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FEAR AND HOPE IN VANUATU PENTECOSTALISM

Tom Bratrud

Abstract. This article discusses the co-creation of fear and hope in the context of the rapid growth of Pentecostal Christianity in Vanuatu in the South Pacific. I take as my starting point how the conjoining of these sentiments operates in three different contexts: first, the growing dissatisfaction with leaders and the status quo in a rural village, the capital Port Vila and the nation as a whole; second, ambivalent ideas about the appropriate road to economic development; and third, the fear of sorcery and various malevolent spirits. By offering a space through which harmful forces can be targeted, I argue that Pentecostal churches in Vanuatu attract those who hope for moral generation, economic betterment and security from dangerous powers. However, by articulating and targeting sometimes new evil forces, Pentecostal activities may also generate new experiences of risk, fear and insecurity as much as offer relief from them. I therefore argue that the cultivation of fear and hope as opposing forces may have the effect whereby the two reinforce rather than encompass each other.

Pentecostalism, a form of Christianity emphasizing the availability of gifts from the Holy Spirit, including prophecy, spiritual healing and speaking in tongues, is the fastest growing religious movement in the contemporary world (Anderson 2013). First emerging in 1906 at the Azuza Street Revival in Los Angeles, Pentecostalism has since claimed six hundred million converts, a number that is rapidly growing (Robbins 2010:634). The influence of Pentecostalism in the South Pacific nation state of Vanuatu, where I have been engaged in ethnographic fieldwork since 2010,[1] is striking. In 2009, Annelin Eriksen reported that one third of the population of the capital Port Vila had a connection with one of the new Pentecostal churches (2009:177). This proportion is far greater today, both in town and in rural areas, not least due to the ongoing 'Pentecostalization' of the Presbyterian, Catholic and Anglican churches in the country, still the largest churches in terms of members.[2]

In this article, I aim to understand the current appeal of Pentecostalism in Vanuatu through an analysis of how experiences of fear and hope are co-constructed in current contexts of social change. The basis for this analytical approach is my twenty months of fieldwork on Ahamb Island in northern Vanuatu, as well as accounts from the literature showing how notions of fear and insecurity appear to be conjoined with hope in Pentecostal contexts. Several scholars of Melanesia and Africa, for instance, argue that Pentecostal churches in these regions draw their growing popularity largely from their ability to combat sorcery and witchcraft, which are important sources of fear and anxiety in people's everyday lives.[3] Other studies treat their interlocutors' experiences of being 'born again' as Pentecostals as an attempt to overcome hardships and to fulfil

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1. I have conducted a total of twenty months of fieldwork in Vanuatu, most of it on Ahamb Island off Malekula Island. My fieldwork trips lasted seven months in 2010, twelve months in 2014–2015 and one month in 2017.
2. 'Pentecostalization', coined by Henri Gooren (2010), refers to the adaptation of Pentecostal elements by mainline churches, including speaking in tongues and faith-healing. Such adaptations often take place in the context of competition for followers. Pentecostal churches often acquire converts from other churches because of their promotion of direct access to the Holy Spirit and their usually more energetic and dynamic services. See Bratrud (2018) and Eriksen (2017) for accounts of this development in Vanuatu.
3. See e.g. Newell (2007), Rio, MacCarthy and Blanes (2017).

failed promises of political and spiritual salvation made during the colonial and postcolonial periods (Eriksen 2009, Marshall 2009). A third strain of work in this area highlights how, in the context of new forms of capitalism, people's heightened sense of insecurity, in tandem with their hopes for material development, fuels a desire for spiritual empowerment that many find in Pentecostal churches.[4]

Given Pentecostal churches' universal emphasis on healing (Brown 2011), creating boundaries separating 'good' from 'evil' (Eriksen 2017) and on breaking with the past to be 'born again' into a better life (Engelke 2010), I argue that notions of fear often work actively alongside notions of hope in Pentecostal contexts. This combination of fear and hope in religious mobilization is nothing new in Melanesia. Indeed, it can be argued that the millenarian movements or 'cargo cults' that emerged in the colonial period (particularly in the 1940s and 1950s) were a response to similar sentiments. In the so-called cargo-cults, Melanesians turned to traditional or innovative religious ritual to access 'cargo' – often understood to mean money or all sorts of manufactured goods, such as vehicles, packaged foods, guns and tools (Jebens 2004). However, as Lamont Lindstrom has pointed out (1993, 2004), cargo movements were never really about cargo and never really about a future of riches; instead they were almost always about the search for a new social and moral order that would ensure local sovereignty and create new unity and a new spirit of government. In this sense, it can be fruitful to see cargo cults as a forerunner of current Pentecostal movements in Melanesia. I argue that both phenomena are important sites for anthropological investigations in that they offer insights into people's concerns and aspirations as well as into how they might mobilize to create desired change.

