

VANUATU MIGRANT LIVES IN VILLAGE AND TOWN¹



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Significant rural-urban migration has characterized the postcolonial Melanesian states, including Vanuatu. Over the past 30 years, most people who once lived in Samaria village (Tanna Island) have moved to squatter settlements that ring Port Vila, Vanuatu's capital. Life histories narrated by migrants who live in Port Vila's Blacksands and Ohlen neighborhoods, and by men and women who remained home on Tanna, reveal migrant agency and pride in their ability to navigate urban challenges including wage-labor, mobile telephony, religious organization, town conflict, gender transformations, and village nostalgia. Tanna migrants celebrate their powers to model their urban settlements after island homes as they also remake the island village with new urban experience and resources. Islander power to remake urban spaces draws on the "partibility" of place—one "distributed" site comprises elements of others so that places travel alongside their people. (Urban migration, personhood, place, partibility, Vanuatu)

Significant rural-urban migration has characterized the postcolonial Melanesian states, including Vanuatu. Over the past 30 years, most people who once lived in Tanna's Samaria village have moved to Port Vila. Before 1980, when the colonial New Hebrides became independent Vanuatu, population migration patterns had been largely circular. Bedford (1974), Bonnemaïson (1976), Chapman (1978), and other geographers of colonial towns then described the predominant circular migration of Melanesian men (mostly) into town and their subsequent return to home villages after limited periods of urban work and experience. Some, however, were already questioning the circular model, finding that more and more islanders were heading into town to stay (Bonnemaïson 1976). In the 1980s, for example, Haberkorn (1989) documented the transition from circular to "uncontrolled" or "one-way" migration among Port Vila's Paama and Pentecost Island communities. Haberkorn (1989:v) concluded that changing economic conditions, "formerly both necessitating and facilitating temporary rural-based circulation, have given way to a setting more conducive to long-term, or even permanent urban relocations." Haberkorn (1989:151) also counted increasing numbers of female migrants to town, beginning in the mid-1960s.

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In 2010 and 2011, I interviewed 20 old friends from Tanna, including 13 men and women who migrated up to Port Vila since Vanuatu's independence in 1980, and another seven who remained at home in Samaria village (Lindstrom 2012).² In stories of both rural and urban places and persons, migrants contrasted their village homes with urban settlements as they narrated trans-island experiences, and as they measured town and village against each other. Soarum, an old friend from Vanuatu's Tanna Island, shared a typical life story:

I left Ianaula school in 1980 for Epi High School, on Epi. I finished in 1984 and returned to Tanna where I stayed until 1987. In 1987, I married and my daughter, my first child, was born. One of my younger brothers was still at school at Onesua [high school], so I left Tanna and came here to Vila to look for work in order to pay his school fees, helping my father and mother to pay his Onesua school fees. I came here to Vila and more of my own children were born, so I stayed in order to pay school fees for them too. I've lived here ever since.

Migrant experience has shaped contemporary sociability, personhood, and urbanity. Life histories reveal changing postcolonial experience including participation in urban migration, wage-labor, mobile telephony and new media, new religious organizations, town leadership and urban conflict, gender transformation, village nostalgia, and urban ennui, among other aspects of settlement life.

Many have engaged in "place making" at one time or another, but migrants in particular find themselves necessarily "involved in a process of making spaces into places" (Ødegaard 2011:342; Bönisch-Brednich and Trundle 2010:1). Urban migration sets new challenges of place-making in an exotic, urban locale. Such migratory place-making commonly involves the recreation of rural places within new urban contexts (Ødegaard 2011:343). Migrants model new urban settlements after island homes and also remake their village with urban experience and resources.

At home on Tanna, islanders are better experienced in place "remaking" when they return to village and garden sites and kava-drinking grounds that may have gone unused for several generations. A marked decline in the island's population occurred in the late nineteenth century, but this decline bottomed out in the 1930s and the number of islanders today is probably at precontact levels. Returned islanders have resettled and remade once abandoned places. In so doing, they recall the traditional names of these places and also those of ancestral residents. When moving abroad to urban settlements, however, people face making places in unfamiliar territory.

