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## Conclusion

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# Calamity, Sacrifice and Blessing in a Changing World

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### Understanding and Coping with a Changing Environment

In 2012, two decades after the bulk of this ethnography of the relationship between perceptions of environmental dynamics and the character of cultural aesthetics and sociality was produced, people on Kotu Island built a sea wall to protect the lower part of their garden lands. As we saw in the introduction, people had not seemed too worried in 2011 by the potential destructive force of the ‘red wave’ (*peau kula*) moving in. Also, they had not seemed overly concerned about the loss of land on the ‘weather coast’ (*liku*), the dying trees, the transformation of the ‘forest’ (*vao*) into a swamp, or the loss of historical landmarks such as the ‘twin pools’ (*vai māhanga*) and the ‘burial mound hidden in the forest’ (*Langi tu‘u lilo*) associated with the high-ranked Tungī Mana‘ia. On the contrary, they expressed confidence in being ‘sheltered/protected’ (*le‘ohi*) from destruction by their staunch faith. Many appeared to turn a blind eye to the environmental changes, with some claiming that they had ‘not yet gone to examine it with their own eyes’ (*teeki ai fakasio*). People seemed reluctant to talk about what was going on and were apparently not thrilled by the idea of broadcasting the news about the sea eating their land. Thus, the very substantial and noticeable changes in the immediate environment became rumours further afield on the neighbouring islands of the Lulunga district, in the regional centre of Ha‘apai, in the capital of Nuku‘alofa and overseas among migrants to New Zealand, Australia and the US.

By the end of 2011, however, such rumours had reached MORDI (Mainstreaming of Rural Development Innovation), a small NGO based in Nuku‘alofa. MORDI is stated as working ‘towards aiding the rural isolated

communities of Tonga [to] fight poverty' (MORDI 2016). With the growing awareness of climate change in recent years, MORDI's development projects have increasingly focused on environmental challenges. The NGO had previously been involved in development projects in the Lulunga islands of Ha'apai, where Kotu is located. According to its General Manager, Soane Patolo, MORDI took the initiative to conduct a survey aiming to find out what could be done to alleviate the problems of erosion and inundation on Kotu. In dialogue with the new town officer of Kotu, Halapua Pule'anga, and a project committee from the Kotu community, it was decided that a voluntary work project would be established to construct a concrete sea wall where the encroaching sea was threatening the lowest lying part of the 'uta garden lands. The new sea wall was completed by the end of 2012. By 2016, however, it was crumbling in places, and MORDI was planning to send another survey team to evaluate what future measures might be taken to strengthen this defence.

No one on Kotu in 2016 was averse to the idea of strengthening the wall built four years earlier, or to making it longer in order to stop the sea from eroding other parts of the *liku* coast. They were quite sober, though, with regard to expectations about the extent to which such a strategy might prove successful in keeping the sea at bay in the long run. The attitude of most people was that while it could not hurt to strengthen or lengthen the sea wall, reliable protection against the destructive forces in their marine environment was in God's hands.

Everyone agreed that the sea had encroached, with rising sea levels, higher flood tides and more powerful storm surges accompanying increasingly fierce and frequent tropical storms. People appeared divided, however, as to the underlying causes. Those considering themselves to be among the *kau lotu*, or 'the praying ones/faithful believers', did not hesitate to identify religious slackness as a very significant root cause for the current state of affairs. Thus, they were quick to point out how much more people went to church in the old days; how much more time and energy were spent 'worshipping' (*lotu*), 'doing duties' (*fai fatongia*) and 'carrying burdens' (*fua kavenga*) for the benefit of the local congregation, local minister, district minister and church president. Also, they would point out increasing 'sinfulness' (*faihala*) in terms of 'disrespectfulness' (*ta'efaka'apa'apa*), 'laziness/crookedness' (*fakapikopiko/āmio*), 'deceitful/false worship' (*lotu kākā/lotu loi*) and 'non-marriage cohabitation' (*nofo fakasuva*; lit. 'living together in the Suva manner'). Some people identified more with what was referred to as *kau poto* – 'the knowledgeable ones' (sometimes referred to as *kau saienisi*; 'the scientific ones') and were familiar with the idea that local sea level rise and 'changing weather' (*fēliuliu'aki 'a e 'ea*) might be caused by 'the air being made dirty' (*faka'uli'i 'a e 'ea*) by

heavy traffic and industrial emission around the globe. No one, however, appeared to find the idea very credible – that something happening so far away could affect local conditions. Nevertheless, those identifying with a *kau poto* or ‘educated/scientific’ perspective tended to see ongoing environmental changes as a result of naturally unpredictable marine surroundings, rather than the result of religious slackness or moral decline. Thus, they would characterize the changes as ‘*me’a hoko fakanatula pē*’, or ‘things just happening according to nature’. With regard to what measures might be most reliable to counteract this and protect land and people from the destructive forces of an encroaching marine environment, whatever the root causes might be, people of *kau lotu* and *kau poto* persuasion appeared to be in agreement about one thing. Since God is almighty, they believed it must be in his power to control all forces of nature and thus felt it was prudent to seek his protection. Thus, in February 2016 as the category 5 tropical cyclone Winston was meandering through Tongan waters on its path from Vanuatu to Fiji via Tonga, *kau poto* and *kau lotu* alike were reported to have congregated in all the Kotu churches to beseech God for his protection with great fervour. After Winston had skirted and spared the islands of Ha’apai twice on its unpredictable path towards its devastating landfall in Fiji (where 44 people were killed), it was thought that *lotu mālohi* (‘powerful/forceful praying’) that was voluble and sincere had the capacity to gain God’s graces and therefore that it might have been instrumental in keeping Winston at bay and diverting its course elsewhere. When asked whether they believed that the people on Fiji who had been less fortunate had not also ‘prayed forcefully’, all were sure that they had; however, informants of strong *kau lotu* persuasion questioned Fijian moral standards in general, and one volunteered that he had heard rumours that ‘witchcraft’ was common in the places where many had died during Winston. Thus, he felt that such a degree of sinfulness might reduce the efficacy of even forceful praying.

The significance of Christianity for Tongan sociality as what Frederik Barth in *Balinese Worlds* (Barth 1993) called a ‘cultural stream’ among ‘... other streams found within the broader flow of the civilization ...’ (ibid.: 177) and can probably not be overestimated. Attitudes to calamities, fortune, failure and success and ideas about the moral judgements underlying their cause as well as ideas about appropriate and effective responses and remedies cannot be understood without this ‘cultural stream’. But as Redfield emphasized long ago in his perspective on the coexistence of ‘great’ and ‘small traditions’ (Redfield 1956; see also Barth 1993: 177), which inspired Barth in his effort to understand the dynamics of Bali sociality, ‘Great Traditions’, like that of ‘intrusive’ and historically recent Christianity in Tonga, may be ‘... a structure of ideas and practices that penetrates but

does not encompass the lives of its practitioners' (ibid.: 177). In a similar vein, I would suggest that although the lives of contemporary Tongans have been thoroughly penetrated by Christian concepts, and although moral discourse is dominated by Christian terminology, Christianity is not all-encompassing. Rather, it should be seen as one of several 'streams of traditions' and kinds of knowing involved in shaping attitudes to calamities, strategies of coping and moral judgements in everyday sociality. To my mind, Christian doctrines and practices should be approached as a 'tradition' coexisting and combining with beliefs and certainties imbedded in fields of everyday experience and engagement to produce what might be called hybrid 'horizons of expectations' (Husserl, see Shore 1996: 282) as well as pragmatic strategies of coping with challenges appearing on this horizon. Thus, it is against the background of such a conceptual and moral blend that I seek to approach the puzzle of people's attitudes and responses to ongoing environmental changes encountered on Kotu in recent years. The relatedness between sinfulness, calamity, blessing and fortune to my mind lies at the heart of this puzzle; a relatedness that appears to remain central in the blend between a relatively recent Christian stream of ideas and enduring understandings and routines of engaging one another and the surrounds with a significant continuity with the older world view that Christianity replaced. Thus, it is my argument that the foregoing ethnography of such enduring understandings and routines of engagement will be key in fitting together the pieces of the puzzle.