The present article is organized into five main sections. First, I provide a brief introduction to fear, hope and Pentecostalism in Vanuatu. I then discuss the significance of Pentecostalism in the context of the growing dissatisfaction with leaders and the status quo on the levels of the rural village, the capital Port Vila and the nation. This section is followed by a discussion of the ambivalence of Pentecostal ideas about economic development. I then move on to discuss the efforts of Ahamb people to eradicate sorcery and evil powers with the help of Pentecostal 'tools' including spiritual vision. I conclude with a short discussion of how fear and hope may be coupled in Pentecostal contexts and how their co-construction might constitute a significant driving force for the religion's growth in Vanuatu. An important point I make in the article is to emphasise the importance of a culturally and contextually sensitive approach to people's experiences of fear and hope. Regardless of the ontological status one ascribes to ideas about sorcery, evil spirits or the Holy Spirit, I argue that it is important to take these ideas seriously as real categories for those who experience them as real. Only then is it possible to understand how notions of fear and hope may develop into social action that can be surprising, invigorating and horrifying, as I will show with examples.

Fear, hope and Pentecostalism in Vanuatu

'Hope' is a concept that has caused much conceptual confusion in the social sciences. It is often coupled with desire (which has received more attention), sometimes as a feeling equivalent to it, and sometimes as its passive counterpart. When hope and desire are treated separately, desire is typically seen as an effective and presupposing human agency, while hope typically depends on some other agency for its fulfilment, whether it

[4] See e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff (2002), Cox (2018).

is God, fate, or something else entirely (Crapanzano 2003:6). I therefore argue that hope suits Pentecostalism and the idea that the Holy Spirit is available to its believers and can perform miracles at any place and time. Morten Axel Pedersen defines hope as 'what people do when they have no firm ground, in the form of a stable economic, religious, or political cosmos, on which to build their ideas of the future' (2012:141). Pedersen's definition teases out, although indirectly, the cultivation of hope alongside experiences of insecurity, anxiety and fear, which I will discuss later.

'Fear' has not received much explicit attention in anthropology, although most studies of violence, conflict and oppression may be said to be about fear in one way or another.[5] In my approach to fear, I find Pedersen and Martin Holbraad's efforts to couple feelings of fear and danger with (in)security useful. In their book "Times of security" (2013a), they insist on acknowledging that (in)security means different things to different people. This acknowledgement resonates with Joel Robbins' (2013) reminder that different people have extremely different senses of what constitutes a good life. Similarly, people also have different perceptions of how their notions of a good life might be threatened. By combining ideas of 'the good' (including hope) and of insecurity (including fear), I aim at a sensitive approach to the potentially multi-faceted stakes people have in their everyday lives, which emphasises in(security) as culturally, socially and historically variable.

Given the irreducibly temporal, future-oriented character of both fear and hope, it is interesting to ask how particular ideas about time and experiences of it play into images of hope and fear (cf. Pedersen and Holbraad 2013b:1). As Robbins has argued (2007), the Christian notion of time is largely based on the concept of rupture. Particularly among Pentecostals, the idea of breaking with one's past to be born again into a new life is central. Moreover, for Pentecostals, as for other Christians, the expectation of the Day of Judgement – that is, the moment when God chooses who will be saved and granted eternal life in Heaven and who will be condemned – is the paramount existential moment of truth.[6] During my own fieldwork, it was frequently stated by my interlocutors that this moment may come when one least expects it – therefore one must be prepared. Because the status of one's fate is generally based on how one has lived on earth, it is important for Pentecostals to 'live well and [be] Godly' (Eriksen, Blanes and MacCarthy 2019:148). Notions of the moral good have a temporal dimension that couples fear with hope regarding what one will encounter at this decisive future moment in time.

Vanuatu is an archipelago consisting of 82 islands, of which 65 are inhabited. It is located approximately 1,750 km east of northern Australia, fifty kilometres northeast of New Caledonia, west of Fiji and southeast of the Solomon Islands. Until independence in 1980, it was known as the Anglo-French Condominium of the New Hebrides. At the time of the 2009 census, its total population was 234,023 (Vanuatu National Statistics Office 2009 **[not in the list of references]**). Nationals and citizens of Vanuatu are commonly referred to as 'ni-Vanuatu', a term I will use several times in this article.

In approaching Pentecostalism in Vanuatu, I agree with Eriksen and Rio that it offers a 'new order of life', a new way of living and thinking, rather than just being something that only characterizes particular churches.[7] Charismatic ideas and practices are now influencing Presbyterian, Catholic and other churches in towns and many rural villages, and not only the self-declared Pentecostal churches. During my fieldwork in

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[5] See, however, Linda Green's documentation of people's fears in contexts of structural violence in Guatemala (1999).

[6] See Jebens (2000, 2005), Robbins (2002, 2004).

[7] Eriksen (2009, 2017), Eriksen and Rio (2017)

2010, the Presbyterian churches of Port Vila and Malekula talked very little about the Holy Spirit. Church services followed a predetermined order of hymn-singing, a sermon and prayers led by the Pastor or Elders, and frequently had the effect of causing worshippers to fall asleep. However, during my fieldwork trips in 2014 and 2017 Pentecostal elements like clapping hands, worshippers' emotional cries for the Holy Spirit and the uncovering of spiritual gifts had become normal parts of Presbyterian Church life. This 'Pentecostalization' of the Presbyterian Church in Vanuatu, including Ahamb, was largely due to a charismatic revival that started in South West Bay in 2013, which I describe in the next section.[8] However, the core ideas and perspectives of the Pentecostal Christian worldview have not just become relevant in the church context. Rather, as Eriksen and Rio argue (2017:191), they seem to be 'structuring everyday life in a total sense'. People relate to the Holy Spirit everywhere, not only in the churches: In island villages and urban residential areas people anointed with the Spirit carry out spiritual warfare raids to clean properties of sorcery and evil spirits; in school playgrounds pupils talk about their experiences of being possessed; in living rooms families watch music videos by Pentecostal singing groups; and in the market places of Port Vila healing sessions take place among the selling of fruits and vegetables. In many places in the archipelago, both urban and rural, Pentecostalism is affecting everyone, whether one is a member of a Pentecostal church or not.[9] On Ahamb Island, for instance, which is predominantly Presbyterian and to which I now turn, a Pentecostal-style Christian revival movement that developed during my fieldwork in 2014 grew into what Marcel Mauss (2016) would probably have called a 'total social phenomenon'. For several months it encompassed all sectors of society and its institutions, leaving an indelible mark on this island.