Place-making is perhaps especially important in Vanuatu, and throughout Melanesia, given an inherent significance of place in local notions of personhood:

The geographic landscape of places and pathways and the social landscape of people in relation to each other must be seen as mutually constituted. Belonging to places is the most significant constituent of a person's identity. (Anderson 2011:126)

Leach (2003), writing about another Melanesian culture, says:

As places enter directly into the constitution of persons, and as places gather those implicated in the labour of producing persons, we can say that places are themselves like persons. In parallel, people take their name and identity from the place in which they are thus grown. (Leach 2003:212)

Places and persons thus constitute and identify each other.

Anthropological attention to place as an object of ethnographic analysis sparked notably in the 1980s, as some have suggested (e.g., Ward 2003). In Vanuatu, such interest kindled a decade earlier as a wave of ethnographers began fieldwork in the archipelago and quickly stumbled across “the inseparability of place and people in Vanuatu identity” (Rodman 1992:647; see also Van Trease 1987:3). From Malo, Rubinstein (1978) reported that “by a man's volition and activity, he creates places which stand as manifestations of himself. They symbolize him, his work, his domestic arrangements, and his identity” (Rubinstein 1978:183). On Malakula, Larcom (1982) noted that “the Mewun were held together by their sense of *ples* [Bislama: place] and it is this which defined the group” (Larcom 1982:334). On Pentecost, Jolly (1982) described “the notion of rootedness of ni-Vanuatu and their indissoluble attachment to the land that they occupy [also conveyed in the Bislama term *man ples*]” (Jolly 1982:340). On Tanna, men's personal names are all also land titles (Lindstrom 1985; see Anderson 2011:186–87); and Rodman (1987) reported from Ambae that “personal essence and identity are thus infused into the land. No longer simply a thing, land becomes a place” (Rodman 1987:34). What happens, then, to personal essence and rooted identity when folks move from village to town?

Anthropologists who explored the centrality of place within Melanesian concepts of the person also noted a parallel importance of mobility. Examples include the several metaphoric oppositions put forward to condense this in Vanuatu: birds and banyan trees (Jolly 1982), or trees and canoes (Bonnemaison 1994). Despite their rooted identities, islanders also appreciate mobility and travel that can bring connection, prestige, and thus an enlarged personhood. Up until the twentieth century, the Tannese sailed and traded among the southern islands; and even today people keenly recall connections farther afield, reaching to Mataso and Maevo Islands of central and northern Vanuatu and as far as Tonga (see also Keller 2009:131–32). Within Tanna's own shores, warfare once triggered population movements from region to region, and other forms of conflict today still displace families. Movement

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includes adoption, which sometimes replaces children, and even in the matrilineal areas of central and northern Vanuatu, people typically practice patrivirilocal residence. Most women have always moved from father's to husband's place, if these are different. Globalization over the past 150 years has moved people about still farther. Many Tannese men and women, starting in the mid-1860s, traveled to Queensland, Fiji, and Samoa to be employed mostly on sugarcane plantations. In the 1940s, again, most of Tanna's men were shipped to Efate to work there in American military labor corps. And today, increasing numbers have begun to travel to New Zealand and Australia as temporary agricultural workers (Hammond and Connell 2009).

Ni-Vanuatu, thus, have long incorporated both rootedness and mobility into their understandings of personhood. The "ples" in the "man ples" has always been potentially multilocal. Nonetheless, place-making of novel spaces still needs to be pursued. This place-making is also person-making insofar as people expect to "share blood" (Rubinstein 1978:175) with the lands and places they come to inhabit. This must be so, too, of today's urban places and settlements which many Tannese migrants have occupied for more than three decades.