This does not mean, however, that people's apparently laconic attitude and a marked reluctance to broadcast the ongoing changes were exclusively produced by this blend of world views. A general reticence motivated by a feeling of 'shame/shamefulness' or *mā* appeared to make people hesitant to call attention to their plight for fear of being ridiculed as 'incompetent/ignorant' (*vale*) and 'uneducated' (*ta'eako/ta'emahino*). This 'shame' may be related to a very strong emphasis in Tonga on the value of formal education and a corresponding stereotype of remote islands as backward and those remaining there as 'lazy' (*fakapikopiko*) and 'incompetent/ignorant' (*vale*). This stereotype appears to relate primarily to the value placed on social mobility, something first of all attainable by turning away from 'growing kava' (*tō kava*) on Tōfua, 'fishing' (*fangota*) in *Namolahi* Lagoon and 'plaiting mats' (*lālānga*) on Kotu in favour of 'looking for life' (*kumi mo'ui*) elsewhere in Tonga and ultimately overseas. The extent to which *nofo pē* or 'just staying' tends to be perceived as a socially stigmatized dead end may be illustrated by the following parental strategy of motivating a wayward son to 'look for his life' (*kumi ene mo'ui*) through formal education and by moving to new places rather than by following in his father's footsteps closer to home, as in the following story.

A man in his late thirties who grew up on Kotu moved to Auckland to 'look for life' in the last decade of the twentieth century when he was in his early twenties. By 2012, he had gained residency in New Zealand, had a permanent work contract within the construction sector and lived with his wife and children in a suburb of South Auckland. He had not been back to Kotu and Tōfua since leaving Tonga for New Zealand. In 2012, he recalled his last experience with the 'difficult terrain' (*tokakovi*) and the 'exhausting' (*fakahela*) conditions on Tōfua. He had moved away from Kotu to attend secondary school on Tongatapu, where he stayed with close patrilineal kin. Sometime in form 3 or 4, he and his cousin decided they were fed up with school, he recalled, and ran away to the island of 'Eua, where they spent the time relaxing, sleeping and drinking 'home brew' (*hopi*). One morning, however, they were woken up by the stern voice of their 'father', their *tamai*,<sup>1</sup> who had found out where they had fled; he beat them quite severely with a large piece of wood he found nearby. To their surprise, he did not bring them back to school on Tongatapu. Instead, he brought them back home to Kotu and from there to his kava plantation on Tōfua. Two decades later, he still vividly recalled how his father treated them like 'slaves/prisoners' (*kaupōpula*) over the next month or so; up before the crack of dawn, little food, long days of weeding and clearing new land for planting and having to carry heavy loads up and down the treacherous and steep footpaths of Tōfua. And every now and then, the angry and insistent question of his father; 'Is this the life you want!? For this is surely the life you will get if you "stay home from school" (*nofo mei he ako*)!' He recalled that it was just like a military camp. But two decades later, he described this experience as instrumental in turning him back towards formal education and away from kava growing and his home onto a path that gradually led him further from the place where he grew up. He also described his father's harsh measures as 'tough love' (*tā 'ofa*; lit. 'strike/punish out of love/compassion') that eventually led him to his new life overseas and for which he was now grateful.

It is likely that the social stigma of 'just staying' (*nofo pē*) and its association with backwardness may motivate reticence with regard to broadcasting misfortune, including the loss of land or environmental degradation. Thus, it is necessary to explore it as a separate part of this puzzle before delving more deeply into the general relationship between calamity and morality in the context of a Tongan Christian sociality that is a blend of 'streams of traditions' (Barth 1993: 177) or 'compromise culture' (Marcus 1980: 10).

## What Happened in the Forest and Who's to Blame?

The two teachers at the Government Primary School on Kotu in 2011 were outsiders and very outspoken with regard to what might have caused the death of the forest between the village and the *liku* coast. On a revisit

to Kotu, I approached them in order to film the schoolkids making their way through the swamp and the dead forest to reach the *liku* coast. I had filmed a similar expedition across Kotu in 1987 and showed them this so they could see the environmental transformation that had taken place in the twenty-four years that had passed. The schoolkids were first of all thrilled to see their parents, aunts and uncles as small boys and girls. In the film, they wear next to no clothes or are entirely 'naked' (*telefua*) and are seen diving into the pools in the forest from the thick boughs of the trees that then surrounded them. Although working on Kotu for more than a year, the teachers had neither heard much about the transformation of the forest nor 'examined with their own eyes' (*fakasio*) the state of the forest or the beach on the *liku* coast. Seeing the film, they were quite struck by the changes. One of them volunteered his opinion that it was people's own fault; that they were too 'lazy' (*fakapikopiko*) to go further than the uncultivated bush next to the village in order to get firewood. Thus, he was sure that the cause of the demise of the forest was local over-exploitation of its resources based on 'ignorance/incompetence' (*vale*) and 'lack of education' (*ta'eako*). While not denying that the forest had always been useful as a source of deadwood, wild fruits and nuts as well as bark and leaves for 'Tongan medicine' (*faito'o fakatonga/vai tonga*), Kotu people felt that there had been no intensification in the use of the forest for firewood in the period before the trees started to die. Some argued that the teacher had got it wrong; that it was only after the forest had started to die, they said, that it became more significant as a source of firewood because of the increasing amount of deadwood. It was also argued that there had been an overall decline in demand for firewood related to a marked population decrease on Kotu in the new Millennium. Thus, people claimed that compared to twenty-five years ago these days there were 'only a few people' (*tokosi'i pē kakai*) living on Kotu: 'More *'apis* are now empty, and fewer people stay in those that are left', I was told. Finally, far more of the cooking was done on gas stoves during my visits in 2011, 2014 and 2016 than what had been the case in the 80s and 90s. Clearly, this had contributed to a reduction rather than an increase in the demand for firewood.

Thus, the outsider teacher's theory probably did not reflect realities of resource exploitation very accurately. His immediate readiness to account for the failing forest in terms of local 'ignorance', 'lack of education' and 'laziness' appeared to reflect a tendency of outsiders to assume that remote places are backward places. It also indicates that the harsh realities of shaming or blaming people for their own misfortunes might motivate people to be quite reticent about broadcasting unfortunate developments. Since achieving fortune and avoiding misfortune appears quite central to Tongan everyday religiosity, we will come back to this. But before doing so,

we should see what other theories of what happened to the forest and who might be blamed emerged in the aftermath of its demise.

While rejecting the theory that over-exploitation was the reason why the forest had died out, some locals questioned why even the *tongo* or ‘mangrove’, which was the dominating species of the forest, should succumb to sea water inundation; ‘that is strange’, one person said, ‘for the *tongo* is related to the sea. It is very much accustomed to seawater (“*Oku fāmili pē ki tahi ‘a e tongo. Maheni ‘aupito mo e vai tahi*”). Some said that it was rumoured that some years ago one of the elders of Kotu had started to pour out kerosene in the forest in order to kill off mosquitos breeding in and around the twin pools and increasingly plaguing villagers. This practice of poisoning the mosquitos’ breeding grounds in the forest was said to have been dropped in favour of introducing *lapila* fish<sup>2</sup> imported from Nomuka island into the pools and the growing swamp that the forest was transforming into. The elder had since passed away, but his son confirmed that his father had indeed occasionally poured some kerosene into the pools. He emphasized, however, that the quantity used was very small and strictly limited to the two small pools themselves, since that was where the mosquitos were believed to breed. Thus, he doubted that the quantities in question could be sufficient to explain the transformation of the entire forest. Rather than environmental change being caused by contamination, he felt that it was salt-water inundation that had killed the forest and made it an ideal environment for mosquitos, which his father in turn made an effort to control. In response to the question why a *tongo* or ‘mangrove’ forest that many people described as *fāmili ki tahi* or ‘related to the sea’ should succumb to inundation, he claimed of the two varieties of mangrove on Kotu – the *tongo* and the *tongo lei* – the latter, which was the dominant species of the forest, does not thrive in very salty conditions. Others on Kotu agreed that only the *tongo* thrives in a saline environment and pointed out in 2016 that it was now reappearing in the forest between the village and the *liku* coast.

