Article

Paradoxes of (In)security and Moral Regeneration in Vanuatu and Beyond

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Abstract

This article examines some paradoxical intersections of fear, security, and morality on Ahamb Island in Vanuatu in the South Pacific. I take as my ethnographic vantage point a child-led Christian revival movement that developed in the wake of enduring political conflicts on Ahamb during my fieldwork in 2014. The revival began as a process of moral renewal and turned into a security measure protecting the island against sorcerers found to be responsible for many of the island society's problems. In the article, I make comparisons between the situation on Ahamb and the recent political and cultural crisis in the UK and USA where an increasing number of people perceive their moral order to be under threat. In both contexts, new charismatic actors of governance emerge and gain a following by identifying an 'other' as responsible for the crisis while convincingly presenting themselves as the solution. An important reason for these actors' appeal, I argue, is that they appear to take people's concerns seriously in a way that established authorities do not. However, in both Vanuatu, the UK, and the USA there is a paradox in how the actors present themselves as holding the solution to people's insecurities while at the same time shaping the context for their emergence.

Keywords

morality, security, social movements, revival, Donald Trump, Vanuatu

Introduction

'This study came at the right time. We thank God that we got this study week now. It is time that we come together to regain unity'. Phelix, a man in his early 30s, spoke up in the Presbyterian community church of Ahamb Island in Vanuatu in the South Pacific. It was February 2014 and the end of a study week initiated by the church to stress the importance of Christian moral living for regaining unity in the community. For the past few years, Ahamb and its 650 inhabitants had been marked by several disputes over land rights and authority. As a result, there was division among kin and villagers, few showed up at communal activities, and the

community chiefs, who themselves were entangled in the disputes, had meager support. Moreover, *posen* (sorcery), referring to a number of techniques used to cause harm to others, was seen as on the rise nationwide. Locally, this was manifested in frequent spotting of *suu* – flying sorcerers – visible as lights travelling in the air, and women waking up at night suspecting they had unknowingly been taken advantage of by 'people walking around at night' using magical means.

It was not coincidental that a study week for regaining unity was organized in the Christian church on Ahamb. Here, Christianity has a long history of representing the morally good and bringing people together across lineages and villages. Most community activities are organized in the church, whether they are committees - for which there is one for just about every area of Ahamb life, fundraisers, or the weekly public meetings held after Sunday service. Since Christianity was introduced in the early 1900s, the church has also been the main framework through which Ahamb people have dealt with perils, from disputes and violence to sorcery and dangerous spirits (Bratrud 2017). However, over the past two years, church leaders too have become involved in the island's political disputes. It was therefore not obvious that the church, at least in its current form, should form the fulcrum around which a moral renewal of society would be organized. It was symptomatic that only around 50 of the community's 650 inhabitants participated in the concluding day of the study week.

While the community was grappling with its problems, rumors started to spread about a Christian charismatic revival movement that had emerged in the Presbyterian churches of South West Bay, a three to five hours' boat ride east of Ahamb, a few months earlier. Revival is a term used to refer to spiritual reawakening in people's lives through the supposed presence of the Holy Spirit. This phenomenon exploded in Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands during the 1970s, giving Christianity a significance in the region it never had before (Robbins 2004, 122; see also MacDonald 2019). Revivals are characterized by the notion that the spiritual gifts of the Holy Spirit, including healing, visions, and prophesying, are available to all believers. They thus form part of a charismatic, or Pentecostal, form of Christianity which is currently the fastest growing religion in the world (Robbins 2010, 634; see Eriksen, Blanes & MacCarthy 2019). The revivals also carry expectations of new blessing, unity, and spirit of government and thus reminds us of the classic millenarian renewal movements described from Melanesia (Burridge 1960; Lawrence 1964; Schwartz 1968; Worsley 1968). In South West Bay, rumors had it that the Holy Spirit was changing the way of life: troublemakers had surrendered to the Lord, sorcery was declining, and a growing number of children and youth were anointed with the Holy Spirit and granted spiritual gifts of prophecy, vision, and healing. A group of church leaders on Ahamb requested a visit from the revival group in South West Bay to the island, hoping that they could help change society also there.

This article takes as its ethnographic vantage point the case of the revival movement as it developed during my fieldwork on Ahamb in 2014. It examines some paradoxical intersections of fear, security, and morality that emerged in its wake. The revival begun as an attempt to morally regenerate the island society, or 'clean the island', as it was commonly phrased. Later, it developed into a security measure to protect the island against sorcerers perceived to be responsible for many of society's problems − including disputes, ruined businesses, malfunctioning community institutions, sickness, and unexplainable deaths. A subsequent discovery of sorcery 'everywhere' led to a spiraling moral and existential panic where people feared for their safety and the island's future. One consequence of this was that two men, believed to be sorcerers and responsible for two decades of problems in the community, were killed. Thus, from one perspective, in the community's attempt to morally rejuvenate their society, they ended up producing the same kind of perils they were initially trying to defeat.