PARTIBLE PERSONS, PARTIBLE PLACES

Marilyn Strathern's (1988) deployment of the "dividual" in her influential analysis, *Gender of the Gift*, energized much subsequent ethnography, analysis, and critique as anthropologists adopted the term to make better sense of Melanesian sociability and personhood. She claimed:

Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produced them. The singular person can be imagined as a social microcosm. (Strathern 1988:34)

This "dividual" or "partible" model of the person—which Strathern borrowed from earlier work in India (e.g., Marriott 1976:111)—has influenced personhood models in the region despite criticism that it overstates the distinctiveness of Papua New Guinean highlands subjects; or, if it indeed accurately describes personhood in that area, has been too enthusiastically applied to peoples living elsewhere in Melanesia and beyond. How might the dividual, for example, fit among other notable figures of contemporary Melanesian society, including those well-known Bigmen (some of whom today are capitalist entrepreneurs) or evangelical Christians who often profess Macphersonian possessive individualism? Some have argued that Melanesians also manage to entertain considerable individuality within, or alongside, their dividuality. Andrew Strathern (1979), for one, whose writing made famous

Ongka, his onetime Bigman informant, has enumerated a range of individualist (contra dividualist) actions and claims that sustain common Melanesian forms of social inequality (see Stewart and Strathern 2000).

Nonetheless, the “dividual” has provided a handy figure through which to comprehend island personhood, which is “partible.” Persons are taken to be composed of various parts of one another and of the food and other resources they consume, and even of the land upon which they live (e.g., Wagner 1991; Leach 2003). Marilyn Strathern’s partible/dividual rephrased Leenhardt’s (1979 [1947]) much earlier analysis of New Caledonian personhood. Even those who might reject the jargon of partible personhood agree that most islanders remain deeply embedded within their families and their home places. Given this, how might dividual Melanesians, or anyone embedded within a kindred and a place, fare living in new urban squatter settlements at a distance from both home folks and home lands? Has urban migration caused the Tanna person to become even more partible, split even more finely between now scattered relations and places, or has this forced the person to shrink into some shriveled impartible, more individualist core? Life history interviews with Tannese migrants in Port Vila suggest that under current conditions they remain embedded—although now at a greater distance—within kindreds and within home places. They sustain this embeddedness by drawing on long-standing island skills of incorporating old and new others, and old and new places, within their everyday lives and within the compass of ordinary personhood and place-making.

Rodman (1992) has encouraged a “multilocal” analytical perspective in Vanuatu, where place is “fragmented and multilocal in its construction” (Rodman 1992:646). Hess (2009) too suggested that places also are “partible” insofar as “the plurality of persons matches the plurality of places” (2009:193). Eriksen (2008), similarly, described “distributed places” on Ambrym Island, where place “is not conceived of as only present in *one* location, but rather extends from this one location into a number of other locations” (Eriksen 2008:33, emphasis in original). For many, understandings of “home” are certainly multilocal and partible insofar as they divide home affiliations among multiple places. But a place itself may likewise be partible if one site comprises elements of others and if it too spills out, somehow, into all the other localities its resident persons inhabit. Places comprise a network—a landscape of interconnected nodes wherein every site is joined with several others. Insofar as places are like persons, partible and distributed Melanesian places mirrors partible Melanesian personhood. Just as a partible dividual’s personhood encompasses bits and pieces of others’ selfhoods, so too does a partible (i.e., multilocal, distributed) place incorporate bits and pieces of more than one locale. Melanesian persons comprise elements of others, and partible

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or distributed places subsume elements of other conjoined locales. Some persons, although notably mobile, may nonetheless remain emplaced in a networked landscape of localities, each of which incorporates bits of other places. Others who remain on Tanna cultivate a less geographically diverse personhood.

Migrant appreciations of town and village, each of which incorporates elements of the other and together increasingly support partly-related kin, take these to be partly interconnected in that urban settlements reflect island villages just as villages have come to echo the city. Or, putting this another way, urban migration may be unsettling and geographically expanding traditionally emplaced Melanesian personhood, but places can travel alongside their people as migrants remake settlement into village, and village into settlement. Tannese dividual personhood still extends to encompass close kin; and home has now come to be divided among several places, rural and urban, each of which absorbs parts of the other.

