The Goal of the 'Good House': Changing Moral and Material Standards of Living

Not long after I took up residence on Lamen island in early 2012, I was invited to a lavish house blessing held by a married father of two young children, celebrating the completion of a house he had built over three years, with proceeds from successive seasons of work on New Zealand's vineyards. Around fifty kin members arrived at dusk and sat expectantly in front of the new house, which had been decorated with flowers. Music blared from a stacked hi-fi system, which was placed outside on a table alongside a glowing flat screen, DVD player and laptop, all hooked up to a solar panel. A DVD was played as the guests tucked in to the plentiful buffet, with several dishes, prepared that day with help from clan members.

The Pastor of the Assemblies of God (AOG) church was the special guest, and he delivered a short talk about how New Zealand's seasonal worker programme had given people the chance to have 'good houses', with solar panels and rain tanks. Thanks to God, he said, now people could come and take shelter in the house if there was a cyclone. He prayed for God to shine his light in the house before he cut the ribbon and switched on the electric lights. The Pastor asked the bashful young man if he had anything to say, perhaps about the cost of the house. The owner replied it had cost upward of 500,000 vatu (over £3000), and there was a round of applause. Then guests were invited to step inside the new home to admire its features. This applause at the cost took me by surprise. Clearly, the builders of such houses are held in high esteem, but why would such a large sum of money[1] spent on a private home be so socially and morally valued beyond the immediate household that occupies it?

This paper explores the paradoxes of seeking a good life and transformed 'standards of living' amongst the people of Lamen Island and Lamen Bay, Epi in central Vanuatu, many of whom have been engaged as seasonal workers in New Zealand and Australia's horticultural seasonal worker programmes. New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer (RSE) programme was launched in 2008, as a response to both seasonal labour shortages in the horticulture industry, and the desire of Pacific island states to gain access to the labour market (Bailey, 2009, pp. 29–30). The scheme introduced measures allowing the entry of foreign nationals to work in New Zealand's horticulture and viticulture sector for a maximum of seven months each year. The programme has been espoused for bringing 'triple-win' benefits for employers, sending states and migrants themselves (Gibson and McKenzie, 2013). Indeed, the RSE was a model for a Pacific Seasonal Work programme first piloted by Australia in 2009, within which Vanuatu is the second main sending country (after Tonga).

In this paper, I explore the pursuit of 'good houses' in terms of both desirable material standards of living, but also how Li-Lamenu people reason about

[1] The minimum hourly rate in 2012 was 170 vatu per hour (Makin, 2012)

and evaluate the motivations and behaviours of the house's occupants. I suggest that these residential reconfigurations both reflect and bring about changes in social relations and visions of the future. I seek to go beyond reductionist explanations of changing economic consumption patterns, by drawing together ideas from anthropologies of morality, value, hope and the gift, thus situating motivations for seasonal work in a wider context of a pursuit of the "good" (Robbins, 2013).

Firstly, I discuss how the 'good house' and residence patterns both embody and are evaluated in terms of changing moral and material 'standards of living'. Secondly, I argue that the 'good house' can be seen as an icon embodying multiple 'qualisigns', significant qualities that convey value conversions. In particular, the durability of the good house is appreciated as materialising a 'good life', envisioned as household prosperity and futurity. In the final section, I discuss to what extent transformations in housing indicate a shift in priorities towards household-oriented concerns, over claims from wider kin.

Changing Standards of Living

> There have been big changes – 'good houses', solar lights – we no longer have the same living standards as before.
>
> Seasonal worker

Building a 'good house' was the most common stated 'goal' for Li-Lamenu seasonal workers when they filled out the required question on Vanuatu Labour Department forms before travelling. The language of 'goals' and 'vision' has been incorporated into their personal expressions for their hopes from participating in the programme. The 'good house' was often associated with improvements in 'standards of living', another English term often incorporated into Li-Lamenu expressions of their desires.

In this section, I embark on a historical review of how Li-Lamenu house styles, and household and residence patterns, have taken shape together with changes in moral and material 'standards of living' over 150 years of political and economic change on the island. I show how the household's form and function, and its relationship with wider kin and community, has changed over time in relation to outside influences (cf. Rensel, 1997a, p. 17), including the colonial promotion of nuclear family models, missionaries' ideas about health and hygiene, and political economic transformation. This changes in houses and domestic spatial patterns articulate aspects of historical and social transformations and changing identities (Rodman, 1985, pp. 269–272).

Precolonial Life

Prior to European trade and missionaries, people lived in small hamlets; clusters of between one and three clans. Each of these groupings would have shared a ritual ground and men's meeting house (Nakamal, *kumali)*. Like Vao in the small islands off Northeast Malekula, hamlets were screened around by reed fences. The dancing grounds (nasara) had carvings and slit drums likened to those of Ambrym and Malekula; islands with which Lamen had strong trade networks, including the transactions of ritual knowledge and practices associated with the grade-taking system, a ritual complex in which men could achieve status and power (Coiffier, 1988, pp. 121–123).

The precolonial Li-Lamenu house featured a low saddle roof that stretched to the ground on either side, and was constructed of a wooden frame of four supports attached by a ridgepole (*marakinsa*). Onto this frame was attached a series of wooden struts (*kui*) on which were affixed panels of woven coconut leaves (*luṁapola*), thatched with wild cane leaves (*luṁa i*) and wild grasses (*luṁa kurui).* There would be a small entrance door at one end, and a cooking fire inside. Speiser (1996, pp. 95, 107) likened the houses to those at Port Sandwich (Lamap) on Malekula. Today there are just a couple of these houses left on the island and they are known as *kanayuṁa*, which was translated as 'kneeling house', perhaps due to its short stature and the angle of its sides, or because you had to kneel inside them.

Missionary Influence and Moral Transformation

In Vanuatu, changing standards of housing, spatial and residential configurations, the eradication of spatial and temporal prohibitions, or tabu, and other material markers such as clothing, made visible and tangible the conversion of people to their new moral temporal order (Mitchell, 2013, p. 292). Subdual of warfare, reduction in fear of sorcery and spirit attacks, and missionaries' encouragement of people to relax or let go of avoidance prescriptions and prohibitions also led to changing residence habits (cf. Chowning, 1997, p. 90). Encouraged by missionaries and colonial officers, pacification and a desire for trade clans began to concentrate into adjacent yards (*rove*) nearer the sandy shoreline, divided by low stone walls. Men were encouraged to leave the men's houses and live with their wives as a conjugal unit, where they ate with their families, thus encouraging more household nucleation (Rodman, 1985, p. 272).

Missionaries and colonial officers arriving in Vanuatu from mid nineteenth century saw precolonial houses as dirty, dark and smoky. They tended to enforce new 'civilising' moral and material standards that promoted hygiene, cleanliness, ventilation and light (Durand, 2015, p. 6; Jolly, 1991, p. 39; LiPuma, 2001, pp. 46–47; Rodman, 1985, p. 272; Schram, 2007, p. 182; Thomas, 1990). One Presbyterian mission wife, whose house on Tanna island was known locally as 'the Great House', saw the construction of her partitioned family home as setting the bar for a civilised Christian life (cf. Rensel, 1997b, p. 36). She wrote of the congregation that the local people must, "try to lift them up to our Christian level in all things. One's Home has so much influence on one's work and life and character" (Jolly, 1991, p. 40). Nevertheless, the first missionaries on Lamen in early 1900s, Smaill and Riddle, had lived in a fairly modest wooden house, though Smaill had a larger house built of stone and timber at a high stop above Nikaura village, his first base (Smaill, 1891). When the final missionary Horwell arrived at Lamen in 1945 (some thirty years later), he stayed in the one remaining room of the original mission house, then a bamboo home.

Gradually, during the late colonial period *kanayuṁa* were increasingly replaced with upright houses similar to that of Horwell's thatched house, with pitched sago (natangura) thatch panelled roofs and a more familiar boxy European-style shape. The walls would be made of woven bamboo, or more typically for Lamen, wild cane (waelken). Some Lamen people told me this transformation largely took place in 1950s to 1960s, triggered by an infestation of small millipedes, known in Bislama as kruked. This may be true, but this transition also took place in islands across Vanuatu and it would seem in no

small part due to colonial and church influence. This A-framed house style, along with separate 'kitchen houses' (kitchin haos), usually of thatch to allow the smoke to escape, and private drop toilets (known euphemistically as 'small houses' (smol haos, or *nunu yumña*), were also enforced by post-war health and development initiatives[2] (Taylor, 2008, pp. 144–145).

Horwell soon began work on a large European-style lime house, for which the missionary summoned an architect and a carpenter from New Zealand. But when it came to the work of construction, Horwell commandeered local communal labour, by arrangement with the local Chief. The Chief would not allow their local workforce to cut timber, so the missionary had to import New Zealand pine (France 1953:108–109). When the new mission house was finished, it drew considerable attention, but also expectations of material assistance from the Li-Lamenu congregants:

> A house is built for him that is necessarily large and airy for health reasons. The natives eye this mansion with envy… to them he appears to want for nothing… the natives try to sponge on him for all manner of things… He certainly sacrifices many things which we regard as essential to a comfortable life (France, 1953, p. 110).