Environmental change and its relationship to global climate dynamics, regional geological events and local human agency is too complex to conclude with certainty what happened to the forest between the village and the weather coast on Kotu. What is most striking for the purpose of the current puzzle of people’s laconic responses to the undeniable changes that had taken place, of a silence bordering on secrecy, is the local reticence and resistance to portray themselves as victims of misfortune, with the potential that there is for being ridiculed, shamed or blamed for their own plight. So far we have seen how a general association between success, social mobility and moving away, and an accompanying stigmatization of ‘just staying’ (*nofo pē*) as an expression of backwardness and ‘ignorance/

incompetence' (*vale*), might make it preferable to let what had happened to the forest stay in the forest. But at an existential level, there may be more at stake for people than fear of derision and ridicule when powerful forces that surround people cause damage and the sea nibbles at the very ground on which they make their stand and work to re-create a community worth living in. In what follows, I shall argue that at an existential level the apparent complacency and reticence, nurtured by fear of blame, is related to a cultural complex of enduring ideas about the human condition – that is, their situation and challenges in a world where they routinely engage with the dynamics of forceful and unpredictable surroundings in order to survive and thrive. In order to discover the characteristics of this cultural complex, it is necessary, I think, to turn to what people themselves again and again described as their most invaluable asset and most important strategy for surviving and thriving with one another in such powerful surroundings: their faith. Through the three decades that I attended Methodist services in Tonga, one of the warnings most frequently and most forcefully repeated from the pulpit of the numerous churches on Kotu was: ‘*Oua teke falala he ivi ‘o e tangata!*’ (‘Do not rely on the strength of Man!’) As Rosaldo once pointed out in the introduction to *Culture & Truth* (Rosaldo 1993), there may be considerable ‘force in a simple statement taken literally’ (ibid.: 2). It is high time to take seriously Tongan Christianity as a means to make sense of and cope with the potentially overpowering and destructive forces of the surrounds; a ‘weather-world’, to borrow a concept from Tim Ingold, ‘in which every being is destined to combine wind, rain, sunshine and earth in the continuation of its own existence’ (Ingold 2011: 115). These are surroundings of multiple motions within which the qualities of the world change as tides go in and out, as night falls and day dawns, as the moon waxes and wanes, as things grow, as presentations are made, as substances and persons flow, as sociality unfolds and as moral judgements are made.

### ***Tuku Kelekele; ‘Placing the Land’***

In Chapter 1, 2 and 3, about everyday motions of merging and separation, we saw how dynamics that were central in many Polynesian pre-Christian cosmogonical and cosmological narratives still characterized modes of referring to and engaging with environmental components and processes in the final decades of the twentieth century on Kotu. Thus, in spite of a marked discontinuity with regard to pre-Christian myths and tales in favour of Biblical narratives, it was argued that themes of world views that predate Christianity may be discovered in enduring ways of perceiving and engaging with environmental dynamics in many everyday life activities. In



later chapters, it was shown how these discoveries may be used as a basis for an ethnographic analysis of Tongan cultural aesthetics and sociality. Christianity had clearly ‘penetrated’ (Barth 1993: 177) Tongan sociality long before my fieldworks, and churches remain the dominant arenas of sociality on Kotu as elsewhere in Tonga. Although a forceful stream or layer of culture, Christian ideas and practices do not, I have claimed, ‘encompass the lives of its practitioners’ (ibid.: 177). It is my argument that enduring ways of perceiving and engaging with environmental dynamics are also key to understanding Tongan everyday religiosity. Alfred Gell has argued that an ‘existential anxiety’ (Gell 1995: 50) related to a chronic threat of annihilation underlies a preoccupation with differentiating, separating and protecting that comes through strongly in the aesthetics and arts of pre-Christian Polynesia (Gell 1998). But as we saw in Chapter 4, about the enduring significance of creating tableaux of ‘beauty’ (*faka’ofo’ofo*), ‘order’ (*maau*) and ‘importance’ (*mahu’inga*), a preoccupation with creating orderliness by means of differentiation and separation has not gone away with Christianization. Neither, I would argue, has the need for insulation and protection from potentially overpowering surroundings. Thus, reconfirming an alliance with God to achieve protective intervention against misfortunes understood to chronically threaten human life and well-being appears to remain central to everyday religiosity.

While pre-Christian narratives about the world and its workings are not well known, then, and were never told on Kotu, the origin myth of Tongan Christianity itself is very well known and often retold. In order to explain the reason why the concept of *le’ohi/le’o*, signifying ‘shelter, protect/guard’, always figures so prominently in Tongan Methodist church services, in 2012 ‘Isikeli Lātū from Kotu relied precisely on the foundational story of Tongan Christianity. In 1986, he still lived on Kotu with his family as a respected member of the local congregation of the Free Constitutional Church of Tonga (*Siasi Tauatahina Konisitutone ‘o Tonga*). This Methodist church was founded by his father’s brother, ‘Ahokava Lātū, when he broke from another Methodist church, The Free Chiefly Church of Tonga (*Siasi Tauatahina ‘o Tonga Hou’eiki*) as a result of dissatisfaction with church leadership and allegations that the church leaders were ‘eating the money’ (*kai pa’anga*). In the 1990s, ‘Isikeli had moved away from Kotu and risen from a position as *setuata* or ‘church steward’ up through the ranks of the church. Twenty years and several moves later, he had become first *faifekau* or ‘church minister’, then *faifekau pule* or ‘head/leading church minister’, and finally *faifekau tokoni* or ‘assisting church minister’ at the main church in Nuku’alofa and next in rank to the *‘eiki palisiteni ‘o siasi* or ‘noble church president’. By 2012, the church president had passed away and ‘Isikeli had become acting church president until a new president could be elected at

the next annual church conference. In a conversation about the root causes of misfortune, he told the following version of the foundational story of Tongan Christianity:

In 1845, a few years after Tafua'āhau Tupou I was baptized and made king of all of Tonga at Pouono in Vava'u, he decided to return there to make a covenant with God on behalf of Tonga. The King had brought his Bible to Pouono and bent down to scoop up a handful of soil from the ground. He placed this 'soil' (*kelekele*) on the Bible and lifted it up toward Heaven before saying: "*Oku ou tuku 'a e kelekele mo e kakai 'o Tonga ki he Langi keke pule pē ki ai*"; 'I place/dedicate the land and people of Tonga to Heaven so that you shall rule over it all.'

According to 'Isikeli, this pledge, covenant or act of dedication established a 'binding/dependable contract, covenant' (*alea pau*) between all Tongans and the Lord of Heaven that he would shelter Tonga from all evil as long as Tongans abided by his taboos and worshipped him. By placing the totality of 'land and people' in God's hands, 'Isikeli argued, the 'binding contract/covenant' (*alea pau*) also included all of the 'Tongan manner' (*'ulungaanga fakatonga*) and made God the overseer of even traditional Tongan taboos of respect and avoidance related to the kinship ideology of 'compassion/love' (*'ofa*) and 'reverence/respect' (*faka'apa'apa*). In a conversation in 2014, a Tongan Mormon bishop also emphasized the significance of this 'binding contract' in terms of the protection it produced for those abiding with the terms of the contract. Thus, he said:

You know at that time there were many colonial powers offering protection to the islands of the South Pacific. But King Tafua'āhau Tupou I was 'very clever' (*potu 'aupito*). He refused to let Tonga become a colony under protection of any European power. Instead he 'placed/dedicated the land' (*tuku kelekele*) to God and thus gained the most powerful ally of all!