PLACE/PERSON-MAKING

Islanders make partible persons and partible places by embedding themselves in others through acts of exchange and by establishing multilocal homes. As Ward (2003) notes of contemporary migrants everywhere, “those who move between cultural worlds hold contextual identities and multiple sites of belonging” (Ward 2003:81). Migrants arrive in Vila still embedded within village kin and neighborhood relationships, although the move to town challenges them to maintain existing connections as it also creates possibilities of new ones. People’s enduring embeddedness within kindred and island village is, in fact, what motivates them to move to Vila so that they can care for kin, notably by helping to pay school fees for siblings, children, nephews, and nieces. Soarum’s story above is commonplace. Joel, Soarum’s cousin, likewise explained his own urban migration in terms of family need:

When we lived on Tanna there was no money. You may have had only one pair of trousers and when that ripped, or there was no thread to sew it up, sometimes you had to tie it up with a piece of banyan tree bark or rope, so you told your brothers-in-law to go to Vila to earn some money to buy new clothing. He would earn money and send some home.

After Vanuatu’s independence in 1980, migration patterns bent toward one-way journeys as previous circling from island to town and back slowed. Migrant men found available house sites in new peri-urban settlements and they began bringing their wives and children to live with them in Vila. In these settlements, people claimed places that they shared with relatives and neighbors from home. Some of the geographic separation from kin that earlier circular migrants once experienced, or many of them anyway, thus collapsed

as wives, children, and extended family members settled together into urban living. One-way migration, like earlier circular, does not necessarily undermine family connections. It is even easier to stay embedded within one's kindred, to stay dividualized as it were, with other family members alongside.

To fashion new homes where they can shape urban settlements into villages (see Keller 2009:141), migrants structure urban space along island lines. On Tanna, the cultural landscape is concentrically conceived (cf. Keller 2009). Circular clearings (*imwarim*), on which men gather each evening to drink kava and to which people come to dance, debate, and exchange, are the foci of the island cultural landscape. Houses and hamlets encircle these clearings, with gardens and the forest farther afield. In town, migrants have cleared urban versions of Tanna-style kava-drinking grounds where these can be squeezed into settlement geography (even if centrality has mostly to be imagined here), and they convene on these to prepare and drink kava, for family exchanges, for debate, and for dispute-settlement, as they do back home.

All of my urban friends also have established kitchen gardens on any scrap of available land within or near their settlement yards. Expert horticulturalists, migrants bring to town farming skills along with the range of staples grown on Tanna, particularly manioc, which is easy to grow on marginal ground. Urban garden products supplement expensive store-bought food that people often cannot afford. Significantly, a person's relationships to place and co-residents are mediated through food. Eating food from a specific place converts a person into a child of that place, and transforms place thusly into home. Tannese root themselves in a place by eating roots, as is common throughout the region. Eating a home-grown taro corm identifies residents with the places they inhabit. That taro incorporates both the place in which it grew and the shared labor a family invested in it: "Products are seen as constructed from multiple sources, sustained as multiple, the products themselves remain multiply authored" (Strathern 1988:159). This sort of place/person-making stumbles when one comes only to eat food purchased in stores or even from urban farmers' markets insofar as no one knows where, exactly, such food was planted or who, exactly, might have tended it.

Alongside planting and eating food grown in new home places, migrants also remake these places through naming. They bring island place names with them to town and bestow these on urban sites. Joel, for example, has named the settlement's kava-drinking ground he helped clear in Blacksands, "Kraisun," the name of one of Tanna's Iasur Volcano's vents. People in Ohlen Nabanga, a second settlement, have named their kava-drinking clearing, "At the Banyan tree trunk," in East Tanna's Narak language. Migrants also bestow island names on other urban entities. A relay team of boys that competed in a

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round-Efate island race, for example, named itself Naninife, the local name for Southeast Tanna's Kwamera language. Most team members are the sons of migrants from this region who continue to use the language with their families in settlement hamlets. Place names also flow back home to Tanna as travelers rename island locales after experiences and connections to places abroad (Lindstrom 2011:152–53). Biblical village namesakes like Samaria, place names imported from Queensland sugar plantations, and World War II labor camp memories, are today scattered across Tanna, providing evidence of islanders' previous efforts to establish partible, multilocal homes.