In the decades that followed, some Li-Lamenu men were trained as carpenters, and employed by the District Officer to construct buildings elsewhere in the District. Others had experience of construction in Noumea, New Caledonia, a popular destination for temporary migration in 1960s and 70s. When they returned, they often spent their money on cement sheeting and other materials, and constructed European style houses (cf. Petrou, 2015, p. 62). Some of these houses were built from manufactured materials or lime, and using styles and techniques that stand testament today to the influence of the mission house, and increasing familiarity with urban and colonial architecture. More than three decades after Independence and the departure of foreign missionaries on Lamen, there still remain strong associations of the 'good house' with both a moral Christian family life, and ideas of hygiene and material development.

What makes a good house?

Over twenty-five years ago, Rodman's (1985, p. 275) informants on the island of Ambae, in North Vanuatu, were distinguishing houses in terms of their 'goodness', concluding: "For most people in Longana, a "good" house is a simple structure, perhaps 15 feet square, with a corrugated iron roof, cement floor, and walls of woven bamboo." Li-Lamenu people today also aim for a 'good' house, but most would no longer be satisfied with the house Rodman described. For a New Zealand returnee, what is usually meant by a 'good' house has, perhaps, three to six bedrooms, and a separate 'sitting room', is constructed entirely of durable materials, a corrugated metal (kapa) roof, walls of concrete or a combination of concrete and kapa, and has a cement floor. Ideally, it will have a veranda out front, one or two solar panels, and a large rain tank.

[2] They may also have been influenced by housing styles of Vietnamese labourers (Curtis, 2002, p. 87) then present in large numbers on the plantations of Epi and Malekula.

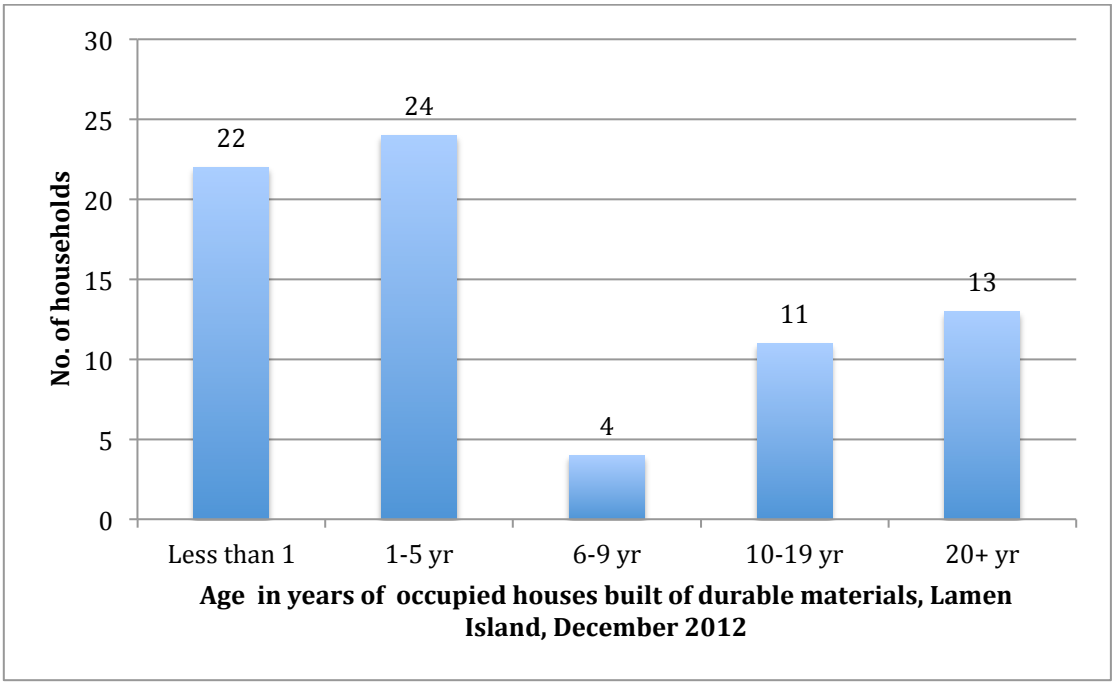

Figure 1 Houses of durable materials (74 of 119 households surveyed) by age, Lamen Island, December 2012

My household survey revealed a rapid transition to more durable imported housing materials on Lamen Island. As Figure 1 shows, there were 46 houses built in since beginning of 2008, when RSE was launched, compared with just four in the five years prior. Given that houses often take at least three successive seasons to build, you can see how many were coming to completion during my fieldwork, and many more were under construction. This transformation was confirmed when compared with the National Census just three years before, as in the graph below (Figure 2)[3]. Over the same period, use of traditional plant materials for walls and roofs were halved.

[3] I have selected Lamen Island as I can directly compare statistics with the 2009 census; reported on an island-by-island basis. My survey, conducted over a period of around 2 months, recorded a de facto population of 502 people, across 119 households as compared with 440 people across 106 households reported in 2009 census.

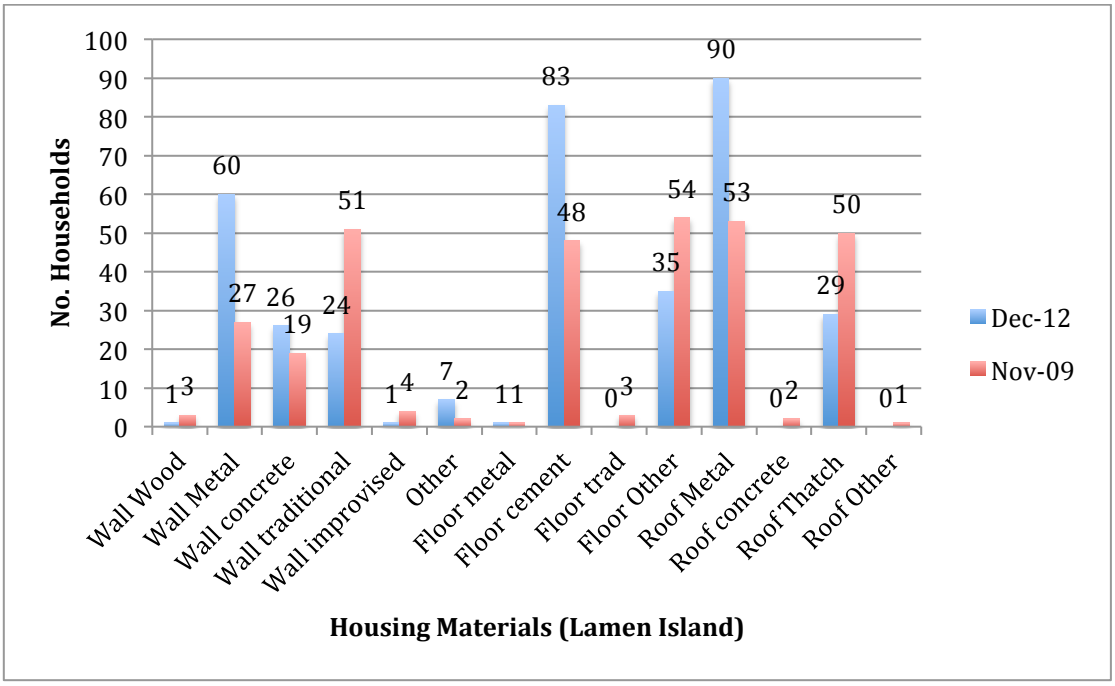

Figure 2 Changes in housing materials for Lamen Island, November 2009- December 2012 (2009: Census data (VNSO, 2009), 2012: household survey by author)[4]

An even more dramatic transformation can be seen in terms of lighting sources; kerosene lamp use dropped from 71 households to just eight. In the same period solar lighting increased fourfold (Figure 3). Whilst the census report data does not separate data for 'solar systems' (i.e. solar panel linked to battery) with solar lights (i.e. rechargeable solar lamps), my Lamen Island survey revealed 76 of 119 households had workable solar panel/battery combinations. Relatively expensive to buy, solar panels were more likely to be acquired by seasonal worker or paid employee households. Meanwhile older people and households without waged employment were switching to solar lamps, as over the long-term they were more cost-effective than buying kerosene.

[4] Walls that were a combination of cement slab or blocks with metal sheeting nailed above are recorded here as 'wall metal'. 'Floor other' is taken to mean an earth floor covered in coral from the beach, the most popular flooring for those without cement floors. Otherwise 'traditional' walls and roofs represent plant fibres (principally sago thatch roofs, and bamboo or wild cane walls).