According to the many Tongans with whom I have discussed the root causes of failure and misfortune over the years, breach of this binding contract with God may lead to a loss of his protection or preventive intervention. Breaches of contract appear to be understood to open up vulnerability to all kinds of misfortunes and accidents pressing, as it were, against the perimeter of God's protection. Similarly, acts reconfirming the original pledge and the placing of the land and people of Tonga in God's hands appear to be understood to ward off misfortune by strengthening the perimeter of God's protection. Responding to a question of what he felt were the root causes of destructive events related to tropical cyclones, tsunamis and earthquakes, 'Isikeli thus characterized them as *me'a fakafafangu* or 'wake-up calls,

warnings'; events that should remind people of the need to hold aloft the light that worship produces so as to keep away the darkness. So just like Koloa had done more than twenty years earlier on Kotu, 'Isikeli described *lotu* or worship as the most important source of 'light' (*maama*); words and actions operating to keep at bay the 'darkness' (*po'uli*) believed by most to have dominated Tonga in the 'dark times' (*taimi fakapo'uli*) before King Taufa'āhau Tupou I placed Tonga in God's hands through the Covenant of Land offering in Pouono.

As Mike Poltorak has noted in his analysis of stigmatization and contestation related to 'mental illnesses' in Vava'u (Poltorak 2007), morally inappropriate behaviour in the form of rumours and gossip quite often crop up in Tonga as explanations for such illness (ibid.: 16–18). But in the form of rumours and gossip explanations using morally inappropriate behaviour as true, underlying causes are by no means limited to discourse about mental illnesses. Root causes of a wide variety of abnormal, unfortunate events or conditions are very often identified in acts breaching the original covenant through which God's protection was granted and that is still earnestly and frequently reconfirmed through *lotu* or 'worship'. As may be recalled, those identifying with a *kau lotu* perspective perceived local environmental changes to be caused by a moral decline and lack of worship, while those identifying with a *kau poto* perspective tended to perceive the causes as *me'a fakanatula* or a 'thing of nature' (although agreeing that protection against destructive natural events was ultimately in the hands of God). Similarly, people of strong *kau lotu* persuasion would account for all kinds of illnesses, personal afflictions and accidents as caused by breaches of taboos and lack of faith. Those identifying more with an 'educated/scientific' (*kaupoto/kau saienisi*) perspective tended to explain fewer kinds of misfortunes by underlying moral breaches. Thus, only the diehard *kau lotu* would explain serious and sometimes fatal but common conditions related to *ma'olunga toto* ('high blood pressure'), *suka* ('diabetes') and *kanisa* ('cancer') in terms of *mahaki pē*; 'just illness' (i.e. with no hidden underlying moral cause). In 2011, a religious movement called *Kai manna mei Langi* (signifying 'Eat manna from Heaven'), with a particularly uncompromising belief in transgressions as a cause of illness and in God's power to heal, recruited a handful of followers on Kotu. Followers were strictly forbidden to seek a cure through Western medicine in favour of unfailing faith, ecstatic worship and treatment with an ointment of olive oil said to originate in the Holy Land itself. On Kotu, it was the beginning of the end for the movement when a woman in her forties suffering from a growing ulcer in the stomach finally broke with the movement to seek medical treatment at the Vaiola hospital in Nuku'alofa, where she soon after died from cancer. To most people on Kotu and elsewhere in Tonga, the faith of *Kai manna*

was far too uncompromising, and the evangelical movement appeared to have died out by 2014.

With regard to sudden and totally unexpected accidents, however, rather than common and serious illnesses, *kau lotu* and *kau poto* alike appeared to agree that the cause was hidden or unconfessed moral transgression. For instance, serious or fatal shark attacks would always be accounted for in terms of the victim's hidden and unconfessed theft from church or a minister, leading to a loss of God's protection, which in its turn would expose the victim to the shark's natural capacity to maim and kill. Thus, a very common expression when unforeseen misfortune strikes is simply *u'u!* or 'a bite!' – that is, a shark's bite. This may be illustrated by how people reacted to unfortunate episodes in the course of everyday events during my stays on Kotu.

In 1987, an 11-year-old boy died on the island of Fotuha'a when he was stung by a Red Firefish (*Pterois volitans*) (Randall 1990: 80) known as *houhau lā* in Tonga. The tragic death became a much discussed topic on Kotu; after a while, a consensus on the underlying cause of death was a past quarrel between the father of the boy and the father's uncle, with whom the boy stayed as an adopted child, about where to bury the boy's grandfather who had passed away in Nuku'alofa. The boy's father who had also moved to Nuku'alofa was rumoured to have denied his father's brother the permission to bring the body of the boy's grandfather back to Fotuha'a for burial and had 'shaken his fist in the face' of his father's brother (*tuhutuhu'i*; lit. shaking the index finger).<sup>3</sup> It was this immoral act of disrespect and disobedience that caused repercussions for the offspring of the offender.

A fundamental idea related to Tongan notions of misfortune appears to be that there exists a host of hostile or indifferent components of the environment with a natural capacity to harm people who have been rendered without protection. But notions of misfortune in some cases also involve a strong emphasis on a kind of symmetry between cause and consequence. For example, the particularly painful death of a middle-aged man on Kotu in 1987 was held by many to have been caused by him killing his neighbour's pig in anger by spearing it through the stomach. This, people claimed, explained why the man should suffer from such stomach pains on his deathbed and why a man in his prime should die at all. Almost thirty years later, his death was described by one villager as having been caused by his 'bad-tempered nature' (*anga'ite'ita*) and his tendency to become 'very angry' (*'ita lahi*) and respond in a disproportionate manner. Likewise, birth defects in Tonga have quite often over the years been represented as the outcome of angry or greedy acts or a failed duty to submit to a higher authority or to respect higher rank. For instance, when a child was born with only two fingers on each hand, the cause was said by one

informant to be that the child's mother during pregnancy had cut off and stolen some of the legs of an octopus that her father's sister was drying at the back of her compound. Likewise, a child born with a crooked leg was said to be the result of the mother's act of cutting holes in her husband's trousers during pregnancy because she was angry with him.

As a response to a question in 2012 of whether it was always the mother's transgression during pregnancy that was to blame for birth defects, 'Isikeli, who was then acting president of the Free Constitutional Church of Tonga, answered after hesitating for a few moments: 'No, since the left side of the body is the female side and the right side of the body is the male side, the cause of defects on the left side is something done by the mother while the cause of defects on the right side is something done by the father.' He looked pleased with the neatness of this explanation, and after a short pause he added: '*mālie e?*' or 'well composed, don't you think?' While the expression *maau* in Tonga is used to commend an aesthetic material constellation like a food presentation for being well 'composed' (*ngaohi*) or assembled, *mālie* is used to commend the artistic value of songs, dances, speeches and stories. Verbal performances like 'speeches' (*lea*) and 'stories' (*talanoa*) are often responded to in terms of their perceived truth value as well as their aesthetic value. Thus, audiences routinely support performers by shouting out *móóni!* ('So true!') as well as *mālie* ('So well composed!') The fact that he described his comment on gendered causation as *mālie* may indicate that he was more concerned about the aesthetic value than the truth value of the explanation. Since all actual cases of defects appeared to blame mothers' acts during pregnancy, I would suggest that his Biblical association of the left hand side with women and the right hand side with men may not have been widely shared. The church president's particular beliefs quite clearly find resonance in the Old Testament with the principle of 'an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth'.