Migrants situate themselves and their children in rural and urban places both by preserving home-island language skills and by making use of Bislama, Vanuatu's lingua franca, which connotes urbanity, modernity, and travel—*nagkariian itoga* “foreign speech,” as people sometimes call this. Migrants recognize that life in town demands knowledge of Bislama, but they also are concerned should their children fall behind in understanding and speaking Southeast Tanna Nife language. And Bislama itself has long been available on Tanna as an alternative code that people may mix with local languages, typically in order to reference modernity, urbanity, or distance (Lindstrom 2007). Bilingualism thus signifies bi-island personhood and signals a speaker's rootedness in both rural and urban places.

If migrants coming into Port Vila remake urban spaces along village lines, people in town have reached back to remake their villages (see Saunders 2010). Samaria, in 1978, was a cluster of small houses and kitchens built almost entirely from forest material. In years since, migrants have sent money and construction material back home to build new houses of cement brick and corrugated sheet iron, the same materials they use for shacks in the urban settlements. Stay-at-homes, and those who have temporarily returned to the village, also enjoy imported commercial goods that urban kin provide, including mobile telephones, generators, hand-held DVD players, electric guitars, and the like. Those returning home to Tanna thus discover elements of urban life in Samaria, just as those who migrate to town find themselves in a settlement whose design and neighborly relationships reflect village geography.

These village/town harmonies and rural/urban flows today underpin migrant understandings of both identity and home as increasingly twinned and doubled. Migrants extend their partible personhood geographically as they remake themselves with new home places and as they enlarge the social, increasingly urban networks in which that partible personhood gets embedded.

TRANS-ISLAND PERSONS

Students of contemporary global population flows have remarked the emergence of transnational families and communities (e.g., Bryceson and Vuorela 2002). But so far this century, the Tannese have yet to travel far enough for this. Unlike Samoans, Tongans, and north Pacific Islanders from the former U.S. Trust Territory of Micronesia, they have few opportunities to join more global migratory flows apart from moving to neighboring New Caledonia, taking advantage of recently established New Zealand and Australian guest worker programs, or occasional employment on ocean fishing vessels.

Migrant places and persons extend mostly from home island to Port Vila; they are distributed across two islands. These today are “bi-island” or trans-island persons and families who inhabit village-like urban settlements and, when back home, a village with urban echoes. Several strategies underpin trans-islandism, including travel itself, although this is increasingly expensive, and shipment of gifts back and forth between Tanna and Efate. Gifts of food are particularly common (see Hess 2009:135–36; cf. Ødegaard 2011:347). Jacob, for example, home on Tanna in July 2010, rushed to load two baskets of taro—a gift for his wife in town—onto an inter-island ship heading for Vila. Having a good job, his wife could easily afford to buy Efate-grown taro in Vila’s market, but eating food from Tanna would nourish her island identity. Villagers long distanced from their homelands boost their connections to home by regularly eating island-grown food. Food flows, too, from city to village. In July 2011, Satig, who lives in Blacksands settlement, asked me to bring four *gateau* (fried cakes, Bislama: *gato*) to Tanna that she had cooked for her mother, Sakrai. Sakrai’s consumption of the *gato* would nurture the mother/daughter relationship, their shared partible personhood, perhaps. *Gato*, although also prepared and sold on Tanna, is a modern urban dish, and Sakrai’s enjoyment of this would also attach her to its source, the urban ples, Blacksands, which she had never visited.

Satig asked me to telephone her immediately after I delivered the *gato* to her mother. The extension of mobile phone service with the erection of cell towers across Tanna in 2008 by two telephone companies, Digicel and TVL, has amplified people’s trans-island message flows and their partible person-making. Previously, most news circulated by word of mouth, carried by those going from village to town and back, or occasionally in letters or notes. Mobile phones in the last few years have spread rapidly throughout Vanuatu, even into places with no electricity like Samaria. These are pre-paid systems and migrants often have no credit on their mobiles, but they borrow phones that do or they send free “please call me” text messages when they want to reach out to contact family members on Tanna or in Vila.