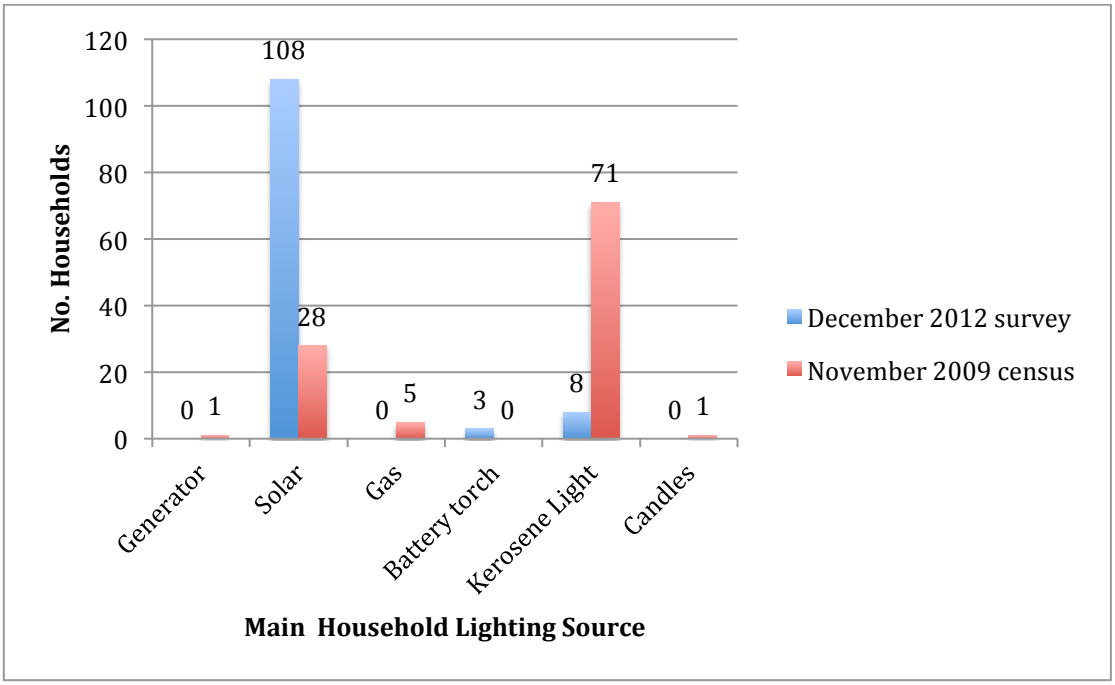

Figure 3 Household main source of lighting, 2009 census compared with 2012 household survey

The house has a general transformative potential in reflecting and restructuring changing ideas about 'standards of living' and emerging social distinctions. Indeed, the building of a new house is a widespread goal for migrants across the world. Cross cultural examples of 'good houses' connoting emerging material distinctions and differentiation include distinctions between 'real' and adobe houses in Mexico (Binford, 2013, p. 89), permanent 'pakka' versus 'kachcha' (crude) mud houses in South Asia (Dahya, 1973, p. 255; Gardner, 1993), or 'white' versus 'wooden' houses in Madagascar (Thomas, 1998).

Transformations in housing styles and residence patterns can be seen to reflect new kinds of social, spatial and temporal orders and values. These are often associated with moral transformations in people's practices and subjectivities in line with teleologies of 'progress' (LiPuma, 2001, p. 47), but I argue they also extend existing moral values and terms into new contexts. In the next section, I discuss Li-Lamenu reasoning about the 'goodness' of the good house, and their multidimensional motivations.

A Meaningful Icon: Making the Future Concrete

A Material and a Moral Good

Many ethnographers have characterised the widespread desire for modern styles of housing and imported goods as a form of 'conspicuous consumption' (Colloredo-Mansfeld, 1994), or a form of social distinction and differentiation, a means to achieve prestige and stand out from a group. In post-Independence Vanuatu, ethnographers have also interpreted the construction of a durable house as a form of 'conspicuous consumption' and the competitive flouting of a symbol of modernity. For Rodman (1985, p. 276), concrete houses afforded richer Longanans on the island of Ambae, "... a new forum for the assertion of inequality... influential individuals have the option to channel their wealth into housing that is a kind of conspicuous

consumption." Philibert (1990a, p. 459, cf. 1984, p. 90) noted that a "good house", a haos i kamplit (Bislama: 'completed house') in Erakor, a peri-urban village, was a modern house partitioned into rooms for different purposes, and fully furnished and decorated with store-bought items.

Although there is an ongoing shift towards commoditised transactions between kin, people's evaluations of the 'good house' are multidimensional, and it is important to pay attention to people's moral distinctions and reasoning about their, and others', actions and decision-making. Wilk (2001, p. 275, cf. 1994, p. 73) critiqued Philibert's view of consumption in developing countries as submission to a global hegemony, and the alienation that proceeds when pre-capitalist relations are gradually replaced by commoditized ones (cf. Miller, 2001). Like Wilk I seek to go beyond reductionist material explanations, drawing on ethnographic research that "finds all people's motivations for buying goods to be complex, deeply symbolic, social, personal and contextual."

Whilst I heard the term 'good house' rather than 'completed house' amongst Li-Lamenu people, there was nonetheless a value on the successful completion of a 'good house', rather than a competitive expansion or elaboration of house styles that is telling of status distinctions common elsewhere (Codesal, 2014; e.g. Hartman, 2007; Lopez, 2010). Li-Lamenu 'good houses' were similar and relatively plain in style, and most no more than four bedrooms and a sitting room. Indeed, when one seasonal worker, named Adam decided to build a five bedroom house, he said some tried to discourage him by saying it would be difficult to complete it. But he managed to build it within two years using a combination of local timber for the frame, and metal sheeting for the upper half of the walls, as many seasonal workers choose because this strategy is speedy and cost-effective.

Many of these material changes are seen to bring about convenient and pragmatic benefits. As mentioned by the Pastor at the house blessing, solar panels and rain tanks are valued material outcomes of engagements in overseas work. Rainwater run-off from a metal roof can be collected in a tank, important on Lamen Island where access to potable drinking water is most limited. People would often comment that solar-powered electric lighting allows them to carry out activities at night that they could not have done when they relied on hurricane lamps.

However the transition is not advantageous in every respect of material comfort and practicality. Metal roofed houses, especially those with metal walls too, would be much hotter (often reaching 30-40 degrees Celsius inside) than the cool and airy houses built of natural materials. As such, people would tend to avoid spending any length of time inside until they retired to bed, preferring to congregate outside in the shade, under a veranda or perhaps in a cool thatched kitchen building. Adam, the owner of the five bedroomed 'good house' mentioned above, frequently slept on the floor of the living room by the open front door, or outside on the veranda. And a woman told me in my survey that when it rained, metal roofed houses made the ground very muddy, adding, "When there is a cyclone, the 'good houses' are good, but in the sun, local houses are still good".

One of the main reasons people give for building a 'good house' is the durability of imported materials. A 'traditional' or 'local' thatch house might last only two years; whereas a 'permanent' or 'semi-permanent' house may last twenty years before the kapa (corrugated metal roofing sheets) have to be replaced. Additionally, 'permanent' houses are less likely to need maintenance during the period the seasonal worker is away (cf. Heyman, 1994, p. 133). When I went to interview one married seasonal worker, who was facing criticisms for choosing to return to New Zealand when his wife was seriously ill, he legitimated his decision by stressing his desire to complete the house he had under construction, as a means of demonstrating his care and nurture for his wife and children, explaining:

> Most of the workers that go over there: their goals are to build a house, light up a house. When you stay in a kastom house, it is a short time before you must build another... When you a build a house, a 'good one', you no longer worry about your family, your family has a good place to live when you are away.

As this statement articulates, seasonal workers often emphasised protection for their family when justifying their decisions. The most common reason given for a decision to build a good house, as in the house blessing described at the beginning, is to provide protection from cyclones, both for the household and for less-well off relatives. Following the Category Five Cyclone Pam in March 2015, which swept the global news media, such statements demand to be taken seriously. A news item reported from Lamen Island, based on an interview with a local nurse illustrates well the importance of a 'good house':

> Even though this big cyclone was here through those who went to New Zealand and came back and built these big, strong buildings. They saved our lives. If it were not for those who went to New Zealand and built these big buildings I can say there many people would have died because we would have been running from house to house and we would have been killed by the flying debris. But these big buildings that we have saved the lives of everyone on Lamen Island (Radio New Zealand, 2015).

Whilst the material superiority of the good house is almost taken for granted as 'good', moral evaluations of their occupants were underpinned by evaluations of their behaviour in terms of whether it was conducive to maintaining good social relations. Chief Waiwo, the Chief of Lamen Bay, gives typical reasons for the positive valuation, but also describes how the 'good house' and the 'goods' it contains can become 'bads' when they are used in a way that is counter to 'living together well':

> Something that we are a glad is happening, because it prevents smoke from polluting the air, is solar which is very good. They build new houses. Houses are better because if you stay with your family in a 'good' house, like in the cyclone season, we no longer worry, not like with a grass house. [When a cyclone comes], everyone runs for a house like this. Before there were few, but now there are many, which is good. Their families are safe. They carry solar, and do good things. But sometimes they use their solar in a bad way; they carry noisy things. When that happens, people no longer have respect. There is mourning, but there's music in another house. It means there is no respect for others. Then you find out they are trying to 'compete'; who can carry the loudest. Some things are good, but some things are like that....

This quote suggests that household goods are only considered 'good' when they appear to bring benefits, without having negative effects on others. In

this sense the kinds of effects termed "(negative consumption) externalities" by economists, and even some cultural economists (Callon, 1998, p. 246; cf. Strathern, 2002) can be seen as integral to value creation and realisation from the point of view of the domestic moral economy, where the moral grounds of value depend on respect, which is crucial to living together well.

The House as Icon

The 'good house' is a means or medium by which Li-Lamenu people can create value through meaningful actions –such as overseas seasonal horticultural work – by extending the influence of their actions over time and space. In this regard, I find Munn's theoretical framework of value transformations of more general application beyond the routes of Kula exchange. Munn (1992, p. 9) suggested that, for Gawans, value is accorded according to the capacity for an action or thing for "spatiotemporal transformation" of self-other relations, within a general totality she terms "intersubjective spacetime".