Political change in the village and nation

Ahamb is a small island of about 600 people just off the central south coast of the larger island of Malekula in northern Vanuatu. The majority of the islanders are subsistence farmers and fishers whose daily lives rely on gardening work on mainland Malekula. Ahamb was home to one of the first mission churches in the Malekula District, a Presbyterian Church probably formed in 1902 (Miller 1989:2, 512). Because of the island's history as a Christian centre, but also its primary school, secondary school, health-clinic, trade stores and place of call for cargo ships between Vanuatu's towns Port Vila and Luganville, Ahamb is regarded as a hub of South Malekula.[10]

Over the past few decades, Ahamb society has suffered from several serious land disputes and clan-based conflicts over authority. These disputes led a group of men to stage a 'coup' against the island's Council of Chiefs during my first fieldwork in 2010, which did not help the tense situation in the community. When I came back for my second period of fieldwork at the beginning of 2014, many people expressed resentment at a society in steady moral decline. Several disputes had intensified and were causing divisions among families, community work had more or less ceased, and there was a sense of increasing sorcery activity, both in Malekula and nationwide. Many Ahamb felt anxious about the situation, but found it difficult to come up with a solution that would change the status quo.

[8] See also Bratrud (2018).

[9] Eriksen (2017:168), Eriksen and Rio (2017:191)

[10] The secondary school moved to the mainland in 2010, but several staff and board members are from Ahamb.

In November 2013, two months before I arrived for fieldwork, a charismatic Christian revival movement developed in the Presbyterian churches of South West Bay, a three to five hours boat ride east of Ahamb. A revival of this kind refers to a spiritual awakening following an experience of the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit. This presence causes believers to have experiences of miracles, acquire a new and convincing awareness of sin, and feel a strong desire for repentance and humility. A distinctive feature of the South West Bay revival was the claim that children and young people were being 'slain in the Spirit' – that is, being possessed by the Holy Spirit, collapsing on to the ground overcome by the Spirit's power, and conveying spiritual visions and revelations to the community. As a result of the revival, according to rumours that reached Ahamb, troublemakers and sorcerers in South West Bay had surrendered to the Lord and were now worshipping alongside fellow community members night and day. In the hope that a revival could help solve some of the problems on Ahamb, the island's church leaders contacted the revivalists in South West Bay to invite them to initiate a revival there as well.

The revival was introduced to Ahamb in March 2014 and drew large masses to church for nightly praise-and-worship services and prayer sessions. It did not take long before children and young people – around thirty at the most – also started receiving spiritual gifts of 'vision' and conveying revelations from the Holy Spirit to the community. The revelations typically concerned what was 'good', what was 'bad' and how people had to live to receive salvation, given that the Last Day of Judgement was approaching. The visionaries stressed that it was important to observe these revelations because the Holy Spirit did not want anyone to end up in eternal punishment. The revival quickly gained supporters in the community, and both women and men, including chiefs and other leaders, were active in church and tried to observe most of the orders that came with the children's revelations. As a result, kava bars were closing down,[11] and several disputants came to church to settle their quarrels and to ask their opponents, the community and the Holy Spirit for forgiveness. Furthermore a large-scale dispute destined for the island's village court was postponed indefinitely after an agreement between the parties and the chiefs because the revival was taking up all the parties' time and attention.

While the revival demonstrates how Pentecostal tools like possession by the Holy Spirit can be used as a means of change in the village setting, Eriksen (2009, 2017) demonstrates how Pentecostal mobilization in Vanuatu today is also about breaking with established structures of domination on the level of the nation. In Vanuatu there is a widespread notion that the country's leaders, who come from the privileged elite, have not managed to change the country for the better since independence in 1980. These sentiments are particularly strong in the capital Port Vila: There is a lack of education and employment opportunities, there is an intense commodification of land around the town, land that had previously been used for subsistence and inexpensive housing, while the current context of consumerism fuelled by Chinese stores, restaurants and coffee shops creates a growing and visible divide between those on low incomes and the wealthy.[12] While many struggle to make ends meet, as one of Eriksen's informants in Port Vila phrased it, 'the state leaders are driving away to their fancy dinners in their fancy cars' (Eriksen 2009:191).

[11] Kava is a mildly intoxicating drink made from the kava plant (Piper methysticum). Kava was problematic, the visionaries proclaimed, because it made drinkers 'drunk on a different spirit', making them too lazy to work or to remain alert in church. Kava also blocked its drinker's capacity to receive the Holy Spirit, as this required a clear mind and alertness. See Bratrud (2019).