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In July 2011, a newborn set off a flurry of mobile calls between family members in Samaria and in Blacksands settlement. Nako's wife gave birth to a baby girl who for some days refused to nurse. Iapwatu and Nasuai, Nako's father and mother, who live in Samaria, repeatedly telephoned family members in Blacksands to learn how the baby was doing and to demand that mother and child fly home to Tanna. They were convinced that the baby would begin nursing properly only if she were brought back to her father's place where grandparents could care for her. Nako and the Blacksands side of the family, however, demurred, but promised to find a knowledgeable Tanna curer (*kleva*) with skill to concoct the right herbal medicine to treat both mother and child. The grandparents agreed in the end, although they pressed their point that Blacksands settlement was still derivative vis-à-vis Samaria as the child's proper, and healthier, home place. Infant personhood needs nurturing in the form of local food, care, and attention from close kin. Nasuai, the child's grandmother, insisted that the baby girl would nurse as soon as she, the grandmother, might have the chance to carry and nurture it. Nako brought the infant down to Tanna a month or so later. Despite migrant efforts to remake urban places and meld these with village homelands, for most, village still trumps settlement as chief among one's distributed home places.

Iapwatu and Nasuai did insist on naming the baby only after her parents brought her to Samaria. Taimweren, Iapwatu's brother, who also lives in Vila, had proposed to bestow a name in Blacksands settlement, but her grandparents wanted to celebrate her naming in order to anchor her to home places on Tanna. Every Tanna family possesses both girls and boys names which they recycle through the generations. Boys names are most emplaced in that each serves as title to specific plots of land, but girls names also broadly connect to particular kava-drinking grounds and hamlets (Lindstrom 1985). Most men and many women also receive a second name. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, these typically were Biblical, but today's parents are choosing names from their urban experience. Migrant children in Blacksands and Ohlen Nabanga, for example, answer to Selena, Alice, Belinda, Felina, Brenda, and Johnson, all of which connote modernity and urbanity. Thus, a child's name is also dividual insofar as it evokes both island and town. Binominal names that combine a traditional and an urban element increasingly signify new trans-island personhoods.

As with Nako's baby, any notable illness or distress sustains migrant connections with island homes. When such threaten, people return to home places and to island kin who "carry" and nurture them back into health. But urban places are equally a refuge with those for whom island life has become difficult. Mysterious illnesses, local disputes, thwarted plans, and sorcery fears may convince people to clear out of home villages and head for urban

settlements (Rio 2010). With kin divided between two homes, migrants seek comfort and support in both. Death, however, continues to pull bodies to Tanna. Taimweren, who lives in Ohlen Nabanga, looking ahead in his own life explained: “I don’t want to die and be buried here. If I die, I should be buried back home.” Although families arrange expected mortuary exchanges of food and other goods with relatives in both town and village, they pool their money to fly the deceased home to Tanna. Even though money is hard to come by, in July 2011 relatives collected enough to ship the body of a young man who, despairing of an unhappy romance, hanged himself in Vila. Both the island and town branches of the family observed days of mourning (moreso on Tanna) and they organized memorial exchanges of food and kava in both places, but the body was flown home to Tanna for burial.

Migrant desire persists in planting bodies in island ground, in villages and kava-drinking clearings that also serve as cemeteries. Their decomposing bodies nourish these places, just as homegrown food once nourished them, while their spirits will continue to nurture, protect, if sometimes also admonish and discipline, the living. Burial on Tanna reunites dividuated migrant bodies with their native ples and with their kin at home. Although, in life, trans-island migrants divide themselves and distribute their homes between Samaria and Vila, the island side of partible personhood will continue to outweigh the urban until migrants come to bury more of themselves in settlement soils, until their bodies nourish and their spirits come to haunt town as well as village.

RESILIENCE

Urban migrants are challenged to sustain home cultures and languages, and their children and grandchildren even more so. Tanna’s trans-island families, so far at least, have been resilient enough to remake both urban and island places as they embed themselves in each. “Resilience,” here, may be a more useful term than is “sustainability” to approach issues of cultural continuity and change in migrant contexts. Resilience was developed within popular psychology and then business management theory to describe individual success in surmounting crisis and challenge. Resilience comprises “psychological and biological strengths required to successfully master change” (Flach 2004:xvii; see Conner 1993:229). More recently, resilience discourse has filtered into “social-ecological theory” (Walker and Salt 2006:13) to capture both transformation and continuity within socio-cultural, political, economic, and other systems. Despite the concept’s perhaps dubious roots in pop psychology, it has some advantages over even more widespread discourses of sustainability. This earlier concept expects some ability to reproduce one’s identity and one’s traditions under new conditions; resilience,

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more flexibly, recognizes that people in fact must remake themselves in new places, and remake these places as well, by building on existing strengths.