Certainly, the house is at once an outcome of and signifies international connections and travels. The fabric of the house itself and the imported goods that it contains stand as testament to the 'roads' (rod) that Li-Lamenu people say they have successfully found and maintained with overseas employers. Across Melanesia, the term 'road' carries connotations of the formation, extension and maintenance of mutual connections, or relational routes, along which people, goods and knowledge can travel, and grounds for reciprocal exchange and mutual recognition between people (Bainton, 2010, p. 16; Biersack, 2010, p. 380; e.g. Strathern, 1972, p. 65). The Bislama term 'rod' (lit. 'road' or 'path'), and its Epi Lewo vernacular equivalent *merapa* a course for purposeful action or a means to an end (Early, 1994, pp. 246, 293), similar to the English word "way". The term rod can be used for a range of different positively-valued relationships, ranging from customarily preferred and new marriages, to all kinds of political and economic strategies and projects (Maclean, 2009, p. 364), as in idioms for seasonal migration opportunities. All express a direction, or trajectory, frequently linked to hopes for a better future (Kraemer, 2013, p. 29; Lind, 2014, p. 82).

Li-Lamenu success in the work programmes also brings 'fame' to the community as news about Lamen as a 'model community' in terms of the work programme travels, in a way that recalls Gawans' value on their 'good name' extending beyond the reach of their actual journeys in space. As Munn (1992, pp. 9, 51) noted for Massim, hospitality extends one's prestige, and the name of the place, and thus can be seen as extending or expanding "intersubjective spacetime", through creating and maintaining relational "roads" (rod) for reciprocal obligations, transactions, and mutual influence, as well as a 'good name'; reputation, or 'fame' of the community or island (Munn, 1992).

Likewise, Li-Lamenu people can enhance their social reputation and relations by offering hospitality to visitors, which is also common in people's justifications for house construction. When I asked the father quoted in the previous section if it was 'good' that people are building bigger houses, he replied:

> Yes, it is good, because of the way we live here… We who live here: we have 'extended family'. Whereas for white people normally extended family does

> not reach that far, here extended family[5] is very important… For example, when you move from one village to another you must have a family to stay with.

Echoing this sentiment, Nancy, who works in New Zealand annually with her husband, was planning the first flush toilet and running shower paid for with their savings. She termed this as a form of hospitality, explaining, "Friends and visitors keep coming, and I see, no, I must have a good toilet and bathroom, so when they come and stay they can use them."

Munn's framework is also useful in considering the moral and material significance of the good house, though consideration of the semiotic significances it conveys. I suggest that the 'good house' can be seen as an icon in Munn's Peircian terms (1992, pp. 16–17), embodying a range of significant qualities, or 'qualisigns': signs with certain qualities that convey aspects of a wider totality of which they are part. Just as Munn and Foster (1995, p. 178) have argued that ritual exchange objects in Melanesia embody iconic qualities such as durability and hard work, so I suggest that the 'good house' is so valued because it is an icon of a range of valued Li-Lamenu qualisigns that legitimate its construction. In their attribution to the 'good house', these meanings are recreated and extended to new contexts.

Particular historic circumstances and connections have given rise to opportunities and 'roads' for overseas work, and thus for the building of 'good houses', which, in turn, lend themselves to particular spatiotemporal conceptions and associated 'qualisigns' such as 'light' and 'dark'. The 'lighting up' of the good house seems to have taken on a particularly spiritual significance, as marked by the Pastor's prayer when he asked God to shine his light in the house at the moment he turned on the electric lights, recalling the transition between a common Melanesian Christian temporal idiom of the time of 'darkness' of the pre-Christian past, and the 'light' ushered in by the missionaries (Jolly, 1991; Rio, 2011, p. 61; Schram, 2007, p. 182; e.g. Tonkinson, 1982, p. 51), as well as the association with material housing transformation and moral 'standards of living'.

In fact the opportunity to work overseas, and to changes one's living standards is often said by Li-Lamenu people to be a 'blessing' by which they see it as part of God's plan[6], a source of hope for the future in the face of deep uncertainty. Many, especially Presbyterians, support such statements by citing how the opportunity to participate in the seasonal work programme is a legacy of missionary Reverend Horwell. It is seen as highly significant by Li-Lamenu people that the initial opportunity to participate in RSE came about through the Horwell connection[7].

[5] He used the English term 'extended family', although in general kinship ways of relating can be extended indefinitely employing a universal system of kinship classification (cf. Peterson and Taylor 2003:108).

[6] It also has echoes of the 'prosperity gospel' which is becoming increasingly prevalent, especially amongst the more Pentecostal churches globally (Meyer, 2010, pp. 116–118), and in Melanesia (Bainton and Cox 2009:5) although in the case of the Li-Lamenu 'good house' I did not hear explicit reference to this kind of doctrine, and it tended to be termed as a 'blessing' for the community, rather than individuals.

[7] One of Horwell's daughters was married to the manager of a large horticultural company, which became the first to recruit in the area.

Another reason the house is widely considered as 'good' is that it is seen as an outcome of hard work, which is associated with both customary and Christian moral values. The quale of 'hard work', noted by Foster (1995, p. 178) as an important quality associated with the value of pigs in exchange, becomes embodied in the 'good house', which stands testament to the actions of the seasonal worker and their household. The types of work people perform on the orchards and vineyards of New Zealand and Australia is positively valued as associated with hard work, 'sweat' (cf. Gamburd, 2004, p. 172 on Sri Lankan migrants) - a popular Melanesian and biblical idiom in Vanuatu, rather than laziness. Overseas work is understood to be exhausting and something to be endured for the sake of one's goals, and the good house as hard-earned and well-deserved (cf. Rensel, 1997b, p. 51).

Another important quality of the good house is its apparent 'permanence' or durability, which is not only associated with access to new foreign materials and technologies but also a way of enhancing the value of actions through its extension over time. Like people across Melanesia (Bainton, 2010, p. 2; e.g. Golub, 2006, p. 283), Li-Lamenu people emphasise the 'permanence' of imported housing materials, emphasising the potential for a value transformation as temporal extension of the house, perhaps beyond the lifetime of its occupants (Bashkow, 2006, p. 71). Munn (cf. Foster, 1995, p. 174; 1992, p. 10) noted that the quality of durability of Kula shells, relative to the perishability of foodstuffs, affects the mode and extends the capacity for shells to effect spatiotemporal transformation through their being used by Gawans for sharing and exchange. Durability is an attractive quality in a broader sense, in that it is seen to have lasting benefits for the household and wider kin, and thus it is an apt icon for visions of the future.

Durable Goods and Lasting Benefits

Whilst for people in Melanesia, and globally, building a 'good house' is a priority for those with the economic means to do so, development economists have often dismissed house-building projects as "unproductive consumption" (Heyman, 1994, p. 132; Hughes and Sodhi, 2006; e.g. Lipton, 1980; cf. Safri and Graham, 2010, p. 115). Arguably the glossing of expenditure on anything other than capital investments as 'consumption' obscures the distinctions that people everywhere make between moral and immoral transactions in terms of whether they are conducive to good social relations. Indeed, Graeber (2011) points out that the very term 'consumption' is a problematic one, where the quintessential illustration seems to be a solo diner, thinking only of one's own tastes and desires. Graeber (2011, p. 502) argued that, "... it might be more enlightening to start looking at what we have been calling the 'consumption' sphere rather as the sphere of the production of human beings, not just as labor power but as persons, internalized nexes of meaningful social relations."

Graeber (2001, pp. 260–261) had previously argued that most enjoyable human experiences everywhere come not from the effacement of society as elements of the external world are devoured or appropriated for one's own interests, but quite the opposite, the "certain loss of self" that is achieved through a pleasure shared. Rather than immediate self-gratification, the expenditure that Li-Lamenu people admired were those that represented investments in resources or relationships that would have lasting benefits for

the seasonal worker and their family, or could be enjoyed by the community more widely (cf. Polier, 2000, p. 204).

It is important to understand Li-Lamenu people's own distinctions regarding which activities or objects are productive of value, and what can be characterised as 'non-productive consumption'. By contrast to the positive evaluation of good houses with hard work on New Zealand orchards, those deemed lazy or prone to 'eating money' were often the subject of negative evaluation. Li-Lamenu people were disparaging of those who spent their money on store-bought food or drink for their immediate consumption, making a moral distinction between expenditure on solitary pursuits, such as eating, drinking, or smoking, and those things to be shared with others. When I asked Chief Waiwo his views of seasonal workers' spending decisions, he said, "we realise that people go back and forwards to make a 'good living' but some never do that. They just keep going and coming back." I responded by asking Chief Waiwo about when some people fail to make a 'good living', where does their money go? He replied, "Food. It goes into the belly, and down the toilet. And some make ceremonies[8]."

In Melanesia, the ways cash can be consumed, or used up, quickly on everyday expenditure is often seen as avoidable, and thus wasteful, and is often referred to as "eating money" (cf. Foster, 1995, p. 177; Polier, 2000, p. 204; Robbins, 2004, p. 235), or "wasting time" (e.g. Bailey, 2014, p. 144). The idiom "eating money" (kakae mani) is deployed as a moral critique of others who are seen to spend their wages unwisely, particularly on food and drink (especially alcohol), or cigarettes. Not only would they have nothing to show for their money at the end of the day, but it was also seen as greedy and selfish, or that such an individual is too lazy to go to their food garden and work.

The association of 'eating' with selfishness evokes the negative value put on personal consumption of food by oneself, vis-a-vis giving food to visitors, or exchanging shells, that Munn (1992, pp. 13, 49–52) described for Gawans. Munn suggested that Gawans saw eating as wasteful or non-productive in the sense it has no longstanding effect or influence beyond the immediate body. By contrast, the durability of Kula valuables lent itself to extending value by circulating beyond the face-to-face interactions of the donors who name and give them, and thus bringing 'fame' to the owners and their families, and the Gawan community.