[12] See Cummings (2013), Kraemer (2017), Mitchell (2011:38), Rio (2011).

Against this backdrop, Eriksen shows powerfully how the Pentecostal churches in the capital Port Vila, which emphasize the need to turn in a different direction or 'break with the past', become appealing and meaningful as a critique of the current order of the government. One may say that the Pentecostal potential of 'breaking with the past' and being 'born again' as something new brings hope of eradicating the insecurity people feel because of the political developments in the country. Eriksen suggests that, for the less advantaged in Port Vila, leaving the mainline churches of colonial origin (Presbyterian, Catholic and Anglican) for Pentecostal churches is a political statement. In Vanuatu one can draw a simplified genealogy between the first Christian converts, the pre-independence village leaders, the fighters for independence and the country's current ruling class. In this scenario the first converts became the first village leaders under the colonial administration, they or their children became the prominent leaders of the independence movement, and the freedom fighters later became the backbone of the new state apparatus (Eriksen 2009:179). Because the country's elite was so closely tied to the established churches, breaking with these churches may be interpreted as a symbolic and material break with the colonial era and the independence the elite created (or failed to create) (Eriksen 2009:189). In the view of Eriksen's informants, neither the dominant mainline churches nor the national leaders associated with them have demonstrated the efficacy necessary to create change, let alone any improvement.

Similar to the charismatic revival movement on Ahamb, the Pentecostal churches in Port Vila display their ability to break with the past and transform society by engaging in spiritual forms of protest. Eriksen demonstrates one example of a female prayer group in Port Vila called 'Mothers of the nation'. They describe themselves as 'doctors operating on a patient', the patient being the country (Eriksen 2009:191). Eriksen shows how members of this prayer group, like similar groups, are trying to change Vanuatu by becoming possessed with the Holy Spirit and targeting a variety of potent issues with prayer, including corrupt politicians, new bills coming up in Parliament, the election of new ministers and a trade agreement being planned with China that they considered bad for Vanuatu (2009:192). These examples suggest the existence of a fear that the current order and those who are behind it lack the efficacy to create improvements and change and in some cases are driven by evil. The Pentecostal framework therefore offers hope for change by providing a space in which ordinary people blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit can attack the forces they believe are behind these problems and heal their village, island and nation.

The hopes and fears of economic development

Many anthropologists have pointed out the intimate relationship between economic activity and Pentecostal Christian life.[13] Central to these discussions has been the Pentecostal message of God's will for believers to be rich, healthy and successful – an ethic that can be traced to the biblical notion of the Abrahamic covenant and 'the idea of blessing coming to those who are faithful to God' (Coleman 1995:167). The basic notion here is that one gives gifts to the church, often referred to as 'seeds', and that these are believed to carry the promise of a divinely increased 'harvest' (Haynes 2012:124). This form of Pentecostalism is often referred to as a 'prosperity gospel' or a 'health and wealth gospel' (Coleman 2000). The growth of this variant of Pentecostalism has been connected to economic changes, for example, from industrial

[13] See e.g. Coleman (2000), Comaroff and Comaroff (1999, 2000), Haynes (2012).

capitalism to what has been termed ‘casino capitalism’.[14] The baseline argument here is that a transformation in the relationship between labour and capital has made the former invisible in the search for instant returns in the financial market (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002:297). Subsequently, when there is no longer a visible and ‘rational’ way of acquiring capital through labour – when one has to depend on luck and probability – spiritual empowerment becomes important. In this context, Pentecostal Christianity, with its emphasis on miracles as a real possibility, like other forms of spirituality (including sorcery), becomes an attractive framework for people’s hopes of achieving success (Eriksen 2009:176).

‘Casino-capitalism’ is to some extent also prevalent in Vanuatu, particularly around Port Vila. Already in the 1970s, Vanuatu (then the New Hebrides) was turned into an offshore financial centre or ‘tax haven’ by the colonial authorities. The Government and private companies have since given the potential freedom from taxes as a reason to invest and settle in Vanuatu. These conditions, combined with the image of an ‘untouched paradise’, have made Vanuatu a popular destination for foreign investors (Rawlings 1999:39). Investors who settle in Vanuatu need to lease land from indigenous landowners, creating a lot of wealth, at least in local terms, for the latter. There are huge disparities in wealth between on the one hand landowners who lease out land and those who are lucky enough to be hired by expatriate residents or the tourism industry and on the other hand those who are unemployed or rely on odd jobs as construction workers, cleaners or bus drivers. The latter, particularly those who live in Port Vila, where living expenses are high, find themselves in situations of constant scarcity and uncertainty (Rio 2017:78). Under these circumstances it is not surprising that the prosperity gospel, where miracles can happen, strikes a popular chord (Eriksen 2009:183).