In the article, I make comparisons between the situation on Ahamb and the recent political and cultural crisis in the UK and the USA where an increasing number of people perceive their moral order and safety to be under threat. In both contexts, new charismatic actors of governance emerge and gain supporters by convincingly identifying forces, groups, or ideas they deem responsible for people's problems while presenting themselves as the solution to the crises. An important part of the appeal of these actors, I argue, is that they appear to take people's concerns seriously in a way that established authorities do not. However, in both Vanuatu, the UK, and the USA I argue that there is a paradox in how these actors present themselves as holding the solution to people's insecurities while at the same time shaping the context for their emergence.

In my approach to morality and (in)security, I build on Morten Axel Pedersen and Martin Holbraad's (2013) emphasis on the importance of having an open approach to the existential matters that are at stake for people in different contexts when examining what security and insecurity means to them. To account for why the revival gained so much appeal on Ahamb, I first outline some of the islanders' fundamental moral values, how they are usually realized in social action, and how the sorcerer emerges as a threat to them. I continue by describing the current context of land disputes on the island, which is seen as the most potent context for the emergence of sorcerers. I argue that the land disputes must be seen in relation to ambiguous postcolonial land reforms in Vanuatu that were designed to attract foreign investors who could help the country develop economically. This illustrates my argument that the sorcerer is often blamed for problems that are far too complex to be blamed on an 'other'. Subsequently, I ethnographically examine the revival as it developed from moral renewal to security measure. With a basis in the revival ethnography, I discuss how a mobilization around moral values for security in Vanuatu can be compared to the current support of nationalistic populist movements in Euro-American societies, including UKIP in the UK and Donald Trump in the USA. I conclude with a discussion on some paradoxes of these

movements, while advocating for the need to study why they became so important for their supporters.

The Good, the Bad, and the Sorcerer

Ahamb is a tiny island located just south of the bigger island Malekula in Northern Vanuatu. The community consists mainly of subsistence farmers and fishers whose daily lives rely on garden work on mainland Malekula. In addition to garden work, fishing, and shell-collecting, everyday life is characterized by spending time with kin, planning and carrying out small projects in one's home and for relatives, and a range of activities related to the Presbyterian community church in which about 95% of the islanders are members.[1] Everyone on the island is entangled in multiple kin relations after generations of intermarriage. Since 2000, a number of Ahamb families have also migrated to a dozen new settlements on the Malekula mainland to get more space, either because of land disputes or to escape the environmental vulnerability of the flat, small island. In addition, 100-150 islanders live permanently or temporarily in the capital Port Vila.

An important part of how Ahamb people perceive themselves and others is through a moral evaluation of the extent to which a person can be regarded as 'good' (*gud* or *ngavuy*). A good person is someone who acts with love, who is humble, and who *luk save* (recognizes the needs of) others (cf. Rasmussen 2015). This value of being good is related to duties and obligations in kinship and having unconditional love for everyone (*lavem evri man*) which is the most prominent principle of Ahamb everyday Christianity. In most contexts, Ahamb people emphasize that all humans have equal value as children of the same transcendent God. One is therefore obliged to treat everyone the same, and to provide care and compassion to whoever is in need. A person who acknowledges these ideas and lives by them is regarded as humble, loving, and Christian and will be talked about as 'being good' (*nren iha ngavuy*). Ahamb's social values thus resemble the centrality of interconnectedness for social life as pinpointed by Marilyn Strathern (1988) in her influential theorizing of Melanesian personhood as 'dividual' and composed of relations. This is a contrast to the self-contained 'individual' prominent in much Western social theory.[2]

While practices related to love and relationships define the good person on Ahamb, the person suspected of being a sorcerer (*posen man*) is anti-kinship, anti-Christian, and devalues the social through often-unprovoked attacks on other

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[1] Everyone on Ahamb regard themselves as Christian. While most islanders are members in the Presbyterian Church, a few families are members of small breakaway churches.