The positive evaluation on the durability of the 'good house' is often differentiated from selfish personal consumption of perishable foodstuffs. The qualisigns of durability and heaviness of the good house also extend to the narrative of protection, which can bring benefits within and beyond the immediate household. By contrast, 'eating money' is a negative value transformation, in that it does not extend spatiotemporal relations. Unlike

[8] I do not have space here to discuss ceremonial expenditure, which is the topic of a full thesis chapter but I will be happy to discuss it further during questions.

houses, money is not seen as 'heavy' or 'durable' in itself (cf. Foster, 1995, p. 175), but has a tendency to 'flow' and to 'fly'[9], as well as be eaten.

The good house is valued as it is something to show, something lasting, from one's work and travels. Thus, a house represents a way of using money (and time) to extend its spatiotemporal effects and reach. In embodying qualisigns of a range of different moral, aesthetic and material values, the Li-Lamenu 'good house' is the preeminent way for people to concretise and realise their visions for a good life and a good future. As Munn (1992, p. 53) argued for Gawans' Kula exchanges, perhaps the 'good house' brings "... into the present... a focus on the future... and on the acquisition of value products that themselves 'contain a future' by reminding recipients that eating in itself has, as it were, no future."

The house both stands for the vision of the future, and brings it into being (cf. Nielsen, 2013; Rollason, 2008, p. 25). However, visions of the 'good life' and a 'good future' are often contradictory and contested. The focus on the lasting nature of the house and durable goods appears to indicate a shift in temporal reasoning and notions of social reproduction, from an emphasis on the reproduction of clans, and their interrelationships, toward an increasing focus on household and intergenerational transfers.

From Gifts to Goods

In seeking a better future through overseas work, Li-Lamenu people are confronted with dilemmas and conflicts over what constitutes a 'good life', for their households and community, and how to achieve this. Moral and material 'standards of living' are in a constant process of change. For Keane (2014, 2003), housing, like other material objects of value, inhere a bundle of different qualities and capacities, and thus can contain a multitude of potential meanings, and future possibilities, whilst the social realisation of these meanings or potentials are inherently historical. Like Munn, Keane suggests particular qualities or 'qualisigns' may be foregrounded, in accordance with a wider system of values, but are always open to other interpretations and possibilities.

Li-Lamenu people are involved in processes of rapid socioeconomic transformations, which are often fraught with contradictions and conflicts over the conditions of production and reproduction of people and things, and visions and projects for the future (Soja, 1985, p. 98). Whilst Munn described the mediation of values by qualisigns in a manner that is suggestive of a kind of social equilibrium, elsewhere she (1990, p. 13) suggests that Gawans make sense of events and signs in relation to different positively or negatively valued 'pasts' and 'futures'. Likewise, I suggest that the way in which people reason about a range of possible good and bad pasts and futures makes the vision of the 'good life' and the 'good future' open to contestation. As some anthropologists have noted, material goods lend themselves to creating and realising changing values, and conceptions of a 'good life' (Friedman, 1994, p. 121): "Material goods contest possible futures, by creating images, and

[9] In fact, paper money is particularly susceptible to being stolen through a kind of black magic known as 'kilim poket' ("hitting the pocket") in which a victim's money is caused to fly and land in the thief's pocket, and I heard of cases where people would weigh down notes with stones or coins.

tingeing those images with inevitability. Material objects in the present make a particular future seem concrete" (Wilk, 1994, p. 74).

Despite their apparent fixity and inevitability, good houses and durable goods can be subject to conflicting evaluations according to the social context. Elsewhere Wilk (2001, pp. 269–270) has contended that, "consumption is in essence a moral matter, since it always and inevitably raises issues of fairness, self vs group interests, and immediate vs delayed gratification." Many of these conflicts entail struggles over what is fair, and what people owe one another. Good houses can be seen as a way for the house-owners to contain their resources whilst embodying dimensions of social and moral values legitimating the construction. The good house concretises a vision of the good life, but one that appears to be increasingly household-oriented. Good houses gain social approval without entailing the extent of everyday sharing of money and resources to extended kin that might have been expected in the past. Here I examine the contested social uses of the good house, and whether the 'good house' can be seen as a form of legitimation of emerging inequalities.

Giving-while-Keeping

In symbolising an idea of 'permanence' or durability (cf. Bainton, 2010, p. 2; Bashkow, 2006, p. 71; cf. Golub, 2006, p. 283), and intra-familial transfers, the 'good house' may also be understood as a 'good' in Gregory's (1997, pp. 14, 79) sense of an inalienable possession, held within a family and transferred over generations. Gregory (1997, p. 79) defines a 'good' (in contradistinction to a neoclassical economic theory of 'goods'), as an "inalienable keepsake", or a "priceless non-commodity whose value as a good is to be explained with reference to historically specific relations of consanguinity" and the perspective of the House. Gregory draws on Weiner's (1992, p. 7) arguments around "inalienable possessions", which Weiner suggests are a means for people to gain some hold over an uncertain future:

> Inalienable possessions do not just control the dimensions of giving, but their historicities retain for the future, memories, either fabricated or not, of the past.... The motivation for keeping-while-giving is grounded in such heroic dynamics—the need to secure permanence in a serial world that is always subject to loss and decay.

Like Munn, Weiner (1992, p. 131) was also interested in how Kula valuables mediate relations between equality and hierarchy. In contrast to a Maussian emphasis on prestige accrued through giving things away, or valuables circulating in space, Weiner (1992, p. 103) drew attention to how the effort to keep certain things- such as land, keepsakes or ritual knowledge out of circulation entails the "paradox of keeping-while-giving".

Consumption goods like other 'inalienable possessions' create personal and social identities (Douglas and Isherwood, 1996, p. 112; Gregory, 1997, p. 81), and this subject-object transformation requires a form of action or work (Foster, 2008, p. 17; Weiner, 1992, p. 39). But whilst Kula valuables circulate, 'good houses' are designed to sit in place, even if they also symbolise a memory of the travels of the people that funded and built them. The acquisition of a good house appears as a shift towards greater household nucleation and household retention of money and resources. These resources might otherwise be shared or exchanged with extended kin, and thus the act

of keeping and containing money and resources for the temporal extension of the household could potentially be contested against the use of money and resources in exchange to create and maintain more extended kin relations.

If Kula is about the paradox of "keeping-while-giving" (cf. Foster, 2008, p. 18; Weiner, 1992, p. x), perhaps welcoming houseguests may be a sort-of 'giving-while-keeping': a way to engage in sharing or mutual exchange without alienating or losing one's own use of the object. The same might go for inviting friends and neighbours to watch a DVD, or allowing them to charge a mobile phone from a solar panel[10]. Although hospitality entails sharing food, it also potentially limits the 'using up' of resources in sharing and exchange of perishable foodstuffs and helps to keep control over what must be shared or circulated. Appeals to hospitality may be a means to legitimate a shift away from, or limitations on, the type of 'sharing' or redistribution of food, money and resources with extended kin that Sahlins (1972, p. 193) called 'generalised reciprocity'.

For Weiner, inalienable possessions, whether material objects or forms of knowledge are inseparable from self and group identities, and thus apt for marking difference and hierarchy. She (1992, pp. 5–7) suggested that despite the apparent conservatism of keeping, it is an act imbued with inherent tensions and ambiguities, and thus contains the "seeds of change". In the remainder of this paper, I will explore what the implications of the acquisition of the 'good house' are for social relations and transactions between kin.

From Reciprocal Dependence to Reciprocal Independence

In Vanuatu, as is common across Melanesia, moral narratives are often highly spatialised as well as temporalised, and this is reflected in idioms of kinship and identity (cf. Jolly, 1999). The Lamenu Lewo term for household is *merasava*, meaning 'door', which is also the root of the term for the patrilineal clan groups, *pamerasava*. For Li-Lamenu people, the thresholds of house and clan have long-acted as spaces of differentiation of kin relations and demarcate loci for autonomous decision-making. Dwelling houses are considered private spaces, and people tend to use a kitchen house or veranda to converse with neighbours. Clan yards or *rove*, in which dwelling houses nestle on Lamen Island, are largely out of bounds to non-clan members, and especially affines. This is comparable to how Munn (1992, p. 69) showed that, for Gawans, the autonomous domains of the house and the clan space are manifestations of "matrices of self-identification", and the house itself as the "artifactual form" of the assertion of autonomy of its occupants (cf. Wagner, 1986, pp. 46–48).

However, as Rodman (1985) has argued the symbolism of precolonial houses as containers of women and wealth makes them apt sites for the elaboration of consumption practices, and the incorporation of things and behaviours from 'outside'. Whilst the house cannot simply be seen as an item of conspicuous consumption, nevertheless it can be understood as a concrete manifestation of changing social relations which can be mapped in changing

[10] Such ideas are certainly not limited to the Pacific; Green (2000, p. 82) describes similar tendencies in rural Tanzania, where; "House building also offers a way of being seen to invest in kinship, without having to redistribute everything for kin to consume. Relatives have latent rights to hospitality and residence. They can share in the investment without diminishing it. A person who opens their house to kin avoids the accusations of meanness that denying other kinds of assistance would entail..."

residence patterns and housing styles. This transformation appears to reflect a shift away from generalised or everyday reciprocity, towards more household autonomy or individualism. In other words, relations of 'reciprocal independence' and a new kind of ethics of opportunity, is emerging as distinct from customary expectations of 'reciprocal dependence' or 'interdependence' based on redistributive patterns of reciprocity and sharing of things and services, that has been seen as characteristic of customary Melanesian social orders (1982, pp. 100–101, 1981; cf. Martin, 2013, pp. 4–5).