In the joint universe between ‘casino capitalism’ and Pentecostalism, there is not necessarily a connection between means and ends. During my fieldwork in Malekula and Port Vila, I have heard countless stories of miracles related to achieving sudden material prosperity. The stories typically depict a ni-Vanuatu person who encounters an unknown beggar, foreigner or ‘businessman’. After helping this person, usually in an unselfish fashion with no expectation of return, the ni-Vanuatu unexpectedly receives a large sum of money or a material status object like a car. The punch line of these stories is typically that the unknown mystical person was Jesus, who was rewarding the ni-Vanuatu person for his humility, unselfishness and kindness.[15] The message is thus that miracles do happen and can occur when they are least expected as long as one lives a morally good Christian life and has trust in Jesus or the Holy Spirit. Economic development in Vanuatu can be characterized by a growth in inequality, especially in the urban centres, where Pentecostal churches are growing most rapidly.[16] However, in ‘casino capitalism’, money, a job or healing from sickness have a tendency to turn up suddenly and through new and unexpected avenues. The Pentecostal emphasis on miracles, as in the story above, becomes a vehicle of hope in this context.[17]

In many Pentecostal contexts, the view of prosperity that it is about sowing seeds in return for a harvest has – to some extent – implied a turn away from traditional

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[14] Comaroff and Comaroff (2002), Strange (1986). The term ‘casino capitalism’ refers to that aspect of the international financial market where speculation is rewarded and leads to growth and expansion. The gaming room has become iconic of capital in this regard in its ‘capacity to yield value without human input’ (Comaroff and Comaroff 2002:298).

[15] This understanding is based on Bible verses like Matthew 25:34–36 and Hebrews 13:2.

[16] Eriksen (2009), Rio (2011, 2017), Taylor (2015)

[17] However, Pentecostal churches not only appeal to poor and marginalized groups, but also the middle classes and elites, as shown by John Cox (2018) for Papua New Guinea.

kinship-based exchange and distribution practices to church-based fund-raising and an importance placed on offerings and tithes.[18] On Ahamb, for instance, there has been a growing awareness of the burden of traditional exchange ceremonies over the decade I have worked there. This tendency, I argue, should be contrasted with the situation of their prosperity-oriented neighbours and town-dwelling relatives, with whom the Ahamb engage and compare themselves. A central but resource-costly and time-consuming ceremonial context on Ahamb are the four ritual feasts accompanying a person's death, in the national language Bislama called 'kakae blong ded' (literally, 'death feast'), which stretch over a period of a hundred days (the first feast on the day of the death, the second on the fifth, the third on the twentieth and the fourth on the hundredth day after the death). The mourning period involves several communal practices symbolizing sympathy and fellowship in the loss of a loved one. For the first five days after death, men and women neither change their clothes nor wash. No one should do any major work during these days other than going to the garden for the food they need. Until the twentieth day after the death, people from all over the island provide food for the family of the deceased and those who are staying with them. From the day of the death, men let their beards grow and do not shave before completing the mourning period on the hundredth day, which represents the completion of the mourning period. Practically every one of the island's 600 inhabitants attends this impressively crowded event. There is kava drinking for the men, large amounts of the popular local pudding *narong* ('laplap' in Bislama) are spread out on mats, sometimes TVs show DVDs with a Christian content or American action movies, and electric lights illuminate a vast area where hundreds of people are gathered. All of these practices involve a major and generalized exchange of both sentiments and material objects that are both symbolically and practically important for creating and maintaining relationships and solidarity.

However, during my fieldwork in 2014 a group of men in my village on Ahamb grew restless after the second day following a death. While relaxing and discussing some recent events on the island, a man in his fifties named Neal declared it would be much better if 'our custom' (*kastom blong yumi*) on Ahamb could be changed. Neal had in-laws on the island of Atchin in north-east Malekula, where prosperity-oriented Seventh-day Adventists (SDA) were dominant, and he spoke at length about how they had changed their mortuary ritual to include just one feast. 'And look at them – they have boats, permanent houses […]. We are wasting time here ('Yumi stap westem taem nomo')!' Neal's comments demonstrate the fear of 'falling behind' in terms of a modern lifestyle. While Ahamb is the 'town' of South Malekula, with several trade stores, a health clinic, a primary school and a church, it is small compared to its neighbours Lamap and the Maskelyne Islands to the east or to South West Bay in the west, all of which have airfields, roads capable of taking trucks, village hospitals and more.

Annelin Eriksen, Ruy Blanes and Michelle MacCarthy (2019) take up the notion of 'waste' as a moral turn toward a specific idea of productivity that they relate to Pentecostalism. 'Do not waste your time' ('Yu no westem taem') is a phrase very commonly heard around the capital Port Vila, but also increasingly on the outer islands like Ahamb.[19] The phrase refers to the literal meaning of being efficient, while also connoting a more subtle moral attitude of not being lazy (and hence being productive). However, it also suggests a message about the ways in which the potential for productivity should be seen, understood and grasped (Eriksen, Blanes and MacCarthy 2019:74). Eriksen points out that, during her fieldwork in 2014 in the neighbourhoods

[18] Eriksen, Blanes and MacCarthy (2019), MacCarthy (2017).