[2] It is important to remember that Strathern's concept of the dividual was never meant to act as an empirical description of how all Melanesians think at all times (see Schram 2015, 319). Ahamb people are not tied to just one model of subjectivity, although they tend to lean toward a mode of being a person that emphasizes one's dependence on a wide range of relationships.

members of the social body (cf. Rio 2014; Smith 2020, 10). When I speak of 'sorcery' here, I follow Evans-Pritchard's (1937) classic definition of the term as the purposeful use of magic to injure, kill, or cause misfortune, in contrast to 'witchcraft' which represents the inborn and unconscious propensity to harm others.[3] Sorcery is regarded a highly secret activity in Vanuatu today. Detailed knowledge of it is confined to special sorcery brotherhoods. The sorcerer leads a secret, double life which means that anyone, even though they appear normal, may be engaged in sorcery. The fact that one can never truly know who is a sorcerer spreads what Jack Taylor calls an 'aura of everyday terror' (2015, 38).

As Knut Rio (2019, 333) observes, sorcery is always implemented in social life in Melanesia and implies that all relations are potentially dangerous and destructive. In Vanuatu, people perceive there to be a continuation between life forms – the living, the dead, humans, and spirits. From this perspective, the world we perceive is not the only version of the world (Rio 2019, 338). Other versions exist and may be revealed at critical moments. The world associated with insecurity, suspicion, and sorcery is typically articulated in situations of uncertainty related to deviant moral behavior. As described by Rio:

> If people are observed acting improperly or inhumanly – if they are selfish or greedy, if they sit alone in their houses and are observed to be angry or grumpy, accusing or demanding against others – this is already interpreted as a sign that other versions of the world has come into effect (Rio 2019, 338).

Sorcery has been part of Vanuatu social life since long before colonialization and Christianization, which begun in the early 1800s (Tonkinson 1981). However, as anthropologists of both Melanesia and Africa have described for almost three decades, current sorcery in these places should not be seen as a simple retreat to 'tradition'. When sorcery emerges today, it is usually related to conflicts, envy, and jealousy triggered by someone who experiences being left out of progress in a 'modern' context of capital and consumer goods (see e.g. Comaroff & Comaroff 1993; Geschiere 1997; Meyer & Pels 2003; Rio 2011). A person may, in this context, turn to sorcery to level out difference, hurt an opponent, or achieve wealth or success. Rather than understanding current sorcery as tradition, it should therefore be seen as a product of new forms of discontent resulting from new forms of inequality that bring insecurity and loss of control into the processes which normally regulate social values and practice (Eves 2000).

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[3] As Rio (2019: 334) and Eves (2013) reminds us, is important to keep in mind that terms like 'sorcery' and 'witchcraft' are generalized approximations of indigenous concepts that do not cover the complex ideas and relations surrounding these phenomena in the local context. For the purpose and scope of this article, however, I have decided to refer mostly to the generalized English term 'sorcery'. I hope that the ethnographic details and context provided will be able to give the reader an introduction to the multiple practices and meanings of the phenomenon in Ahamb people's lives.

An important context for the emergence of new inequality in Vanuatu is disputes over land rights. Land disputes have since the country's independence from the UK and France in 1980 been a focal point of intense local and national political tension (de Burlo 1989; McDonnell 2017; Smith 2017). On Ahamb, such disputes have been frequent and strong. Some of these land disputes relate to the island's small size, which makes land for gardening and dwelling a relatively scarce resource. However, most of the disputes relate to the new material value of land after Independence. The Constitution created with Independence stated that all lost or alienated land, that at this time made up 36% of Vanuatu's land mass (Rawlings 1999: 76), was to be returned to indigenous customary owners and their descendants. However, to build an economy independent of the British and French colonialists, the Vanuatu government has introduced a series of land reforms designed to attract foreign investors since 1980. Most central in these land reforms is the possibility to lease customary clan land for a period of 75 years – a lease that is easily renewed (van Trease 1987). For the lessor, a land lease implies enormous sums of money and has tempted several Ahamb people to lease out land in the area. However, the land advertised for lease has often been used for gardens or villages by others, and several land leases have been completed without a proper settlement of who the customary landowner really is. Most islanders depend on land for subsistence. Therefore, the possibility that someone else might lease out the land on which one resides or has a garden triggers people to formally claim the land themselves in order to secure a place to live, grow food, and provide cash crops for the future.

The current competition for land rights is increasingly creating new forms of inclusion and exclusion. On Ahamb, where everyone is kin and inclusion of others is normally an important feature of the morally good person, land claims often cause resentment. People mostly express their resentment in gossip and occasionally in public meetings. A few are believed to turn to sorcery to attack those who keep claiming for themselves, especially if they are challenging their own land rights. Sorcery can thus be seen as a double-edged blade (Newell 2007, 463): it clarifies the moral importance of collectivity and social bonds, while also demonstrating a harmful individualism in letting personal grudge and interest override relational compassion, and bringing fear, insecurity, and death to others.

