him back and encouraged the boy to stay, since the adoptive parents were more well-to-do and could offer better opportunities for secondary education. Others thought that seeing the way the work was heaped on the boy, the biological father probably doubted that the boy would be given the opportunity to go to secondary school anyway and thus felt more inclined to 'receive well' his returning son.

Four years later, the then 11-year-old former *pusiaki* was still staying in the *ʻapi* of his biological parents and siblings, his career as a *pusiaki* being referred to in terms of his 'going a lot' (*ʻalu ai pē*) to the *ʻapi* for some time and then 'just staying at home' (*nofo pē ʻi ʻapi*).

## Coping with One Another in a World of Movements

'Compassionate love' (*ʻofa*) as the willingness to let something of inherent desirability slip out of your hand appeared to be understood as a fundamental requirement for achieving a beautiful, well-ordered and predictable society. From such a perspective, a sociality not wholly dominated by actions and events of 'no account' (*noa*) that 'crop up aimlessly' (*tupu noa ʻia pē*) as people grasp for and clench their hands around that which is desirable may not be taken for granted. It becomes an achievement of human collaborative creativity. But just as blurred phases of *noa* were conceived as inescapable (and essential) phases in the regenerative motions producing the growth on which people rely for their living, 'dumb, good for nothing' (*noa*) aspects of the person appeared to be understood as inescapable (and essential) facts of life, producing desires that may not be eradicated. The exploration of people's engagements with and understandings of the dynamics of the surroundings indicates that growth and vitality were perceived as the spontaneous outcome of a regenerative

motion of merging and separation. The exploration of the aesthetics of ceremonial materializing practices indicates a conviction that growing things of particular significance and high social value do not come about spontaneously. They may not be achieved ‘haphazardly’ (*noa ‘ia pē*) but according to procedures and regulations, making the manner of growth ‘beautiful’ (*faka‘ōfo‘ōfa*) and ‘well-ordered’ (*maau*). We also saw how the building of presentable boards of food may be interpreted as a further refinement of what was produced by engaging with the basic rhythm of merging and separation and subjecting the ingredients to particular procedures of separation, organization, orientation and distribution in order to create a tableau of ‘order’ (*maau*), and a tableau that stands out in terms of being detached from the multiple contingencies of everyday consumption and in terms of briefly materializing something that foregrounds an ideal order that mostly remains in the background in ordinary socializing. It is an order that recapitulates the significance of the relationship between that which leads or causes and that which follows or results. The symbolic significance of the Tongan house may similarly be approached in terms of the construction of a beautiful tableau of order that articulates the process of growth that produces *enduring* things in a world in which stability and endurance are difficult to achieve. Finally, the exploration of ‘building/composing children’, entangled in a wide variety of adoptive arrangements whereby people are engaged with one another through mutual sacrifice, indicates a shared assumption that the temptation to close the hand is constant. It also indicates an assumption that the decrease in one constitutive flow opens up for the increase in another flow of constitutive interchanges. The children were built, then, in a manner in which ‘compassionate love’ (*‘ōfa*) kept producing relations between child-givers, child-takers and children and in which such relations kept dissolving as people redirected flows of interchanges or simply closed their hands.

One dimension of the establishment and reproduction of adoptive relatedness, then, may be described in terms of the *intensity* of flows of interchanges, while another may be described in terms of the *endurance* of flows of interchanges. Of the two, endurance must clearly be harder to achieve, simply because it is produced by several people who must continually commit to the demanding requirements of ‘compassionate love’ (*‘ōfa*) and who may potentially opt out. As we have seen, Kotu people did not make this distinction, but the terms *tauhi* (‘care for/nurture’) and *ohi* (‘transplant’), described to differentiate between temporary fostering arrangements and ‘truly earnest’ (Gifford 1929: 26) and lasting arrangements of adoption, seem to fit rather well with the differences of intensity and endurance. Thus, *ohi* arrangements may be said to have the beauty and strength of that which endures (like the Tongan house), but in real

life endurance is rare, and it is very hard to know how enduring a *pusiaki* relatedness will prove to be. Also in real life, generosity is a difficult thing (and very 'exhausting' *fakahela*); it is fraught with dilemmas and ambivalence, both because people appeared to share Hobbes' pessimistic views on 'human nature' and because the flows by which people related to one another appeared to feed on one another so that the increase of one flow of interchanges goes with a parallel decrease of other flows of interchanges. This was consonant with a more general theme of channelling and transforming constitutively potent flows that characterized people's mode of relating to their environment and one another in several fields of experience.

Throughout the analysis, I have argued for the potential for discovering shared 'horizons of expectations' (see Shore 1996: 282) by taking seriously involvements with and conceptualizations of the components and dynamics of the environment that people engaged with on a day-to-day basis. Thus, I have explored the dynamics of people's understandings and involvement with their surroundings, their conceptualizations of natural qualities, their aesthetic sensibilities and their practices of relating to one another in the flow of everyday events. My emphasis on the potential for discovery in focusing on people's practical engagements is not an attempt to establish a unified grid of meanings that synchronizes individual strategies of personal goal achievement, producing homogeneity in individuals' understandings of their world and social stability. It does, however, represent an attempt to illuminate enduring 'culture themes'<sup>13</sup> embedded in everyday practices as persistent understandings that largely go without saying and that play an important part in shaping the multiplicity of statements, acts and responses to events in the world. These shared horizons of expectations of everyday life neither imply that Kotu people's attitudes were free from ambivalence nor that choices were free of dilemmas. Neither do they imply that people's coping with one another was, or has ever been, characterized by their agreeing with one another about the appropriateness of acts or the meaning of events. They do suggest, however, that the ambivalence, dilemmas and disagreements related to the flows of social interaction, produced by people trying to act appropriately and effectively, were embedded in fields of experience and meaning that tend to persist over time to make events meaningful. These insights about such shared and persistent understandings should be expected to prove quite helpful in trying to figure out why people responded as they did to changes taking place around them, the question that shall finally be answered in the next, concluding chapter.