[19] See Kolshus (2016).

of Freswota and Ohlen in Port Vila, to her surprise there was a small trade store in nearly every other household, whereas a decade earlier there had been only a few locally run stores for every block. Store-keepers bought small quantities of staples like rice, noodles and canned fish wholesale, which they sold to themselves, relatives and neighbours for a small profit but where the selling price was set lower than in other stores. 'It is an easy way to make money', an informant told Eriksen. Therefore 'everyone should have a store'. There seemed to be a moral imperative, Eriksen suggests, that there should be a small shop or store in virtually every household in these neighbourhoods. Because potentially there was a small profit to be made, not to do so was lazy, even close to immoral.[20]

This form of Pentecostal economic thinking, marked by a morality of productivity, often with the result that resources are retained by smaller social units, is problematic in Vanuatu. At the time of my fieldwork in 2014, the National Bank of Vanuatu (NBV) had recently introduced their 'Rural banking' scheme to Ahamb, which encouraged a similar economic logic. Under the scheme, bank employees visit rural villages twice a month to provide information on savings and loans, while offering financial services such as creating bank accounts for villagers and accepting villagers' deposits. Sebastian, a prosperity-oriented Ahamb man and SDA in his forties, was enthusiastic about the new service. One morning, when the NBV representative had visited the island, Sebastian came to my house. While we were chatting, he pulled out his bank book and showed me that he had deposited some large amounts, around 10,000 VT (ca. USD 86), twice over the past few months. I could also see that he had deposited 200 VT (ca. USD 1.7) on that day. 'It is not much, but I keep depositing when I can!', Sebastian exclaimed enthusiastically, while smiling and raising his hand to initiate a high-five. However, not everyone shared Sebastian's enthusiasm for the banking scheme. Simeon, a man in his fifties, expressed his discontent with it a few days later, when we met at the house of a mutual friend:

> With this kind of life, soon there will be no more gifts, nothing will be free. Sharing and so on, all of this will cease to exist. We must be careful when the bank is coming to do workshops. They want people to take loans and place our money with them only. Today, people do not want to give or spend their money all about, for instance, at fundraisings. People only want to receive. They do not want to give. The bank is talking about savings. It is good because of security. But they are also saying that we must look after our money (*holem taet mane blong yumi*). Before, I did not worry about money. I helped this and that person with school fees, no problem! A life with the bank means we are losing Christianity. For us who believe in God, our bank is up there with God.

It is often true of Vanuatu, as Adam Ashford (2005:34) notes for South Africa, that, no matter how wealthy you are and no matter how many people you assist, many more will feel excluded from your beneficence and generosity and take your exclusion of them as an affront. The feeling of being left out of progress provokes suspicion of and reflections on inequality, poverty, development and their absence. This may lead to envy, jealousy and anger, causing someone affected by these emotions to inflict sorcery on someone else, either to cause hurt, level out differences or achieve wealth for himself. Simeon was an outspoken supporter of both traditional ways (*kastom*) and Christianity on Ahamb, and considered sharing and 'love' to be core principles in both frameworks. However, he was forthright over issues he had strong opinions about,

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[20] Eriksen, Blanes and MacCarthy (2019:74). See also Rio (2017) on how people use stores in Port Vila as a way to justify their inability to give freely.

whether the loss of traditional values or his claims to land landownership. For different but related reasons, people also suspected him of being a sorcerer, for which he was tragically killed during the Ahamb revival, as I describe in the next section. In connecting Simeon’s fear of exclusion with the accusation that he was a sorcerer, it is useful to understand sorcery in Vanuatu not as a retreat to ‘tradition’, but rather, as most contemporary scholars of Melanesia and Africa have shown, as a product of new forms of discontent with a modernity that brings insecurity, socioeconomic inequality and declining solidarity.[21] From one perspective, the ‘prosperity gospel’, with its emphasis on productivity, saving and self-reliance, reinforces the conditions in which sorcery is practised because it makes people afraid of being left out of social relationships. People’s hopes for economic change through the ‘prosperity gospel’ thus simultaneously produce the conditions for their fear of sorcery. As I shall show in the next section, people’s fear of sorcery may further reinforce their notion that Pentecostal spiritual elements are necessary because they are the best, even the only, tools with which one can fight the sorcerers’ power. The situation is therefore one in which fear and hope, sorcery and Pentecostalism, are mutually reinforcing, depending on each other to some extent, rather than encompassing each other.

Eradicating sorcery and evil spirits

The 2014 Ahamb revival had been going on for two months when it suddenly increased in seriousness and significance for the islanders. One afternoon, a group of visionary children who were walking around praying for people were ‘slain in the Spirit’ outside the island’s community hall. When they woke up, they conveyed revelations saying that a sorcery stone had been buried in the area and had to be removed. The stone had been placed there by ill-meaning sorcerers to bring damage to the community. This discovery of sorcery spurred an intense search for more sorcery and evil powers whose locations and character had appeared before the visionaries in their visions and revelations. Every day for the next three months the visionaries would take the remaining community members to different places on the island, where they ‘saw’ sorcery or evil spirits. Together the visionaries and community members prayed against the evil powers and removed objects the visionaries claimed were infused with them.[22]

While the community was praying over pathways, removing stones and cutting down trees that the visionaries said contained evil powers, the visionaries also realized that sorcerers from around the district had become furious with them for removing and neutralizing their powers. As a result, they started ‘seeing’ how, every day, a whole network of sorcerers were coming to Ahamb in invisible form to stop the visionaries’ activities and try to kill them. This mobilized the community in a ‘spiritual war’ with the sorcerers. There were intense prayer sessions counselling, and a re-organization of daily activities to protect the children and each other and to keep the sorcerers, who operated in the spiritual realm, off the island (Bratrud 2017). The discovery of sorcery and the ensuing battle against the attacking, invisible sorcerers generated a sense of moral and existential panic. Many came crying to church, saying they could not sleep at night because they were so afraid of the sorcerers. Several people I knew stopped going to the gardens for fear of being attacked by sorcerers hiding in the bush, and a number of others, including some sturdy men I knew who would not normally admit to being