The Revival: Recovering Ahamb's Moral Order

The Christian revival that developed in South West Bay in November 2013 was introduced on Ahamb in March 2014. The initiation took place in the Ahamb church over a weekend and was led by church leader Elder Edward from South West Bay and 52 of his local youth – many of whom were recipients of spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. It did not take long before the revival made its mark also on Ahamb. After two weeks, around 30 children and a few youth and women received spiritual gifts of vision and prophecy. On a daily basis over the next nine months, the visionaries were 'slain in the Spirit' – that is, they were supposedly

overcome by the power of the Holy Spirit and fainted and fell to the ground. After up to an hour in this state, they communicated revelations to the community concerning what was good, what was bad, and how to live one's life in order to receive salvation as 'the last days' were approaching. The visionaries received and conveyed the revelations during designated revival worship services organized every night in church, but also suddenly during everyday activities in the village, at school, and in the gardens. If people only followed the children's revelations, the children and church leaders assured, the Holy Spirit would change the very fabric of life on the island, presenting solutions to the pressing disputes that were dividing the society.

The visionary girls and boys were chosen by the Holy Spirit to be its mediums because they had 'soft' hearts that enabled them to more easily 'open up' and submit themselves fully to its guidance. Their role was also connected to the Biblical theorem that one must become humble like a little child to enter the Kingdom of God (see Mark 10:14-16; Luke 18:15-17; Matthew 18:3). For revival supporters, the latter worked as a criticism of the adult men who cultivated their own desires in land claims and political strife, without thinking of others (Bratrud 2019a). As a contrast, the children exemplified the values of humility, obedience and love. They were key to becoming more like God.

Central to the revival was the need to 'prepare one's life' (*preperem laef blong yu*) to meet God in this life and in the afterlife. In order to be aligned with God, it was important to fight 'the life of this world' (*laef blong wol ia*); the deceptive worldly enjoyments that kept people away from a Holy lifestyle. This included everything 'not good' (*nogud*), such as stealing, adultery, unfaithfulness, envy, anger, swearing, fighting, selfishness, being obsessed with money and material things, drinking, not going to church, not participating in community work, doubting God, and practicing sorcery. The actions and values that were encouraged as 'good' and representative of 'life in Heaven' (*laef blong Heven*) included humility, kindness, helping others, moderation, faithfulness, going to church, and a full devotion to God. The revival was recruiting people to a more pious, empathic, and ascetic lifestyle, and was commonly talked about as 'cleaning the island'. It was a 'rescue operation' to obtain new moral cohesion by reminding islanders of God's true ways, which ought to underlie their values and interests, as Stephanie Hobbins (2019) describes from the Solomon Islands. Similar to other Christian charismatic, or Pentecostal, movements in Melanesia and elsewhere, the revival represented a 'break with the past' that had moral and political connotations (see Eriksen 2009; Eriksen, Blanes & MacCarthy 2019; Maggio 2015; Meyer 2004; Robbins 2004).

The need for moral and spiritual renewal was the overarching parole of the revival. Two months after its inception, eradication of all sorcery became a specific measure to realize this goal.

The Spirit in the Grapefruit Tree

From May 2014, the visionary children started locating sorcery objects and to 'see', through their spiritual vision, who were sorcerers. As mentioned, sorcery is a highly secret activity in Vanuatu and detailed knowledge of it is generally believed to be confined to members of secret sorcery brotherhoods. However, during the revival, the visionaries were suddenly revealing the entire world of the sorcerers, including who were sorcerers, what were their movements, techniques, and remedies, and who were on their lists to become the next victim. To protect people on Ahamb and the district of South Malekula as such, the visionaries started leading prayer missions to neutralize the sorcerers' powers. Many Ahamb islanders joined the visionaries on their missions in the hope that they could secure the island from these potent, dangerous forces.

During a revival worship service one evening in late May, several visionaries conveyed revelations saying that someone had to go to the house of Orwell, a man in his 60s who had been suspected of being a sorcerer for over a decade. He was also known as an active land claimant - several of his killings were believed to be caused by land disputes. Shortly after the revelations were conveyed, a group of visionary children and an adult support group left for Orwell's house. At first, I stayed behind in church where there was prayer and singing meant to nurture the presence of the Holy Spirit. After two hours in church, at around ten p.m., I was getting tired and hungry. Together with two other men, I went outside the church to stretch my legs and get some fresh air. After some chatting, we eventually decided to go to Orwell's house to see what was going on.