Migrants living in urban milieus that potentially undermine island customs of kinship, embedded personhood, and connection to home places, and that privilege economic individuality instead of dividuality (see Keller 2009), may be challenged to sustain island culture, but they have been resilient enough to remake select aspects of urban spaces, and thus themselves, on some of their own terms. Tannese migrants have transformed their urban settlements along village lines, although much urban space remains hostile and beyond their control. They are particularly critical of urban markets and commercial transactions that trump traditional reciprocity, and they are frequently suspicious of settlement neighbors who come from other places, wary of strange foods, and critical of miserly employers. As Taimweren explained,

In my opinion, if you have a job, settlement life is good. But if you don't work, it's bad. You must work to eat. If you don't have your own house, you must rent a house, pay for electricity, pay for water—money, it's all money.

No surprise, sorcery fear and accusation have inflated within the settlements (Rio 2010), but this too might be taken as a form of cultural resilience insofar as people refurbish traditional explanatory systems and practices to make sense of new urban experience.

Onetime circular migration of men from village to plantation or town and back has given way to the movement of entire families to Vila's peri-urban settlements. Migrants, however, keep in touch with home places (keep home partible, as it were) by making occasional visits to Tanna, by sending town children home to help their village grandparents, with new mobile telephony, and eventually with their own homing corpses. All migrants I recorded, in fact, had plans to return to Samaria before they die—beating, so they hope, death back to Tanna. Refusal to bury one's dead in town is an important pillar of ongoing migrant resilience and growing trans-islandism. But all also insisted that they would leave at least a child or two behind in Port Vila's settlements, thus to maintain trans-island connection. As long as one's family is emplaced in both Vila and Tanna, place and personhood are thereby amplified and home, too, has become distributed and partible.

Everyday stories of island and settlement life—narrative itself—maintain partible homes as rural kin listen to accounts of settlement experience and as urban children hear talk of village life. The life histories I recorded are artificial in that most people do not typically exercise this narrative genre unless prodded by nosy anthropologists. Migrants do, however, often talk long and comparatively of life in town and village and, as Ward (2003) has elsewhere observed, they “hold past places of belonging in their minds

through memory and hold future places of belonging in their minds through imagination” (Ward 2003:88). Rauaua’s memories of the attractions of arranging customary circumcision ceremonies back on Tanna are typical:

Our place is good. Although we don’t have a lot of things there, we live well. We have gardens; we eat food; water is there. We maintain traditions. It is good. Should we want to organize a circumcision feast, everything is available. There is nothing to make any trouble for one.

Trans-island migrants share, compare, and contrast their memories and imaginings of home places. Children who have never visited Tanna, as audience of these place stories, come to know the village as home. Stay-at-homes in Samaria likewise consume stories of urban life in Blacksands and Ohlen Nabanga and come to imagine these places, too, as family homes. Stories of the fascinations and the difficulties of urban life, told back on Tanna, both titillate and horrify country kin. And idealized accounts of village arcadia, sometimes, encourage settlement youth to consider moving back to the island should life in the city get too rough. People’s resilience, despite the challenges of migration and urbanity, develops and matures within the stories they tell about their trans-island lives and homes.

Resilient migrant ability to live urban lives along village lines, and to shape settlements to reflect island expectations, has sustained local expectations and practices of personhood. Urban migrants remained emplaced within kin networks and home landscapes even though these networks and homes today are increasingly dispersed between village and town. Trans-island persons remain “dividual” and “partible” in urban as well as island settings. Place partibility maintains dividuality as migrants have rooted themselves in trans-island homes.

NOTES

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2. Friends narrated their life stories in southeast Tanna’s Nife (Kwamera) language. Excerpts here are my (broad) translations of their accounts into English. The symbol [ɨ] represents the mid-central vowel.

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