Likewise, in the Bible, there is a widely held notion equating 'generous/compassionate deeds' (*ofa*) with good fortune. Thus, just as unexpected misfortune tends to be discussed in terms of antisocial transgression, lucky breaks tend to be described as *tāpuaki* (a sign of 'blessing') (Churchward 1959: 457).

One central idea within Tongan Christian morality, then, appears to be that punishment and reward for sinful and virtuous deeds are not necessarily postponed until Judgement Day and neither are they only a question for the afterlife. The overwhelmingly dominant theme in church services was not punishment, however, but God's power to protect and safeguard people from *mala'ia* or 'misfortune' and the gratitude to which this entitles him. Above all, the message from the pulpit was that people should 'not trust the strength of man' (*oua te ke falala he ivi 'o e tangata*), and that man relies on God's protective intervention to keep at bay all that may harm and

destroy life. Above all, the required response from the congregation was voluble expressions of gratitude (*fakēfeta'i*) for being 'spared and granted life and well-being to this day' (*malo e tau lava/ malo e mo'ui ki he 'ahoni*). And such a strong concern with the necessity to have access to God as a protective ally with the power to ward off harm and destruction and thus achieve well-being was by no means limited to church services. Thus, many everyday routines appeared to exist to reconfirm the bond with God as the ultimate source of protection and well-being.

From Chapter 5, we may recall the significance of 'nurturing spaces' (*tauhi vaha'a*) in establishing and reproducing relations of everyday sociality. Everyday religiosity in Tonga, I would argue, may also be approached in terms of constitutive flows nurturing a space understood to be of singular importance for survival and well-being; the space between God and Tonga, which was initially opened by the Covenant of Land offering in Vava'u. In this space, the hierarchy of church ministers and presidents clearly has a key role in mediating or facilitating the flows that create a 'good space' (*vā lelei*) between people and their protector against destruction; the ultimate source of well-being.

Everyday protective practices routinely involve generous acts of *ōfa* or 'love/compassion' towards church ministers and church presidents or other people in positions of high rank within the realm that was placed in God's hands through the Covenant. Thus, many informants over the years have explained that if you buy a new car, the *faifekau* or 'minister' should always be brought an 'envelope of money' (*sila*) and offered transport to the market or his garden lands to acquire yams or other food crops as a sort of spiritual insurance policy against future accidents. But also persons of rank, such as a man's sister (*tuofefine*) or father's sister (*mehekitanga*), may be brought gifts and offered transport in order to 'open up' a new car for safe use. Rather than being elaborate or highly ritualized, these strategies of 'nurturing a space', which includes God, are often quite low key and may sometimes be hard to notice.

Thus, visiting a friend who had moved from Kotu to Tongatapu in 2004, it was only after the event that it became clear that such insurance had been taken out right under my nose in the form of what is known as *hopoki* or 'a first embarking/inauguration'. This happened whilst we were sitting out, once, in front of the house. The head of the household's wife's brother and some of his children stopped by in his car. He sat down with us for a smoke and to exchange news but rose when his sister and a few other women and children of the household came out. They all went over to his car and drove off, leaving me and the head of the household to continue our conversation about the 'old days' on Kotu. After an hour, they returned with a couple of baskets of yams and sweet potatoes, which were carried into the kitchen

house. Shortly after, the brother and his children took their leave and went off back home. When the wife joined us again, I asked where her brother had taken her. The household head answered on her behalf:

He has just bought a new van and came to offer to transport his sister and her food. It was a *hopoki* ('first embarking'). It is just like the *hopoki vaka* ('the first embarking of the boat') that used to be done with new boats in order to avoid sinking. *Hopoki* is still very important, and often the sister, the *faifekau* ('minister') or both are offered transport in order to avoid future accidents.

Apparently, the higher the rank – within kindred, church or kingdom – of the position towards which generous and compassionate *’ofa* is offered, the more emphatically it reconfirms the ‘binding contract’ (*alea pau*) of the covenant. Also, I would argue, the more substantial the ‘sacrifice’, understood as work and that which is surplus channelled into this space (and that could have been channelled elsewhere), the more forcefully it nurtures the ‘space’ (*vahaà/vā*) between people and their ultimate protector and source of future well-being and security from surrounding destructive forces. Thus, in June 2012, before the ‘official opening’ or *huufi fale* of the brand new central church building of the Free Constitutional Church of Tonga in Nuku’alofa, many resources were channelled towards the very summit of the Royal hierarchy of the Kingdom of Tonga. The high-ranking sister of King Tupou V, Princess Pilolevu, had agreed to officially open the new church. A few nights before the official opening, a delegation headed by the church president made a substantial presentation to the Princess. It consisted of a very large *puaka toho* or ‘tusked pig’ (with an estimated value of 1000 US\$) the size of a small van, large amounts of yams and kava (agricultural produce collectively referred to as *ngoue*) as well as printed ‘bark-cloth’ (*ngatu*) and fine mats (collectively referred to as *koloa fakatonga* or ‘Tongan wealth’) in addition to an ‘envelope’ (*sila*) containing 10,000 TOP (equalling about 5,000 US\$ in 2012). According to the president, it was partly done in order to fortify Princess Pilolevu or lend her ‘strength’ (*ivi*) to succeed in the work of opening the new house of God and thus secure God’s protection of the new church and its members and to acquire his blessing for future undertakings. He compared it to the spiritual strengthening of the one giving the *malanga* or ‘sermon’ achieved through the kava ceremony that always precedes the main Sunday service of Methodist congregations. Thus, he emphasized that acquiring God’s protection and blessing is very taxing and exhausting work and requires sacrifices in order to be successful. Other informants confirmed that material fortification of church ministers, presidents and other high-ranking people in order to activate their capacity to create a ‘good space’ (*vā lelei*) between people

and protector in fact constitutes a very significant part of their economic income. In many Methodist churches salaries are so low that the ministers in fact rely on the generous and compassionate *’ofa* of church members based on the ministers’ key position in what might be called an economy of security and success related to an enduring entanglement of *mala* (‘misfortune’), *monū* (‘fortune’) and morality.

### ***Tuku Mo’ui; ‘Placing Life’***

We have seen how everyday religiosity in Tonga, with its strong emphasis on not trusting the strength of man, is accompanied by numerous everyday strategies for gaining security and success by reaffirming the covenant, agreement or pact of protection. We have also seen how this reaffirmation takes the form of channelling a substantial flow of material resources towards positions held to be particularly significant for gaining security and success. We have seen how the rank of the recipient within kindred, church or kingdom and the magnitude of the offering make a difference with regard to how well the offering may be expected to work in gaining protection and prosperity. In the previous chapter, we saw how nurturing flows between hands that let go constituted a dynamic of everyday sociality where things understood to be strongly attached to people were also understood to be particularly potent for establishing and affirming alliances. Thus, I argued that the pervasive fostering practices that characterized local sociality on Kotu may partly be understood as sacrificial in terms of a detachment and offering of something to which one is strongly linked in order to nurture promising spaces for achieving a good life. Likewise, I would argue that everyday religiosity as an ongoing quest for security and success in Tonga relies on a similar sacrificial mechanism where frequent worship in which offering what is intimately attached to or a part of you is seen as key to achieving protection and prosperity.

In anthropological theories of sacrifice, it is common to follow the distinction the English language makes between ‘sacrifice’ and ‘offering.’ Thus, Huber and Mauss in their classical essay about the nature and function of sacrifice (Hubert and Mauss 1964) ‘designate as sacrifice any oblation, even of vegetable matter, whenever the offering or part of it is destroyed’ (ibid.: 12) and define sacrifice as ‘... a religious act which, through the consecration of a victim, modifies the condition of the moral person who accomplishes it ...’ (ibid.: 13). As Bourdillon has pointed out in the introduction to his anthology on *Sacrifice* (Bourdillon 1980), many of the later theories have focused on sacrifice ‘... in its common form of ritual slaughter’ (ibid.: 1) – that is, on the consecration, killing/destruction of worthy victims and the offering of their life force in the hope of influencing



life-controlling powers. Beattie in the same anthology says that what is sacrificed is ‘... usually and ideally, another living creature, precisely because, being living itself, it most appropriately symbolizes the life that is being offered’ (ibid.: 30). Thus, Beattie perceives religious sacrifice as ‘... a dramatic, symbolic expression of man’s awareness of his dependence on forces outside himself. And ... sacrificial ritual provides a means of influencing, or rather hoping to influence, these forces’ (ibid.: 32).