At Orwell's house, which was made out of weaved bamboo walls and a thatch roof, as the majority of houses on Ahamb, we arrived at a spectacular scene. The first thing we saw was two men who had climbed a big grapefruit tree. One of the men was carrying a torch in his mouth, shining it around. A crowd of about 30 people was standing on the ground looking up on the tree. Some of them were pointing and discussing while watching. I went to see some young men at the back of the crowd to ask what was happening. 'They are searching for a spirit that the old man is using when he is making magic', one of them explained. 'The Holy Spirit has conveyed that the spirit is hiding up there', another followed up, without moving his eyes from the tree. Loud common prayers were frequently initiated among the people standing on the ground. The prayers were usually started by men and women who had volunteered to look after the visionary children. In the prayers, they were asking God to neutralize the evil powers present and to reveal to the visionaries how to catch the malevolent spirit.

After one of several prayers, the place went quiet. The only noise I noticed was from the two men in the tree who were searching around with their torches while sporadically communicating with us on the ground. Then, all of a sudden, several visionary children and women started crying and shouting. The place erupted in chaos; the visionaries' bodies were shaking as they howled, shouted, and cried out

in desperation. People came to hold the shaking visionaries who were unable to stand up. A few of the visionaries conveyed that they had seen the spirit take the body of a rat up in the tree. Some men found wooden sticks and promptly started hitting down the tree's grapefruits. Fruits and branches were falling as the visionaries jumped frantically away, shouting and crying. Suddenly, several of them jumped aside as if to escape something the rest of us could not see. I was told that the spirit had moved through the crowd and up on to the thatched roof of Orwell's house. Two teenage boys then immediately climbed the roof, shining their torches rapidly around. The visionaries continued their howling, and jumping, as they pointed hysterically while the boys, who did not have the spiritual gifts to see any spirit, shone their torches restlessly around.

Some people I talked to, who had been at Orwell's house the whole evening, explained to me that the visionaries' revelations had said that the man was hiding several sorcery items in his house. With the help of prayer, the visionaries had managed to get the main spirit powering Orwell's sorcery out in the open. What we were witnessing, they explained, was the spirit trying to escape the crowd and the power of their prayers. Orwell himself was also present. People were confronting him about the spirit and asked him to call for it and destroy it. Orwell kept denying his knowledge of the spirit and any involvement in sorcery as such. At one point, Michael, a man who had followed the visionaries closely over the past weeks, confronted Orwell saying that the revelations were clear: the children had seen that he possessed sorcery. Margareth, a woman in her 30s with spiritual vision, then came forward to confront Orwell. He was her Mother's Brother (*papa*) - a relationship that carries high value and implies mutual obligations in Vanuatu as elsewhere in Melanesia (see e.g. Eriksen 2008; Kolshus 2008; Malinowski [1922] 2010; Munn 1992; Rio 2007). Margareth kneeled down in front of him, folded her hands as in prayer, and said:

> *Papa*, I can see that you 'have something' (*holem samting*). It is inside a box in your house. I can see it. I can also see two white corn seeds. I wonder why a rat has not eaten it when you have so much *doti* (garbage) inside your house. Please, you must give up these things now.

That the two seeds had not been eaten by rats indicated for Margareth that they were not normal seeds after all; they were sorcery remedies transformed by Orwell into another form to avoid suspicion. To make Orwell tell the truth about his alleged sorcery, a group of people surrounded him and placed Bibles on his head and around his body. They prayed for him and for the Holy Spirit to work in his heart and mind. Despite the prayer, Orwell still denied any affiliation with sorcery. Because the spirit seemed to have escaped, and Orwell did not admit anything, it was decided that everyone should go back to church to close the night's revival worship session.

Walking back to church, there were many speculations about Orwell and his recent wanderings. A group of young men I joined discussed how Orwell had recently been seen in two different places simultaneously. This, they held, was indicative of him using *laflaf* - the sorcery of duplicating oneself - typically used to direct attention to the version of the self who is engaged in normal activities while another version of the self can perform sorcery behind people's backs. *Laflaf* exemplifies the social insecurity associated with sorcery: there is a gap between the presentation and the self. While a person with nothing to hide is transparent about their activities, the sorcerer conceals his movements because he has something to hide from the public gaze. A woman from Orwell's village commented that she had seen the light in his house turned on the whole previous night. In the morning, she explained, Orwell had carried his mattress to the beach, claiming it was so hot in his house that he could not sleep. The woman concluded that it must had been the Holy Spirit who filled his house and worked in him, making him unable to sleep because he was 'hiding something'. Orwell had for two decades been said to be the main sorcerer on Ahamb. That night, several people argued that if they could only eradicate the spirit they had chased outside his house, they might be able to eradicate all sorcery on the island, once and for all.