## Notes

1. According to Churchward's dictionary, *feohi* signifies '(to have) fellowship or communion or moral and spiritual comradeship' (Churchward 1959: 171). It is frequently used in a religious context, where it signifies achieving 'communion/oneness' by taking in and being taken in by God or Jesus.
2. Other ways of discriminating between 'frontal' and 'posterior/back' parts of the house were also common. Regarding the part of the house sectioned off as the 'bedroom' (*loki*), to which there was no direct entrance from outside, this was perceived as 'frontal' (*mu'a/tāmu'a*). One can note that specific events taking place in the house would sometimes involve the overruling of general criteria of orientation. A 'restriction' (*tapu*) consistently held to, even on everyday occasions of recreational kava drinking, was that a *faikava* must not be joined 'from the front' (*mei mu'a*), since this would mean entering the *faikava* from the chiefly end directly opposite from the kava-maker's end, the *tou'a*. The kava-maker would often sit with her/his back to the 'door facing the road' (*matapā ki hala*) so that potential kava drinkers would have easy access by 'entering from behind' (*hū ki he kava mei mui*). Thus, what was otherwise referred to as 'entering the house from the front' (*hū ki fale mei mu'a*) would be referred to as 'entering from behind' (*hū mei mui*) on occasions of kava drinking. Regarding the assembly of 'boards of food' (*kaipola*), the 'frontal end' (*mu' a 'ō e pola*) would normally be positioned towards the 'front door' and thus the 'posterior end' (*mui 'ōe pola*) would be close to the 'cooking area' (*afi*), affording the 'working people' (*kaungāue*) easy access when bringing the food to be placed on the *pola*.
3. For an interpretation of doors and doorways and their cultural significance in Fiji, see Toren (1990: 33, 35, 84).
4. Another term, *mata'i tofe*, refers to the pearl of a pearl oyster.
5. A significant exception to this public policy of open doors occurred during a certain phase of funerary procedures. During the 'preparation of the corpse' (*teuteu 'a e sino 'ō e mate*) by those 'free of restraint' (*ātā/fa'itelihā*), the doors of the house would be closed and the windows (*sio'ata*) covered with 'barkcloth' (*ngatu*), entirely sealing the house off to keep those 'outside' (*'i tu'a*) from seeing what was going on 'inside the house' (*loto fale*) and to protect them from the naked corpse until it had been oiled with *lolo tonga* ('Tongan oil') and wrapped in *ngatu*.
6. Paul van der Grijp uses precisely the concept of 'house' (*maison*) to describe what contemporary Tongans refer to as *famili* – that is, '... a local group [that] stems from a number of brothers and their descendants ...' (Van der Grijp 1993a: 136). He claims to use this 'Levi-Straussian concept ... for purposes of clarity' (*ibid.*: 136).
7. 'Essential property' is used to refer to a property whose importance was emphasized by people describing the quality of specific plants for specific purposes. The essential property of 'sugar cane' (*tō*) for purposes of eating would be its

- 'sweetness' (*melie*), and this was described to be more 'at the frontal end' (*'i mu'a*), close to the roots, while the essential property of kava for the purpose of kava drinking would be its affective 'strength' (*mālohi*), similarly unevenly distributed.
8. Such unexpected material benefits were described by the term *tapuaki*, meaning 'blessing', 'good thing', 'benefit', 'advantage' and understood to be the unlooked-for reward of a generous attitude.
  9. Medical recipes for making even some of the most widely known 'Tongan waters' (*vai tonga*), the ingredients of which were known by virtually all, were not used freely but 'asked for' (*kole*) and 'granted' (*tali*) by those said 'to have' (*ma'u*) a particular medicine. This would involve 'washing the hands' (*fanofano*) in a vessel of water to allow the ability to cure to flow from the one to which it belonged to the one who was granted to use it.
  10. The durability of relations of fostering/adoption would vary enormously, but child exchanges taking place as the child was weaned would tend to result in more stable arrangements than exchanges involving older children. Certainly, the transfer of a 6- to 8-month-old child would be intended to result in a durable relationship between the child and the foster parent(s) and the other members of his/her new *'api*, as well as between child-givers and child-takers.
  11. This home or *'api* was located between the homes of two of her elder brothers, who occasionally brought her food from their plantations, which happened to be partly cultivated by those staying in her *'api*. Thus, her *'api* was rather intimately linked to the *'apis* of her brothers and represented (as numerous other Kotu *'apis*) a not altogether autonomous household. Clearly, her capacity to run her own 'home' or *'api* and the 'close fellowship' (*feohi*) between her *'api* and those of her brothers' were brought about by the flow of children among these *'apis*.
  12. Since about two thirds of the *pusiakis* were adopted by persons who would be referred to as 'close kin' or *kāinga ofi*, anyway, this interpretation must be qualified. The Tongan classificatory terms of kinship by which siblings with the same mother and father refer to one another with the same terms as even third cousins imply that there are some senses in which their relationships are the same. This does not mean that there are no senses in which the relationship between true siblings is quite different from the relationship between third cousins, particularly in terms of histories of sharing experiences of actual intermixing. Similarly, the histories of intermixing are different among even true siblings, some of whom are closer to one another than others and some of whom are brought closer together by precisely such experiences of intermixing as those involved in the practices of naming, adoption and 'child-building'.
  13. The expression 'culture theme' is borrowed from James Fox, who has used the expression 'Austronesian culture theme' (Fox 2008) to approach the possible cross-cultural unity of Austronesia in spite of an obvious cultural diversity.