Sacrifice in the form of offering body parts or the lives of humans for the benefit of ailing chiefs was, according to Meredith Filihia, quite common in Tonga until the turn of the nineteenth century. Thus, ‘the cutting off of finger joints was prevalent in Tonga’ (Filihia 1999: 6) to the extent that Captain Cook reported from his visit to Tonga in 1772 that: ‘the greatest part of the people ... had lost one or both of their little fingers’ (see ibid.: 6). According to Filihia, sources indicate that the cutting off of fingers as well as the strangulation of children was part of a healing strategy when high-ranking chiefs were suffering a serious illness believed to be brought about by breaking a taboo. Those offering fingers for the benefit of an ailing chief were his low-ranking relatives and, according to Mariner, who lived four years in Tonga from 1806, ‘... children as young as five competed to have the privilege of sacrificing their fingers’ (Mariner, see ibid.: 7). Those sacrificed through strangulation were apparently the ailing chief’s own children born to low-ranking wives. Both practices were abandoned very soon after the conversion to Christianity in the first decades of the nineteenth century and for contemporary Tongan Christians belong to the ‘dark time’ or *taimi fakapo’uli* before the coming of the ‘light’ or *maama* of Christianity. Contemporary religious offerings made as a part of the ongoing quest for protection and prosperity clearly do not involve sacrifices of this order. Nevertheless, I would argue that a sacrificial mechanism whereby protection and prosperity may be hoped for by offering what is strongly attached to you or part of yourself remains a significant component of contemporary Christian sociality in Tonga.

This sacrificial mechanism may be particularly well illuminated by focusing on the most important occasion of offering in the many Methodist churches of contemporary Tonga, the *Misinale* or ‘Annual money collection’, usually arranged on the last Sunday of October. This is the annual collection of money to support the activities of the local congregation and the central church. My findings both before and after the new Millennium clearly support Van der Grijp’s findings that many resources in the form of ‘... much time, energy, material produce and money’ (Van der Grijp 1993a: 207) were dedicated to church activities. Thus, a very significant amount of ‘Tongan wealth’ (*koloa fakatonga*) and cash income from and agricultural and marine produce was channelled into the church, not just in annual

(*misinale*) but quarterly (*faka kuata*) and monthly (*lī pa'anga*; lit. 'throwing money') money collections as well as in relation to 'quarterly' (*kuata*) district meetings and the annual church 'conference' (*konfelenisi*). Van der Grijp reports that his informants represented their motives for contributing produce, 'wealth' (*koloa*), and money in markedly transactional terms:

Ultimately, the people of Taoa see the *pola* [food presentation at church conference] as a gift to God and not to the church and his ministers. However, God does not eat earthly food, but the ministers do. The ministers pass the gifts on to God through prayer, in which they ask him to bless the faithful and to reward them. (ibid.: 207)

Van der Grijp therefore concludes: 'This set of religious ideas is thus a discourse of reciprocity: it is a question of giving and receiving' (ibid. 207). I would agree with Van der Grijp that giving generously and receiving fortune in return indeed was and remains an important emphasis in everyday religious discourse in Tonga. I would add, however, that so was the emphasis on foregoing inherently desirable things and putting in inherently exhausting efforts into 'doing duties' (*fai fatongia*) and 'carrying burdens' (*fua kavenga*). I would also add that a general emphasis on God's power to 'protect' (*le'ohi*), in terms of everyday ritual techniques for avoiding accidents and explanations of root causes of unexpected calamities, suggests that God's 'blessing' is quite as much a question of avoiding misfortune as that of achieving spectacular success. I have suggested that a willingness to let go or sacrifice what is inherently desirable or understood to be dear to you energizes the constitutive flows of everyday sociality. Likewise, I suggest that a willingness for such self-sacrifice lies at the heart of a religiosity aimed at everyday security and that this sacrificial theme dominates the annual *misinale* offering of money.

In the *misinale* of the Kotu congregation of the Free Wesleyan Church of Tonga in November 2014, a total of 11,500 TOP (equalling about 5,750 US\$) was collected. This was quite impressive given that the congregation now numbered only a handful of households, that annual cash income to these households was generally very low, and that few of them were supported by overseas relatives. Van der Grijp has described *misinale* money offerings in Tonga as highly competitive and potentially shaming because of the role public announcements play in the collection procedure (ibid.: 205–6). Thus, in 2014 the initial sum in the 'plates' or *peleti* of the congregation's 'donating groups' (*kalasi*) was loudly announced before the plates were sent around church for the *tokoni* or 'assistance' of the congregation, accompanied by loud encouragements to *'ofa mai* ('show love/compassion'). Also the church choir was encouraged by the one in charge of sending round the plate to sing loudly to lend support and strength to

give generously. Likewise, some of the elder, married and widowed women of the congregation danced with sexually suggestive and mock-aggressive body movements, much too close to respectable elders, and wearing either fierce countenances or masks. They behaved in ways that were pretty much the inversion of appropriate public conduct and that would normally be referred to as *launoa*, *laupisi* and *pau'u*, signifying to speak 'silly/nonsense', 'rubbish' or 'naughty'. In the context of the *misinale*, however, people referred to their dances as *fakafiefia* or 'to behave joyfully/celebrate' on account of what was described as women's greater inherent capacity for 'warmth' or *mafana* and therefore through *fakafiefia* cause others to warm up sufficiently to feel 'ofa' or 'compassionate love' and to be generous or 'let go of their grip' (*nimahomo*). Thus, from the point of view of members of the congregation, the significance of publicizing the donated sums and the competitive nature of the procedure of donation was not primarily that it produced shame or pride but that it was part of a process of offering that generated sufficient warmth and strength within people to release desirable assets. The notion that it requires *ivi* or 'strength/energy' to be generous and to release desirable assets to my mind constitutes a very significant part of the hope that *misinale* money offerings might produce protection and prosperity or security and success through God's intervention. And clearly the focus on *ivi* or 'strength/energy' was very strong in the *misinale* as a collective achievement of the congregation; not only in terms of how taxing or *fakahela* ('exhausting') the effort was implied to be for those who contributed on the day of the *misinale* itself but also in terms of all the energy spent over the year that had passed since the last *misinale* to produce the current money offering. This emphasis that the money offered in the *misinale* was really a sort of condensation of *ivi* or strength/energy was indicated by the term or expression people used to describe the *misinale* money offering in the course of the event itself. As an institution of the church year, the annual money collect appeared generally to be referred to as *misinale*. In the course of the performance, however, it was referred to as *tuku mo'ui*, or 'placing/offering life'. After the *misinale* collect in 2014, the middle-aged man who had been in charge of collecting money offerings elaborated on his understanding of the *misinale* as *tuku mo'ui*:

It means to 'present/give' (*foaki*) to God or to 'place' (*tuku*) with God. It is *tuku mo'ui* ('placing of life') because the money offered comes from all the work we have done to grow things in our gardens, to catch fish from the sea, to prepare and plait mats and all other kinds of work since the last *tuku mo'ui*.

He was on his way to the congregation's meeting hall, where the *misinale* feast was to take place as soon as the *tuku mo'ui* in church was finished.

He felt that the feast was important because it expressed the congregation's gratitude to all who had 'helped' (*tokoni*) and 'carried the burdens' (*fua kavenga*) in the work of the *misinale*, and it was also an essential means for refuelling or 'renewing strength' (*fakafo'ou 'a e ivi*) after spending so much 'energy' (*ivi*) on 'placing life' in church.