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[21] Comaroff and Comaroff (1993), Eves (2000), Geschiere (1997), Rio (2002, 2010)

[22] Because I was present on Ahamb during the first nine months of the revival, I became caught up in these events for several months, both voluntarily and involuntarily.

afraid of anything, expressed a fear of sleeping alone or going to the bathroom at night for the same reason. The notion that sorcerers were omnipresent, but that the Holy Spirit offered the necessary protection because the Christian God is higher in the cosmological hierarchy than the traditional spirits, strengthened people's support for the revival. Learning about the potency of the evil powers, few were willing to take the risk of not supporting the movement, at least to some extent. Their hopes of security depended on the visionaries and the continued presence of the Holy Spirit.

Despite the precariousness of the situation, some men expressed doubts and rejected the visionaries and their revelations, for three main reasons. First, some men found the visions unrealistic. Second, some men found it hard to accept that children should occupy such a crucial position in society. Third, the visionaries were criticizing men heavily for drinking kava, which is an important aspect of male socializing.[23] According to the visionaries, however, the sceptics represented a serious risk to the community because their doubts provided 'openings' in the Spirit's protection of the island. Only if people were open to and receptive and supportive of the Holy Spirit could the latter work strongly enough to keep the increasingly aggressive sorcerers away.

Some Ahamb church leaders were also ambivalent towards the movement. One of them was Elder Ken, a man in his late forties. Ken was among the most dedicated Christians I know, but he rarely came to revival worship. He was criticized for this by revival supporters, who said he was jealous and could not accept the situation of the children leading the church. People complained about Ken and his supporters, saying: 'If the Church Elders are not coming to church, how can we expect that ordinary people do so?' I often visited Ken when I was in his village. One day we started talking about his experience of the revival. He claimed he was happy for the revival, but was unsure of whether or not the visionaries' revelations were always being interpreted correctly. He did not like there being so much talk of sorcery (*posen*) and evil spirits (*devel*) in the church. It went against his beliefs (*bilif*), he said, and continued:

> If we talk about *posen* and *devel*, it makes people afraid. That gives Satan power. When we believe and pray, we must trust that God is protecting us. If the sorcerers are really so threatening as the visionaries claim, have our decades of prayer against sorcery been in vain? Have they not worked?

Ken's latter questions refer to the enduring work of the Ahamb Presbyterian Church to counter sorcery by burying bibles around the island and the pledge, the 'Bible Operation', that everyone in the community has made annually since 2007 promising not to engage in sorcery. Ken found the theology of the revival ambiguous: 'We teach belief, but we also teach fear. That makes people confused', he argued. Ken's concerns resonate with anthropologists working on Pentecostalism and witchcraft in Africa, who argue that Pentecostal Christianity has taken on the very logic of witchcraft it is supposed to oppose and thus made the church a part of the witchcraft problem as much as a solution to it.[24] This is because the church not only recognizes witchcraft as a real and powerful force, but also because it attracts supporters by building on witchcraft discourses. The Pentecostal gaze that discerns evil spirits and sorcery was thus not only a relief from current existential fears, it also brought the threat of evil powers into the church in new and more explicit ways and intensified people's fear of them. This point resonates with Radcliffe-Brown's critique of Malinowski's(1954) view of ritual as a

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[23] See Bratrud (2019).

[24] See Meyer (1999), Newell (2007).

relief in situations of uncertainty and anxiety. Radcliffe-Brown argues that it is the ritual itself that produces uncertainty and anxiety. As he phrases it with respect to the Andaman Islands:

> If it were not for the existence of the rite and the beliefs associated with it the individual would feel no anxiety […]. [T]he psychological effect of the rite is to create in him a sense of insecurity or danger. It seems very unlikely that an Andaman Islander would think that it is dangerous to eat dugong or pork or turtle meat if it were not for the existence of a specific body of ritual the ostensible purpose of which is to protect him from those dangers (Radcliffe-Brown 1933:39, also quoted in Homans 1941:169).

Eight months after the revival had been initiated, and after five months of 'spiritual warfare', five men admitted to having worked as sorcerers and having taken part in several killings on Ahamb using sorcery. The five men pointed out two senior men, among them Simeon, both long-time sorcery suspects in the community, as leaders of their sorcery group. One of them had allegedly caused more than thirty deaths in recent decades, in addition to numerous cases of sickness, ruined businesses, and other types of misfortune. The five men gave vivid accounts of several killings they had taken part in, and they handed over to the community sorcery items they had been using, though the two senior men did not part with their supposed remedies. Fearing for the security and future of the island, a small mob of furious men took it upon themselves to kill the two men mentioned in order to protect the community.[25] From the mob's point of view, the killing was an act of self-defence and a way of restoring safety on the island. Given how afraid Ahamb people are of sorcery, in all its brutality the attack became a way for these men to close the main channel from which incomprehensible deaths and misfortunes are believed to occur, thus 'taking back control over the circumstances of life' (Rio 2014:324). It was an action of hope based in fear, a fearful act with a hopeful goal.