Spiritual War and New Insecurity

According to the visionaries' revelations, the anti-sorcery work of the community infuriated sorcerers from all over Malekula. This was not least due to the chasing of the spirit at Orwell's house. Because sorcerers are believed to engage in 'networks' (*netwok*), other sorcerers from Malekula and beyond were aware of the visionaries' attack on Orwell's powers and his public humiliation. Every day, for the next four months, the visionaries conveyed that up to 20 sorcerers from the district were coming in, in invisible form, to kill anyone they could get a hold of on Ahamb. This was partly as revenge, partly to break down the revival, and partly to test their powers against the Holy Spirit. The only way to be protected against the sorcerers, the visionaries instructed, was to pray and follow the directions the Holy Spirit gave them. The main message was that if everyone supported the revival and cooperated, the Holy Spirit would provide absolute spiritual protection of each individual and the community. On the contrary, disobeying the Holy Spirit provided an opening for the sorcerers to attack, putting everyone's life at risk.

The visionaries' detailed description of the sorcerers and their movements created a spiraling moral and existential panic. During the most intensive periods of sorcerer activity, many did not go to their gardens to get food because they were so afraid of being attacked in the bush. As a result, food stocks were dwindling in many homes. Some sturdy bachelors in their mid-20s, who otherwise lived in their own house, were so afraid that they came to sleep at their parents' homes during these periods. Others avoided going to the bathroom at night, fearing they would be attacked by waiting sorcerers. The message from the visionary children was clear: we had to be careful; we should not go anywhere alone in the bush; we had

to keep an eye on the children, and generally look after ourselves. The sorcerers were continuously trying out new techniques to get to the island. However, the visionaries were continuously receiving revelations from the Holy Spirit about their positions and plans, and calmed people down by seemingly putting the necessary measures in place to protect us.

The perceived threat from sorcerers was taken by many as a wake-up call about where one's loyalty should lie, because it mattered. Was it with God or was it with worldly concerns, such as land rights and political positions? The sorcery incidents represented a shift in Ahamb public discourse. They generated a sense of crisis and emergency, associated with the idea of an invisible realm of evil that was growing because people did not take Christian morality seriously (see however Bratrud 2019b, 123-124). Now, it was everyone's responsibility to create change. This perception of crisis led the community to seek refuge *en masse* in church, which became a place to find existential and corporal security.

Eight months into the revival, after four intense months of daily threats of sorcery attacks, five men admitted to having operated as sorcerers and taking part in several killings on Ahamb and its surroundings. Two senior men from the island, who were long feared for being sorcerers - one of them Orwell - were pointed out by the confessors as their sorcery group's leaders. Orwell was even reported to be the 'king' of sorcerers in the entire South Malekula and responsible for more than 30 deaths. After a public hearing that lasted three weeks, a small mob of men took it upon themselves to kill the two alleged sorcerers in order to protect the community from more death and misfortune.[4] From the mob's point of view, the killing was an act of self-defense and a way of restoring security on the island (cf. Siegel 2006). People questioned how they could be safe with sorcerers of this caliber, presumably without scruples, being around their children and families. The idea that an invisible, parallel force was attacking innocent people, whenever it suited, encouraged this sense of crisis. Many felt permanently at risk wherever they were.

The moral and existential panic was mainly due to the presence of sorcerers. In Melanesia, sorcerers can be seen as 'folk devils' *par excellence* as Stanley Cohen (2002) calls socially deviant people who pose a threat to the values and security of society. Despite their brutality, the killings of the two men became a therapeutic relief from this crisis for many people, even though they did not endorse the killing itself. It was as if the two men had become the embodiment of the islanders' generalized fear of evil forces at work in the world (cf. Ashford 2005, 64). The sorcerers were not only perceived to have killed several innocent people. They were also believed to be responsible for numerous instances of sickness, ruined businesses, and disputes that had broken down relationships and community institutions over years and even decades. Building on Rio's (2014) discussion of the many sorcerer

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[4] I was myself in the capital Port Vila when the killing took place but returned to the island three weeks later.

killings in Melanesia recently, we may say that the accused sorcerers were 'sacrificed' for the healing of a community that was longing for new order and security.