The term *tuku*, like so many Tongan terms, has a wide variety of applications, varying between 'to place/devote', 'set aside/keep', 'to desist' and 'to abandon/forsake' (Churchward 1959: 507–8). In the context of the *misinale*, the meanings 'to place', 'to leave with' and 'to entrust' (*ibid.*) appeared closest to people's understanding of what was done with this money. As for the value of this offering, people emphasized that what is entrusted to God is in fact 'life', indicating that not only 'another living creature' '... living itself ... appropriately symbolizes the life that is being offered' (Beattie 1980: 30). People's emphasis on the energy required both to get money and release it, and the need to regain strength afterwards, implies '... man's awareness of his dependence on forces outside himself. And ... sacrificial ritual provides a means of influencing, or rather hoping to influence, these forces' (*ibid.*: 32). I would hesitate, however, to say that money 'appropriately symbolizes the life that is offered' (*ibid.*: 30). Rather, I would argue that what makes money an appropriate offering is that it materializes in a very condensed form energy spent and growth achieved in a medium that is endlessly useful and therefore inherently desirable. Thus, money in the ritualized *tuku mo'ui* does not, I would argue, stand for life but is life. Letting go of a significant part of the fruits of work and growth by overcoming an urge to close the hand and by releasing it at points of particular conductivity in the 'space' (*vaha'a*) between people's everyday struggles to survive and succeed and their ultimate protector becomes a kind of self-sacrifice: the giving up of a part of the fruits of labour and growth in the hope of influencing forces, the dependence on which few find reason to doubt in Tonga. It is a dependence that people are constantly reminded about from the pulpit in being told '*Oua teke falala he ivi 'o e tangata!*' ('Do not rely on the strength of Man!')

The *faifekau pule*, or 'district minister', left little doubt in his *malanga* or 'sermon' of the *misinale* of 2014 that securing good conditions for prosperity and well-being, for vitality, growth and health, was what one might hope to achieve through the 'placing of life' in church. This was expressed in terms such as hoping for enough rain and avoiding droughts so that the crops would thrive and grow. It was also expressed in terms of a hope to avoid being hit by catastrophes in the form of destructive cyclones in the upcoming 'cyclone season' (*taimi afā*) or by destructive 'red waves' (*peau kula*) over the next year. After the money offered had been counted, it was put in a white linen bag and placed in the lap of a young maiden dressed

in white and sitting on a chair under the high altar of the church. She was addressed as the *Sea 'o e tuku mo'ui* or the 'Chair of the placing of life'. During his main sermon, the minister focused on Bible verses stating that the Kingdom of God belongs to innocents and that what is done to one of God's innocents is also done to God. Thus, he emphasized that 'generous and compassionate love' or *ofa* directed toward the 'Chair' was guaranteed to reach all the way to God. After the 'Chair' had read out the total sum of the money placed in her lap, she brought it to the district minister, the local minister and the local church steward, who all held onto the bag of money offered while the district minister consecrated the offering by praying over it. The prayer, like his initial sermon, 'gave thanks' (*fakafeta'i*) for being granted life and protection since the previous *tuku mo'ui* and the hope for continued protection, growth and prosperity over the next year.

We saw how the foundational story of Tongan Christianity was about *tuku kelekele* or 'entrusting/placing the soil' under God's protection in order to be spared from misfortune and to prosper. If so, then the annual *tuku mo'ui* or 'entrusting/placing life' in the form of placing a significant part of what emerges or 'grows' (*tupu*) out of that soil in God's hands constitutes a reconfirmation of an '*alea pau* or 'binding agreement'. We also saw how the breaking of this contract may quite easily be turned into the root cause of *mala* or 'misfortune'. Clearly this makes being the victim of misfortune potentially morally damning. We have also seen how a striking reticence with regard to broadcasting the ongoing environmental transformation through which the wild forest and weather coast of Kotu has deteriorated may partly be related to a tendency to ridicule remote places as backward/uneducated. But with the very strong emphasis in everyday religiosity on the significance of God's protective intervention for achieving security and success in an environment where worship is seen as the key to holding at bay unpredictable and potentially very destructive forces, one should probably not expect that claiming victimhood with regards to environmental change is very attractive to people.

Over the three decades that I went to Kotu, I repeatedly encountered two sayings that people identified with and would like to be recognized for. Both emphasize a willingness to combat narrow self-interest by committing to and making sacrifices for a common good. '*Ha'afeva ē, tala ki Kotu mo mālie fakamotu!*' ('Ha'afeva tell Kotu, you both did well in coming away from your island!') refers to the heroic role people from the islands of Ha'afeva and Kotu are reputed to have played when they decided to support King Taufa'āhau Tupou I during his campaign in Fiji in 1854 and is used to emphasize the moral value of 'breaking out of isolation' (*fakamotu*) in order to contribute to a greater, common cause. The other saying that people would clearly like to be associated with and that indeed has also

become the name of a Facebook group consisting of people originating on Kotu is this: ‘*Kotu ‘iloa he lotu moe poto*’ (‘Kotu is known by worship and (scholarly) competence’), which emphasizes people’s willingness to devote themselves to ‘worship’ (*lotu*), to ‘carrying burdens’ (*fua kavenga*) and ‘perform duties’ (*fai fatongia*) within church to keep darkness at bay and to seek enlightenment through education. Clearly, with people seeing themselves as achieving God’s protection through *lotu* and also seeing themselves as engaging the environment in a *poto* manner (i.e. with ‘competence/wisdom’), being associated with environmental calamities in the form of both sudden disasters and gradual degradation may be unwelcome to people. Clearly, also, from a local perspective, the most attractive option may be to look the other way, not dwell too much on the implications and not spread the news about what is going on.

In his book *Why We Disagree about Climate Change* (Hulme 2009), Mike Hulme discusses controversy, inaction and opportunities related to climate change discourses. He concludes that we shall probably never be able to think alike or agree about the causes and consequences of climate change because what we think about it is informed by many things, including what we think about science, our social, political and moral values, our faith and our fears. The extent to which the environmental changes that have happened on Kotu over the last few decades are related to climate change is not entirely clear, neither from a scientific nor from a local perspective. But just like Hulme claims to be the case for global climate change discourses and disagreements, the drastic transformation of the surroundings that people have been engaging for countless generations on Kotu Island and *Namolahi* Lagoon appears to be understood and responded to in terms of attitudes to science, enduring social and moral values, fears and faith. Global and regional climate change debates have the potential to challenge or change the significance of faith for understanding and coping with what is going on. But for now, people’s trust in the lasting efficacy of the King’s ‘placing of land’ under God’s protection in Pouono appears firm in Tonga. And on Kotu, there is no indication that people will stop identifying their island as *Kotu ‘iloa e lotu* (‘a place known by its worship’) and thus under God’s protection anytime soon.

## Everyday Experience and Cultural Continuity

In exploring modes of conceptualizing and of engaging with what in Tim Ingold’s terms might be called the ‘weather-world’ (Ingold 2011), some enduring understandings have been revealed about the world that largely ‘go without saying’ (Bloch 1992). An important outcome of the exploration has been that by following threads from routines of conceptualizing

and coping within fields of everyday experience, a constitutive motion that relates diametrically opposed qualities or states of being has been discovered. The dynamics discovered in everyday routines of production, aesthetics and sociality also resonate with what has been identified as widespread ‘culture themes’ of the Austronesian world. According to Fox, interrelated notions of growth and precedence make up ‘origin structures’ of varying sorts (Fox 1995: 218) that play a significant part in creating, reproducing or undermining hierarchical relations in many parts of the world of Austronesian-speaking peoples: ‘In many Austronesian societies, origins are conceptualized as a form of growth’ (ibid.: 218–19).