Indeed, this shift from deferred return in kind within a dispersed kin network, to more immediate cash transactions can be seen in the construction of the fabric of the house itself. The construction of a thatched house is an event involving wide networks of kin, and tied up with acts of reciprocity of food and labour. When building a wild cane house, the household gather together a wide circle of kin and neighbours; whose collective efforts mean it could be completed in just one or two days. The women pre-prepare the materials, and then get to work cooking food to feed all those that contributed, who –in turn- could expect reciprocal assistance in future (cf. Rensel, 1997b, pp. 34–35). However, permanent houses demanded a certain level of technical expertise, and often a local carpenter, usually a kinsman, is employed for a considerable fee. The demand for a 'good house' has provided impetus for commoditization and division of labour, which undermined the principle of reciprocity of work (cf. Flinn, 1997, p. 140). Today people often complain that if you ask someone to come and help with a domestic task, they will expect payment.

In contrast with traditional house building, in which workers would be fed, the feasting that comes with a 'house blessing' such as the one described in the introduction, is more unilateral. These 'blessings' also celebrate the morality of the seasonal worker in saving his money wisely, and working hard to achieve his or her aspirations and security for the household, a rather different spatiotemporal configuration of relational values. In this sense the 'good house' seems a manifestation of the householders' aim to secure the long-term future of the household.

I argue that changes in concepts of what constitutes a 'good house' reflect a shift in attitudes towards kinship relations and inheritance, toward an increasing accumulative process aimed at the future of the nucleated household over sharing and exchange with wider kin networks. Similarly, Gamburd (2004) found that amongst female migrants in Sri Lanka, spending on the house and land is a means to allocate remittances in such a way that it allows household accumulation without entailing the types of criticism reserved for individual consumption. However, it also limits the wide dispersal of remittances to kin networks; "A newly prioritized object of desire (a plot of land and a house) supersedes both the Western ideal of luxury consumption and the older ideal of a strong family support network" (2004, p. 180). Rodman (1997, p. 227) identified a similar transition towards household nucleation in rural Vanuatu, noting:

> In the past, a house expressed connection to the community; now it expresses the importance of nurturing the nuclear family and of material success. A 'good provider' under these changed circumstances turns inward toward the household more than outward toward the larger social unit.

In Li-Lamenu terms, the house and clan as 'doors' denoted both autonomy but also interdependence in paths of exchange and reciprocity brought about through the passage of women. However, it appears that this propensity for the house to act as a domain of autonomy has led to its transformation in the context of the uprooting of productive ways in which households make a living from its reliance on sharing and cooperation between kin. Li Puma (2001, p. 217) indicates that privacy and locked doors have become a metaphor for the emergence of notions of private property, and possessive individualism, perhaps in part by keeping goods out of plain sight it helps curb others jealousy or desire (cf. Wardlow, 2005, p. 66).

The same might be said of the proliferation of tradestores, which are built in a room within the 'good house', with a caged window to the outside. Tradestores are a popular addition in new Li-Lamenu houses, with one front room usually designated for the purpose. Although few stores seem to have been very profitable, perhaps they are seen as a 'store' for wealth that can be more controlled in how and when it is 'eaten'. Polier (2000, p. 207) saw houses and the creation of tradestores in one room of the house as a strategy to privatise wealth, and limit sharing and redistribution to kin. Likewise, Li Puma (2001, p. 149; cf. Silverman, 2005, p. 85), argues for Maring, "The tradestore implies the right of private property, exemplified by a decline in the obligation to share, and private ownership in turn is a metaphor for privacy or the self-containment of the person that is an index of individuality". Unlike descriptions of businesses elsewhere in Melanesia, which could only survive if operated by outsiders (Curry, 1999, p. 288), tradestores in the Li-Lamenu context appear delimit a space in which it is acceptable to exact a price and a profit from one's kin, and refuse to share. Even where kin take advantage and accumulate too much debt, store holders can retain the right to refuse store credit to kin (by posting signs in the name of the 'store'), whilst refusing to share cooked food with kin would be seen as selfish.

Li-Lamenu business owners lending money for interest are using a similar spatio-moral logic when extending credit to prospective migrants. When Leitar, a widow in her fifties, received 41,000 vatu (around £250) tax rebate from a season's work in New Zealand two years before, she decided to 'play around' with the money, and began to lend it out to prospective migrants. The success of Leitar's scheme depended on her ability to enforce the business logic behind it, and keep it distinct from everyday kin behaviour, partly through the spatial and temporal 'bounding' in the construction of a room in the house for commodity transactions. When creditors tried to repay the money as she was walking around, she would explain to them that that is not the fasin blong wok, i.e. the way to behave as regards "work". Rather, they should come to her store, in the front room of the house she shared with an adult son, and see her at her window.

Furthermore, good houses are often built in more secluded spots away from the tightly packed yards where clan members have tended to live side-by-side, and this may indicate a greater degree of household assertions of autonomy and privatisation of property. I suggest that this incipient spatio-moral order reflects a change in the transactional orders that have so long characterised the ethnography of the region. The changes move from a

generalised sharing within, and differentiated exchanges between clans towards a new emphasis on formally commoditised exchanges, even between close kin. This raises the more general question of whether the good house and its store rooms reflects a shift away from a kin-ordered morality towards a more individualised, or nucleated household spatialised and economised moral order.

Unequal Standards of Living and Deprived Relatives

The construction of modern houses and acquisition of household goods have often been often analysed as examples of capitalist hegemony and incipient class formation (Gardner, 1993; Philibert, 1990b). Although I have argued that Li-Lamenu ambitions for a good house are not necessarily 'conspicuous', in this section I interrogate further whether the 'good house' reflects incipient class formation, or status distinctions in terms of 'haves' and 'have-nots'. By Narotzky's (1997, p. 218) definition of class formation as "... the degree of necessity that impels people into specific labour/capital relations to earn a living, and the degree to which they can choose between different alternative forms of labour/capital relations or other strategies", Li-Lamenu people are far from becoming a 'class-based' society. After all, Li-Lamenu people are determined to retain customary land tenure, and this is important in helping to 'keep their options open', continuing to draw on diverse ways to make a living (Rodman, 1993).

Furthermore, rather than being understood as a cause of inequalities within the community, the building of a remittance house is often termed more as the closing of a gap that has existed for decades (cf. Torres, 2015, p. 360). The prevalence of seasonal work opportunities amongst Li-Lamenu people meant that most households with people of working age had a 'good house', or one under construction. People would frequently tell me that New Zealand work means that people who schooled to Class Six (Primary School level) can now build houses that before were only accessible to government workers, politicians, or successful business people; they could not have imagined having a 'good house' before the rise of the scheme. Rather than exaggerating existing status distinctions between households, opportunities for overseas wage work have enabled those who previously could not have afforded such homes to achieve a similar standard of living.

This closing of a gap between 'haves' and 'have-nots' could be seen as a process of 'levelling' and part of a 'symbolic struggle' that resists status distinctions and class formation (Stirrat, 1989, pp. 108–109). On the other hand, Rodman (1985, p. 276) also saw this struggle as part of an on-going process of more antagonistic relations between emergent 'haves' and 'have-nots':

> Like the Landrover or trousers, current standards of luxury housing no doubt will be only temporarily effective as a sign of inequality. As more people have an opportunity to earn cash incomes, such houses should become much more common. But as any Western homeowner knows, purchased housing provides almost limitless opportunities for the most affluent to differentiate themselves from their poorer neighbors.

This process of change evokes the contrast that Wagner (1981, p. 91) describes from a balanced dialectic of mutual creation towards a more antagonistic relation of mutual motivation in an economically differentiated or class-based society.

Rather than spurring more elaborate house constructions by the richer elite, the spread of 'good houses' amongst the general population seemed to be welcomed by people who had already had the means to complete one. Indeed, it has long been the case that an egalitarian ethic and sorcery beliefs meant that one should avoid being 'conspicuous'. Visible signs of wealth invited higher expectations and more demands on the part of kin for redistribution of wealth, and jealousy was associated with a fear of sorcery attacks. Mary, the recruiter who was in well-paid government employment and highly educated had told me that before the migrations scheme she felt self-conscious about having perhaps the biggest house in the community, and was almost relieved that now so many families had the opportunity of achieving a 'good house'. Mary implied that this took the pressure off her to support kin members, saying that seasonal migration is changing people's attitudes to development; people no longer just "sit and wait for hand-outs".

I suggest that one of the reasons for the perceived success of overseas work as a route to development is that income from seasonal work is seen as well-earned through hard work. Furthermore, workers' wages are perceived as an alternative to 'hand-outs' from MPs or aid from development organisations (cf. Errington and Gewertz, 2005, p. 168), which are often associated with corruption and unfair distribution on the part of the givers, and laziness on the part of the receivers. Expectations of redistributive sharing or 'hand outs' can be seen as the extension of kinship relations of mutual creation and exchange, to a situation where the economic differentiation between kin entails a shift from alternating symmetrical to asymmetrical or unidirectional exchanges, from 'haves' to 'have-nots'. Conversely, the critique of 'hand-outs' has served as an attempt by richer elites or 'haves' to legitimate their accumulative lifestyles and limit expectations of redistribution of wealth to poorer 'have not' relatives (2005, p. 168; 1999, p. 49, 1998; Martin, 2013, 2007, p. 287).