Responding to Insecurity in Vanuatu and Euro-American Societies

Although unique in its way, the revival process on Ahamb (and other places in Malekula to which it spread in 2014-2015) shares many characteristics with previous revivals in Melanesia, as summed up by Fraser MacDonald (2019, 392). It generated in many a heartfelt conviction of sin and necessary repentance; it demanded a refusal of traditional spirit forces such as sorcery; it implied situations of collective shaking and crying, and it was characterized by experiences of healing, visions, dreams, and prophesy. Further, I suggest that the revival bears resemblance with much wider social and political processes associated with fear, uncertainty, and (in)security in three ways. First, in that people fear for the dissolution of moral values and security underpinning their society, which in turn mobilizes particular actions in hope for a better future. Second, in that a deviant 'other' is identified as the reason for the crisis and becomes the fulcrum around which the necessary change is imagined and enacted. Third, in that new charismatic actors of governance emerge and gain a following by appearing to take people's concerns seriously in a way that established authorities do not. Consequently, they become figures of hope for betterment and change. I will now discuss how the Ahamb revival can be said to share these characteristics with recent revitalization movements in the UK and USA.

Cathrine Thorleifsson (2019) discusses how in context of the 'refugee crisis' in Europe in 2015, the figure of the Muslim migrant became the center for fear of moral dissolution and insecurity in the UK and elsewhere. Analyzing the environment around far-right political parties, including the United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP), Thorleifsson shows how discourses, images, and tropes were actively casting migrants as fundamental threats to national identity, culture, and security. Particularly male Muslim migrants, imagined as violent and potential terrorists in the post 9/11 context, were portrayed as a threat to social order, imagined sameness, and civilization (see also Ewing 2008). The alien 'crimmigrant' other is, in these contexts, set up in contrast to the utopian European citizen represented by 'ordinary, authentic, white people' where the latter is idealized as the defenders of a civilization and culture under threat (Thorleifsson 2019, 9). I argue that the sorcerer emerges as a similar 'crimmigrant' other in Vanuatu in general and in the revival context in particular. Here, the sorcerer is cast as a dangerous deviant emerging from an alternative version of the world. If not kept out, he will break down the order of society as people know it and pose a serious threat to its security.

As with sorcery in Vanuatu, however, the problems in people's lives that make them subject to blaming particular persons or groups for various problems are

usually complex. Their reasons are located far beyond the agency of the imagined 'other'. Thorleifsson illustrates this point for the UK context by telling the story of Doncaster, which was a thriving coal town in the 1980s. In the late 1980s, most of the coal mines in Doncaster closed due to the Thatcher government's neoliberal restructuring of Britain's manufacturing industry, which was deemed unproductive and uncompetitive. The result for the once thriving industrial town was economic stagnation, deprivation, and increasing unemployment. After the closure of the pits, people who previously depended on the heavy industry for labor found themselves in a vulnerable position in an economic reality where they now had to compete with cheap labor from elsewhere (Thorleifsson 2019, 5). Following the 2004 enlargement of the European Union, Doncaster also received many Eastern European labor migrants, which led to a rapid demographic diversification. As a result of the dissolution of industrialism and empire, increased immigration and diversification, the previously privileged white majority in Doncaster were now facing new struggles over resources, rights, and recognition. In 2015, UKIP obtained 24.1% of local votes in the general elections. In this election, Thorleifsson explains, UKIP appealed to the grievances of dispossessed Doncaster communities, addressing the cultural, economic, and racial anxieties related to such rapid social change. The party promised to restore Doncaster's past greatness by reinvigorating the coal-industry and secure jobs in fossil fuels, while also securing the nation's borders against alleged economic and cultural threats of immigrants. UKIP thus helped people structure their feelings and hopes about the future by drawing on lost values and a sense of order and security from a nostalgic memory of the past (Thorleifsson 2019, 6).

Similarly, in the US national elections in 2016, a predominantly white working class and petty bourgeoisie - feeling deeply alienated by the distant political elites - found hope in Donald Trump's protectionist economic policies and promises to build a wall on the Mexican border (Gusterson 2017). As Keir Martin and Jakob Krause-Jensen argues, Trump reinstated 'a long-lost sense of agency' in these groups, in a society marked by economic deregulation that worked to the disadvantage of the majority of Americans (2017, 5). In this context, Trump became a prophet representing a number of unmet social demands. Simultaneously, he pointed to a longed for but hitherto unrealized possibility: He would make America – or rather, the white and alienated Americans - 'great again'.