In Chapter 5, we saw that Koloa used the artificial ‘Tongan house’ (*fale tonga*) rather than a growing thing as a metaphor for the Tongan family. But the correspondence between the careful ‘building of the house’ (*langa fale*) and the manner in which natural growth produces ‘hard’ (*fefeka*) and enduring things clearly inscribes the force of growth into the structure of the house. Thus, we saw that the hardest end of the ‘inner ridgepole’ (*to’ufūfū*) closest to the tree’s ‘base’ or ‘reason for existence’ (*tefito’i*) ‘leads the way’ (*mu’a mai*), with parts that ‘follow after’ (*mui mai*) toward the ‘frontal end’ (*tāmu’a*) and ‘chiefly’ (*’iiki*) position of pre-eminence. Most ways of referring to genealogical relations in Tonga do so in terms of prior and later occurrences. Genealogical tracing is referred to in a true mode of temporal precedence as *hokohoko*, meaning ‘to join one after another, or to be/happen in succession one after another’ (Churchward 1959). If that which produces social pre-eminence does so by a process articulating the process of growth, then the relationship between ‘base/foundation’ (*tefito’i*) and ‘tail’ (*hiku*) is first of all one of precedence. The crucial motion in the cultivation and growth of nurturing ‘yfi (yam) and *niu* (coconut), strong kava and the beautifying and protective mulberry (*hiapo*) and hard/enduring ironwood (*toa*) is that some occurrences ‘lead the way’ (*mu’a mai*) to constitute the ‘reason’ (*tefito’i*) for occurrences that ‘follow after’ (*hoko mai/mui mai*). Dealing with components of the environment in an effective manner means dealing with a practical experiential realm of precedence. Indeed, dealing with this kind of precedence was probably a significant aspect of what the old Tongan calendar of yam cultivation was all about. Thus, the pre-eminent worth of the *kahokaho* yam of the ‘early yam crop’ (*tokamu’a*) was that of its antecedence, making it a yam ‘leading the way’ (*mu’a mai*) so that the ‘late yam crop’ (*tokamui*) or the ‘large crop’ (*tokalahi*) and the ‘collectivity of cultivated food’ (*to’u kai*) may ‘follow after’ (*mui mai*). A narrow focus on structures such as the house or peaks of ceremonial elaboration would tend to produce images of fixed hierarchical structures, but these structures are not all there is. Focusing instead on the building of houses, the ceremonial processes of transforming food into

presentable ‘boards of food’ (*kaipola*) and the opening up of potent flows of relating at ‘interfaces of enhanced conductivity’ (*mata*) produces images of precedence embedded in a procreative dynamic of merging and separation as an encompassing process of growth and life. Such a focus opens up a vista on a flux that makes outstanding moments of unambiguous order beautiful, moving and important in the continual labour of re-creating a society fit to live in. Put differently, the enduring cultural significance of the phases of ‘sea coming in to unite with land’ (*hu’a mai ke tau ‘a e tahi*) and ‘sea detaching from land to become almost empty’ (*mahu’i ke mamaha ‘a e tahi*), ‘night/darkness’ (*po*) and ‘day/light’ (*‘aho*), ‘dead moon’ (*mate ‘a e māhina*) and ‘mutual day’ (*fe’ahoaki*) at full moon and other states of *noa* (‘haphazard’, ‘indiscriminate’) and *maau* (‘orderly’, ‘well proportioned’) does not lie in their fixed oppositeness. Rather, it lies in the encompassing process of merging and separation running through the environment people must engage with to achieve a good life. In Tonga, as elsewhere in Polynesia and Austronesia, people clearly remain preoccupied with etiquette, distinctions and boundaries due, perhaps, as Gell has claimed, to an enduring ‘need to keep things apart’ (Gell 1995: 36). This preoccupation does not, I believe, reflect a wish to live in a world of chronic ‘orderliness’ (*maau*) or a need to keep things constantly apart. First of all, such a wish would appear quite unrealistic to people. Secondly, it would mean existing in a frozen and barren world devoid of highly valued qualities like desire, courage and creativeness cropping up from ‘within’ (*‘i loto*) to ‘give zest to life’ (Toren 1995: 76).

Picking up threads from different practical fields, I have traced enduring notions about qualities of the environment that people engaged with in everyday life, which has made it possible to produce an ethnography that may provide ‘... some intuition into the evocative power of [the] symbolism’ (Bloch 1993: 114) by which social relatedness and orders of precedence are elaborated and constituted. In the ethnographic exploration of Kotu in the final decade of the twentieth century, I have made an effort to anchor ‘conceptualizations in the material – the body, houses, wood, styles of speaking – and in practices – cooking, cultivation, eating together’ and, thus, to approach symbolic expressions in the context of ‘the wider processes of ecological, biological, and geographical transformation of which human society is a small part’ (Bloch 1992: 144). My discoveries would seem to imply that the legitimacy of those whose pre-eminent positions are constituted by such articulation would tend to be confirmed through modes of conceptualizing and coping with the dynamics of several fields of everyday experience. Put differently, it would seem hard to uproot a leader whose pre-eminence is constituted in a mode that recapitulates practical modes of transforming ‘useless wild growth’ (*tupu noa ‘ia pē*)



into nurturing foods, strong drink and enduring and valued materials. The resonance between conceptualizations of tidal, diurnal and lunar dynamics in which many productive practices were still embedded on Kotu in the last decades of the twentieth century indicates that the calendar of yam cultivation that was centred around the Tu'i Tonga was once a powerful tool of naturalization for a centralized apparatus of government. Clearly, also, both the position of the Tu'i Tonga and the calendar of yam cultivation are institutions that have long since lost their significance in Tonga. Nevertheless, the motion of merging and separation that once was elaborated in stories about the world and its makings, and in terms of the role of Tu'i Tonga for security and well-being, did not grind to a halt with the appearance of new narratives, new faith and new important positions. In Kotu, it lingered on in many everyday engagements with dynamics and components of the environment and continued to nurture shared ideas about the importance of cultivation, of beauty, of orderliness and of sacrifice in the ongoing struggle to achieve 'good spaces' (*vā lelei*) in a world where that may never be taken for granted.

It is on the background of shared expectations that responses to environmental changes also play themselves out. It goes without saying that instability, unpredictability and vulnerability to powerful surrounding forces are to be expected. As we have seen, Tongan Christianity looms large on contemporary shared horizons of expectations and partly rests precisely on trust in God's protective intervention against overwhelming and potentially destructive surrounding forces. There is reason to doubt that neither sudden 'red waves' nor gradual sea level rise will shake this trust anytime soon. And who, after all, offers anything more reliable to trust with regard to protection against possible future scenarios of low islands in a vast ocean in an era of global warming? Few that remained on Kotu in 2016 felt certain that predictions of higher sea levels and more violent weather in the future were wrong. This did not appear to shake their trust in God's protective power, however. Thus, a laconic sentiment expressed by some was this: 'Even if Kotu should sink and red waves should keep moving in, one might perhaps hope for God's help in moving out ...'

## Notes

1. He was the biological father of my informant and the father's brother of the boy my informant had fled with. He was thus 'father' or *tamai* to both in terms of Tongan classificatory kin terminology.
2. *Lapila* is the Tongan term for a kind of tilapia fish endemic to freshwater lakes in Africa, where it is used as a measure to control mosquitoes and hence

malaria. It is farmed extensively in Asia and was probably introduced to Tongan brackish lakes in the twentieth century.

3. Pointing or beckoning by using the index finger is generally perceived as extremely rude in Tonga unless it is done by a person whose position of authority is incomparably higher than the one being beckoned. Even then, it is considered a crude gesture of self-aggrandizement. According to the Kotu interpreters of the misfortune on Fotuha'a, the act of *tuhuhuu'i* is also associated with an act of 'cursing' (*talatuki*).