The co-construction of fear and hope

Eriksen (2009) argues that the mass mobilization of people in Vanuatu to join Pentecostal churches largely rests on a desire for radical change in society. Many of the Pentecostal churches she has studied in Port Vila proclaim intense dissatisfaction with the status quo, as did the Pentecostal-like revival on Ahamb. Simultaneously they offer solutions for change through the identification of 'evil' and going to 'war' against forces of the invisible realm that they believe are corrupting leaders, the public and, in Eriksen's case, the dominant churches. In Vanuatu, where churches define the community to a significant extent, establishing an alternative to the dominant church is itself a demonstration of dissatisfaction and a desire for change.[26] Many of these new outbreak churches in Vanuatu, urban and rural, are Pentecostal.[27] The new Pentecostal churches represent a break with the dominant structures to which the mainline churches are central. Pentecostal movements thus constitute a critical space in which to articulate

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[25] See Bratrud (2017).

[26] See Eriksen (2008:105). This is also the case elsewhere in Melanesia. See McDougall (2016:184) for the Solomon Islands and Handman (2015) for Papua New Guinea.

[27] Eriksen (2012), Kolshus (2016), Taylor (2015). Of three small outbreak churches on Ahamb, two are Pentecostal (the Neil Thomas Ministry and the Bible Teaching Ministry).

a new social order and a new form of independence from existing structures of domination.[28]

I suggest that the conjunction of hopeful projects based in fear or fearful projects with hopeful goals brings hope and fear together in people's strategies for managing complex processes of social change. In times of insecurity, worry and fear, the Holy Spirit appeals because it makes intelligible the destructive forces that one suspects are at play in society, but that cannot easily be grasped or understood. These forces my consist of corrupt politicians, reactionary church leaders, traditionalists slowing down development or sorcerers – all local manifestations of destruction that, in the universal Pentecostal cosmology, are classified as 'evil'. The Holy Spirit offers techniques for taming these forces and taking control of them. As Harry West observed, Pentecostal instruments 'see the unseeable' in order to 'know the unknowable, and [...] make sense of the senseless'.[29]

In the case of the Ahamb revival, Pentecostal tools to identify the hidden world of sorcery were particularly important in attracting followers. If sorcery is the main fear of people in Vanuatu, 'emerging from an ambiguous, uncertain realm, beyond purely human capacity' (Rio 2014:321), it is not difficult to understand that churches that demonstrate efficacy in controlling these forces easily capture the hearts and minds of those who fear them. However, the rise of the panic resulting in the fatal murder of the two men who were feared to be sorcerers shows that the Pentecostal targeting of evil may in fact reinforce or create new notions of risk, fear and worry as much as it brings relief to these experiences. To paraphrase Radcliffe-Brown, in his critique of Malinowski, one may say that it was the Pentecostal ritual itself, in its identification of sorcery, that triggered the fear that caused the killing. Thus, it might be argued that both fear and hope were cultivated as opposing forces that had an effect when they were mutually reinforced. In such situations, it is tempting to quote former US President Franklin D. Roosevelt's first inauguration address in 1933, that 'the only thing we have to fear is fear itself'.[30]

However, I think there is much to learn from the fear, hope and notions of (in)security that surface in Pentecostal contexts in Vanuatu. I am sympathetic to Knut Rio, Michelle MacCarthy and Ruy Blanes's (2017:3) argument that much of the appeal of Pentecostal churches worldwide is that they take seriously the fears and worries of their grassroots supporters. These are fears and worries that politicians, policy-makers, NGOs and human rights organizations do not necessarily understand and may fail to address. Pentecostal churches, however, are often more explicit in acknowledging the gap between official politics and grassroots concerns, and they target this gap as both an existential and a governmental problem (Rio, MacCarthy and Blanes 2017:3). One powerful example is Eriksen's ethnography of the 'Mothers of the nation' prayer group in Port Vila. Here, in the absence of state initiatives, the Pentecostals are placing their hopes for new national unity and economic development in their own hands through prayer missions and the church. A similar example from Ahamb is how the mob took over the sorcery case themselves, instead of seeking help through the police. Many Ahamb people argued that it would not make any difference if they called the police in this case because the police could not prosecute any of the suspects, given that the Vanuatu state's legal system does not properly acknowledge sorcery.[31] Since sorcery operates in the spiritual realm, it is impossible to prove that sorcery has taken place

28 Eriksen (2009:177). See also Marshall (2009).
29 West (2005:10). This is also quoted by Rio, MacCarthy and Blanes (2017:4).
30 See Houck (2002).
31 Bratrud (2017), Forsyth (2006).

before a state court that uses normal evidentiary principles.[32] For this reason, out of fear and panic, the mob ended up acting against the alleged sorcerers themselves, with such tragic consequences.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasize the need for a culturally and contextually sensitive approach to the threats, fears and hopes that people experience in their lives. Even though one might not subscribe to ideas about sorcery, evil spirits or the Holy Spirit, it is important to take these ideas seriously as real categories for those who experience them as real, otherwise we risk overlooking the specific sources of our interlocutors' fears and how they may develop further into concrete social action. For this task, I argue, there is no better tool than fine-grained and long-term ethnographic exploration, which enhances our understanding of our research subjects' own experiences and life-worlds.

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[32] See, however, Rio (2010).

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