On Ahamb, the Holy Spirit and its mediums earned themselves a similar role as that of UKIP and Trump. In life worlds like Ahamb, where malevolent spirits, sorcerers, and the Christian trinity has a place, the Holy Spirit was appealing because it explained the destructive forces that people suspected were at play in society, but that could not easily be grasped or understood with the tools at hand. Further, the Holy Spirit offered techniques for identifying and taking control of these forces. The revival thus resembles the increasingly popular charismatic or Pentecostal Christianity found many other places in the contemporary world, particularly in the Pacific, Africa, and South America: in contexts of social, economic,

and existential insecurity, the Holy Spirit becomes an instrument to map, discern, and heal communities from powers believed to operate in the hidden (Rio, MacCarthy & Blanes 2017, 3-4). Locating the source of one's misfortune in concrete persons or objects, and having the impression of being able to eradicate the problem, generates hope that a better present and future is possible after all.

The paradox for the American case, Martin and Krause-Jensen points out, is that while Trump claims to speak on behalf of the dispossessed working class, he simultaneously celebrates an intensification of a 'winner-takes-all' capitalism that deprives the same people of income, affordable health care, and other forms of security (2017, 6). The same might be said of UKIP. They claim they will nationalize and secure UK jobs, while simultaneously promoting liberal economic policies, describing the movement as being influenced by Margaret Thatcher. Both Trump and UKIP may thus present themselves as the saviors of the dispossessed and alienated, while at the same time promoting the structural conditions for such dispossession and alienation to emerge. Comparably, the revival and Pentecostal Christianity may be presented as the savior of those who feel existentially insecure, while simultaneously promoting the destructive forces that make people feel so insecure at the outset. Indeed, being present on Ahamb as the revival unfolded, I doubt that the movement would have gained the force it did, had it not unveiled the world of sorcery and assured people that protection was available if they only followed the visionaries' revelations. Martin and Krause Jensen (2017, 5) argue that it is Trump's ability to hold such contradictory and mutually exclusive positions together that is at the core of his appeal. Can the same be said of UKIP and Pentecostal Christian movements like the Ahamb revival?

Conclusion

When assessing the mobilizing force of political figures or movements like Trump, the revival or UKIP, it is useful to pay attention to their performative aspects - how they present themselves as the solution to people's problems, the charisma of their leaders, and the organization of their rituals. However, what is most crucial, as Martin and Krause-Jensen (2017, 7-8) points out, is to look at the audience. What is it that people experience to be at stake in their lives, which makes the political figure or movement so meaningful to follow?[5]

As Pedersen and Holbraad (2013) advocate, it is important to have an open ethnographic approach to what people experience to be at stake when they make decisions in the name of security. I argue that both Pentecostal Christian movements and populist movements in Euro-American societies appeal because they appear to take people's everyday concerns seriously in a way that established authorities do not. Martin and Krause-Jensen (2017) and Hugh Gusterson (2017)

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[5] Tereza Kuldova (2019) also takes this 'audience first' perspective in a similar context of uncertainty in her monograph *How Outlaws Win Friends and Influence People* (2019).

suggest that the appeal of Donald Trump to millions of Americans in the presidential election in 2016 was precisely because they experienced that the established political elites no longer had anything to offer them. Moreover, the liberal mainstream demonized the 'Trumpenproletariat', describing their thoughts and actions as backwards or stupid – as expressed powerfully in Hillary Clinton's characterization of Trump supporters as 'a basket of deplorables'. This fortified the image of the established elites' lack of concern for the real problems of those who Trump claims to protect. The feeling of being ignored and even ridiculed left many Americans waiting for someone who would take them seriously – 'no matter how contradictory, bigoted, and bizarre that "someone" might turn out to be' (Martin and Krause-Jensen 2017, 8). Trump became the answer to millions of Americans who felt the establishment no longer had anything to offer them. Ahamb people too had given up that the problems in their community could be solved by their chiefs and original church leaders, as many of them were entangled in the disputes that divided the community. Similar to Trump and UKIP in their respective contexts, the Holy Spirit emerged here as a 'parental figure' that helped modulate people's anxiety and restore a new sense of order and security (see Spiro 1994, 187; Wallace 2003, 21-22).

Fear and insecurity can lead to aggressive strategies of 'othering' and legitimize new ways of surveillance – whether this is by religious visionaries, the state, the military, or other means. Simultaneously, it might keep us from conducting proper analyses of – and respond properly to – what the underlying causes of this fear are (Nussbaum 2018, 61). However, to understand the dynamics behind blame, and any form of mobilization in the name of security and morality, it is crucial to take seriously what morality, (in)security, and problems are for different people in different communities, all things considered. It is also crucial to take seriously the cultural (including ontological), social, political, historical, and economic context in which people's responses to such experiences are shaped. Because the more we reach out to understand difference without demonizing, the more likely we are to mend divisions and to reverse the menacing trends we are seeing in the political, social, and cultural crises of our time.

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Acknowledgements

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