The motivation for seasonal workers in building a durable house is to attain a certain 'standard of living' and parity with richer neighbours. This motivational factor has been recognised by New Economics of Migration theorists (e.g. Stark and Taylor, 1991), who term it 'relative deprivation'. However, although most households had at least one member who had worked overseas, there were those who remained deprived of the opportunity to accumulate enough money for a 'good house'. People who are older, have health problems or are single parents do not have the same access to the income and material goods.

Often those who did not yet have a 'good house' would apologise, or appear ashamed when I came to visit saying that their house was substandard. But the house can also provide concrete evidence of material care from family members, or their neglect. For instance, Jemima, a mother of three young boys, was initially ashamed to invite me to their house, which was built by a classificatory brother of her partner, Pulpe from woven coconut leaves, and was only ever meant as a temporary measure. Even compared with most 'local' houses, Jemima's seemed particularly battered and lowly. She spoke with sadness about how her partner's family neglected her and her children, and the fact her Pulpe would not go to New Zealand to work, unlike his

brothers, nor share whatever cash he made for producing kava with her and the children. She added that she built their kitchen house by herself, weaving the panels for the sides, cutting the wood and nailing on the roof, and that she had to ask a family member returning from New Zealand to bring her a small solar lamp, for which she exchanged three of her own chickens.

Often people would explain their poor home through the failure of family members to properly provide for them. Widows also seemed to feel relatively deprived by their husband's clan after the death of their husband. One widow I got to know very well grumbled that her thatch house was leaking, but her sons had done little to help build a new one. Another I visited during the household survey also apologised at the state of her house; she told me that since the death of her husband and son she had been dependent on her married daughter for financial help.

Cases such as these suggest that although new 'standards of living' may be seen as collective goals, some may be left behind. As I outlined in the previous section, people talk of a decline in sharing behaviours and mutual help between kin, which may signal an emerging consumption-based form of social distinction, between having and not-having. Douglas and Isherwood (1996, p. 154) suggested that class formation should be seen as about absolute distribution of income than about patterns of exclusion and inclusion, which form the "boundaries of sharing and hospitality".

Likewise, studies of incipient class formation and the formation of a new elite in Melanesia have highlighted the process of "the social and cultural work of creating new forms of distinction", as Gewertz and Errington (1999, p. 8) put it, with elites investing in new lifestyles, and limiting the extent to which they are expected to share. The claim of everyone having the potential to improve their 'standards of living' has been noted by Gewertz and Errington (1998, p. 346) as a modernist form of legitimation of accumulative lifestyles amongst an emerging elite, whose resisting 'hand-outs' could even be turned upon those requesting them, blaming them for their disadvantage in a "virtual sleights of hand". The prevalence of seasonal employment opportunities locally has reinforced and popularised this modernist claim by allowing most households to participate in this quest for better 'standards of living', enabling the proliferation of an ethic of opportunity and 'hard work' over expectations of sharing.

Conclusion: The Good House and the Good Life

At the intersection of spatiotemporal frameworks of kinship and reproduction, and imaginaries of a different future, the 'good house' represents Li-Lamenu people's determination to secure a home, and a good future for their household in the face of anxieties and uncertainties over the future. As I have argued, the good house is iconic of a number of 'qualisigns' of value that legitimate expenditure on imported materials. Not only are imported durable materials attractive in offering strength and protection from the elements, and prestige of modernity and money, but 'durability' itself is a qualisign that makes the 'good house' apt for signifying and concretising a vision for the future, and the longevity of the household, whilst staking a place in the community.

The 'good house' is understood as a 'permanent' (or at least 'semi-permanent') testament to ones travels, and one's care for the household. Perhaps it also gives some sense of permanence and security in a changing world, where the future is by no means certain, and a way of extending one's care for the household and one's children in time. As such, the 'good house' can be valued positively as a value conversion with lasting benefits, against the negative valuation on 'eating money' and spending on ephemeral personal consumption.

In practice, this intensifies tensions over householder's obligations to others, and the implications for these decisions and actions in terms of 'living together well'. In emphasising social benefits and value of the good house in offering protection for the family, hospitality for kin and friends and embodying God's 'blessing' for the family and community the 'good house' can be perceived by others as a social and moral good. Such reasoning legitimates the proliferation of the 'good house', even though it appears to make concrete new spatiotemporal moral configurations.

Whilst the house is presented in terms of care for the family, the preoccupation with the 'good house', and the channelling of resources and money into its fabric, may suggest an increasing preoccupation of household welfare and future over relations of sharing and delayed reciprocity between kin. Further, the house becomes a container for the accumulation of other durable goods, and is evidence of a growing divide between economic production and the reproduction of kin relations, which makes visible a dynamic tension over what constitutes a good life and a good future, putting the grounds of social reproduction into contestation.

In terms of the articulation between production and reproduction that Narotzky highlights, there have been important shifts, as production and reproduction spheres are increasingly mediated through money and imported goods. So if increasing class conflict is the struggle over the means or possibilities for "owning one's future", as Narotzky (1997, p. 218) suggests, the question remains over whether changing material 'standards of living', and access to money and commodities, is creating new kinds of relations or conflicts between Li-Lamenu people. There appears to be more of an emphasis on what each household 'owns' in terms of material goods and intergenerational transfers, rather than processes of (re-) production of social relations between kin and clans.

Bibliography

Bailey, R., 2014. Working the Vines: seasonal migration, money, and development in New Zealand and Ambrym, Vanuatu. (PhD Thesis). University of Otago.

Bailey, R., 2009. Unfree Labour? Ni-Vanuatu Workers in New Zealand's Recognised Seasonal Employer Scheme (MA Thesis). University of Canterbury. School of Social and Political Sciences, Canterbury, New Zealand.

Bainton, N.A., 2010. The Lihir Destiny: Cultural Responses to Mining in Melanesia. ANU E Press, Canberra.

Bashkow, I., 2006. The Meaning of Whitemen: Race and Modernity in the Orokaiva Cultural World. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.

Biersack, A., 2010. Comment on Maclean's "globalization and bridewealth rhetoric." Dialect. Anthropol. 34, 379–382.

Binford, L., 2013. Tomorrow We're All Going to the Harvest: Temporary Foreign Worker Programs and Neoliberal Political Economy. University of Texas Press, Austin.

Callon, M., 1998. An essay on framing and overflowing: economic externalities revisited by sociology. Sociol. Rev. 46, 244–269. doi:10.1111/j.1467-954X.1998.tb03477.x

Chowning, A., 1997. Changes in Housing and Residence Patterns in Galilo, New Britain, 1918-1992, in: Rodman, M., Rensel, J. (Eds.), Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, pp. 79–102.

Codesal, D.M., 2014. From "mud houses" to "wasted houses": remittances and housing in rural highland Ecuador. REMHU Rev. Interdiscip. Mobilidade Humana 22, 263–280. doi:10.1590/S1980-85852014000100016

Coiffier, C., 1988. Traditional Architecture in Vanuatu. University of the South Pacific Centre, Suva.

Colloredo-Mansfeld, R., 1994. Architectural Conspicuous Consumption and Economic Change in the Andes 845. Am. Anthropol. 96, 845–865. doi:10.1525/aa.1994.96.4.02a00070

Curry, G., 1999. Markets, social embeddedness and precapitalist societies: the case of village tradestores in Papua New Guinea. Geoforum 30, 285–298. doi:10.1016/S0016-7185(99)00020-2

Curtis, T., 2002. Talking about Place: Identities, Histories and Powers among the Na'hai speakers of Malakula (Vanuatu) (PhD Thesis). Australian National University, Canberra.

Dahya, B., 1973. Pakistanis in Britain: Transients or Settlers? Race Cl. 14, 241–277. doi:10.1177/030639687301400302

Douglas, M., Isherwood, B., 1996. The World of Goods: Towards an Anthropology of Consumption. Routledge, London.

Durand, M., 2015. Thinking through houses: The materiality of kitchen houses and histri on Mere Lava, Vanuatu. J. Mater. Cult. 1–21. doi:10.1177/1359183515601452

Early, R., 1994. A Grammar of Lewo, Vanuatu (PhD Thesis). Australian National University, Canberra.

Errington, F., Gewertz, D., 2005. On Humiliation and Class in Papua New Guinea, in: Robbins, J., Wardlow, H. (Eds.), The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation

and the Nature of Cultural Change. Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, pp. 163–170.
Flinn, J., 1997. Private Houses, Public Sharing: Pollapese Migrants Coping with Change, in: Rodman, M., Rensel, J. (Eds.), Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, pp. 132–150.
Foster, R.J., 2008. Commodities, brands, love and kula Comparative notes on value creation In honor of Nancy Munn. Anthropol. Theory 8, 9–25. doi:10.1177/1463499607087492
Foster, R.J., 1995. Social Reproduction and History in Melanesia: Mortuary Ritual, Gift Exchange, and Custom in the Tanga Islands. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
France, N., 1953. The Jungle Drums are Quiet. Presbyterian Bookroom, Christchurch.
Friedman, J., 1994. The Political Economy of Elegance: An African Cult of Beauty, in: Friedman, J. (Ed.), Consumption and Identity. Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, pp. 120–134.
Gamburd, M.R., 2004. Money That Burns like Oil: A Sri Lankan Cultural Logic of Morality and Agency. Ethnology 43, 167–184.
Gardner, K., 1993. Desh-Bidesh: Sylheti Images of Home and Away. Man, New Series 28, 1–15. doi:10.2307/2804433
Gewertz, D., Errington, F., 1999. Emerging Class in Papua New Guinea: The Telling of Difference. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
Gewertz, D., Errington, F., 1998. Sleights of Hand and the Construction of Desire in a Papua New Guinea Modernity. Contemp. Pac. 10, 345–368.
Gibson, J., McKenzie, D., 2013. The Development Impact of a Best Practice Seasonal Worker Policy. Rev. Econ. Stat. 96, 229–243. doi:10.1162/REST_a_00383
Golub, A., 2006. Who Is the "Original Affluent Society"? Ipili "Predatory Expansion" and the Porgera Gold Mine, Papua New Guinea. Contemp. Pac. 18, 265–292. doi:10.1353/cp.2006.0016
Graeber, D., 2011. "Consumption." Curr. Anthropol. 52, 489–511. doi:10.1086/660166
Graeber, D., 2001. Toward an anthropological theory of value : the false coin of our own dreams. Palgrave, New York.
Green, M., 2000. Participatory Development and the Appropriation of Agency in Southern Tanzania. Crit. Anthropol. 20, 67–89. doi:10.1177/0308275X0002000105
Gregory, C.A., 1997. Savage Money: The Anthropology and Politics of Commodity Exchange. Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam.
Gregory, C.A., 1982. Gifts and Commodities. Academic Press, London.
Gregory, C.A., 1981. A conceptual analysis of a non-capitalist gift economy with particular reference to Papua New Guinea. Camb. J. Econ. 5, 119–135.
Hartman, T., 2007. Moral vectors, transitional time and a "Utopian object of impossible fullness"*. Soc. Anthropol. 15, 187–203. doi:10.1111/j.0964-0282.2007.00012.x
Heyman, J., 1994. Changes in House Construction Materials in Border Mexico: Four Research Propositions about Commoditization. Hum. Organ. 53, 132–142.

Hughes, H., Sodhi, G., 2006. Should Australia and New Zealand Open Their Doors to Guest Workers from the Pacific?: Costs and Benefits (CIS Policy Monograph 72). Centre for Independent Studies.
Jolly, M., 1999. Another Time, Another Place. Oceania 69, 282–299.
Jolly, M., 1991. "To save the girls for brighter and better lives": Presbyterian Missions and Women in the South of Vanuatu: 1848–1870∗. J. Pac. Hist. 26, 27–48.
Keane, W., 2014. Signs are not the Garb of Meaning, in: Moore, H.L., Sanders, T. (Eds.), Anthropology in Theory: Issues in Epistemology. Wiley Blackwell, Chichester, pp. 518–513.
Keane, W., 2003. Semiotics and the social analysis of material things. Lang. Commun., Words and Beyond: Linguistic and Semiotic Studies of Sociocultural Order 23, 409–425. doi:10.1016/S0271-5309(03)00010-7
Kraemer, D., 2013. Planting Roots, Making Place: An Ethnography of Young Men in Port Vila, Vanuatu (PhD Thesis). London School of Economics.
Lind, C., 2014. Why the Future is Selfish and Could Kill: Contraception and the Future of Paama, in: Rollason, W. (Ed.), Pacific Futures: Projects, Politics and Interests. Berghahn Books, Oxford, pp. 71–95.
Lipton, M., 1980. Migration from rural areas of poor countries: The impact on rural productivity and income distribution. World Dev. 8, 1–24. doi:10.1016/0305-750X(80)90047-9
LiPuma, E., 2001. Encompassing Others: The Magic of Modernity in Melanesia. University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor.
Lopez, S.L., 2010. The Remittance House: Architecture of Migration in Rural Mexico. Build. Landsc. J. Vernac. Archit. Forum 17, 33–52.
Maclean, N., 2009. Globalisation and bridewealth rhetoric. Dialect. Anthropol. 34, 347–373. doi:10.1007/s10624-009-9124-7
Makin, B., 2012. Vanuatu daily news digest | 25 September 2012 [WWW Document]. Vanuatu Dly. Dig. URL https://vanuatudaily.wordpress.com/2012/09/25/vanuatu-daily-news-digest-25-september-2012/ (accessed 5.20.15).
Martin, K., 2013. The Death of the Big Men and the Rise of the Big Shots: Custom and Conflict in East New Britain. Berghahn Books, New York.
Martin, K., 2007. Your Own Buai You Must Buy: The Ideology of Possessive Individualism in Papua New Guinea. Anthropol. Forum 17, 285–298. doi:10.1080/00664670701637743
Meyer, B., 2010. Pentecostalism and globalization, in: Anderson, A., Bergunder, M., Droogers, A., Laan, C. van der (Eds.), Studying Global Pentecostalism. Theories and Methods. University of California Press, Berkeley, pp. 113–131.
Miller, D., 2001. The Poverty of Morality. J. Consum. Cult. 1, 225–243. doi:10.1177/146954050100100210
Mitchell, J., 2013. Objects of Expert Knowledge: On Time and the Materialities of Conversion to Christianity in the Southern New Hebrides. Anthropologica 55, 291–302.
Munn, N.D., 1992. The Fame of Gawa: A Symbolic Study of Value Transformation in a Massim (Papua New Guinea) Society. Duke University Press, Durham, NC.

Munn, N.D., 1990. Constructing Regional Worlds in Experience: Kula Exchange, Witchcraft and Gawan Local Events. Man, New Series 25, 1–17.

Narotzky, S., 1997. New Directions in Economic Anthropology. Pluto Press, London.

Nielsen, M., 2013. Analogic asphalt: Suspended value conversions among young road workers in southern Mozambique. HAU J. Ethnogr. Theory 3, 79–96. doi:10.14318/hau3.2.006

Petrou, K., 2015. Are we Home Yet? Paamese Migration and Urbanisation a generation on. (PhD Thesis). University of Sydney, Sydney.

Philibert, J.-M., 1990a. Consuming Culture: A Study of Simple Commodity Consumption, in: Manning, F., Philibert, J.-M. (Eds.), Customs in Conflict: The Anthropology of a Changing World. Broadview Press, Peterborough, Ontario, pp. 449–478.

Philibert, J.-M., 1990b. The Politics of Tradition: Towards a Generic Culture in Vanuatu, in: Manning, F., Philibert, J.-M. (Eds.), Customs in Conflict: The Anthropology of a Changing World. Broadview Press, Peterborough, Ontario, pp. 251–273.

Philibert, J.-M., 1984. Affluence, Commodity Consumption, and Self-Image in Vanuatu, in: Salisbury, R., Tooker, E. (Eds.), Affluence and Cultural Survival, 1981 Proceedings of The American Ethnological Society. American Ethnological Society, Washington DC, pp. 87–94.

Polier, N., 2000. Commoditization, Cash and Kinship in Postcolonial Papua New Guinea, in: Haugerud, A., Stone, P.M., Little, P.D. (Eds.), Commodities and Globalization: Anthropological Perspectives. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Lanham, MD, pp. 197–218.

Radio New Zealand, 2015. Pam teaches lessons about building [WWW Document]. Radio N. Z. URL http://www.radionz.co.nz/international/pacific-news/269786/pam-teaches-lessons-about-building (accessed 3.28.15).

Rensel, J., 1997a. Introduction, in: Rodman, M., Rensel, J. (Eds.), Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, pp. 7–26.

Rensel, J., 1997b. From Thatch to Cement: Social Implications of Housing Change on Rotuma, in: Rodman, M., Rensel, J. (Eds.), Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, pp. 27–54.

Rio, K.M., 2011. Policing the Holy Nation: The State and Righteous Violence in Vanuatu. Oceania 81, 51–71. doi:10.1002/j.1834-4461.2011.tb00093.x

Robbins, J., 2013. Beyond the suffering subject: toward an anthropology of the good. J. R. Anthropol. Inst. 19, 447–462. doi:10.1111/1467-9655.12044

Robbins, J., 2004. Becoming Sinners: Christianity and Moral Torment In a Papua New Guinea Society. University of California Press, Berkeley.

Rodman, M.C., 1997. Conclusion, in: Rodman, M.C., Rensel, J. (Eds.), Home in the Islands: Housing and Social Change in the Pacific. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu, pp. 222–233.

Rodman, M.C., 1993. Keeping options open: copra and fish in rural Vanuatu., in: Lockwood, V., Harding, T.G., Wallace, B.J. (Eds.),

Contemporary Pacific Societies: Studies in Development and Change. Prentice Hall, New Jersey, pp. 171–184.
Rodman, M.C., 1985. Contemporary custom: redefining domestic space in Longana, Vanuatu. Ethnology 24, 269–279.
Rollason, W., 2008. Counterparts: Clothing, Value and the Sites of Otherness in Panapompom Ethnographic Encounters. Anthropol. Forum 18, 17–35. doi:10.1080/00664670701858927
Safri, M., Graham, J., 2010. The Global Household: Toward a Feminist Postcapitalist International Political Economy. Signs 36, 99–125. doi:10.1086/652913
Sahlins, M., 1972. Stone Age Economics. Aldine Atherton Inc., Chicago.
Schram, R., 2007. "Sit, Cook, Eat, Full Stop": Religion and the Rejection of Ritual in Auhelawa (Papua New Guinea). Oceania 77, 172–190.
Silverman, E.K., 2005. Sepik River Selves in a Changing Modernity: From Sahlins to Psychodynamics, in: Joel Robbins, Wardlow, H. (Eds.), The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation and the Nature of Cultural Change. Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, pp. 85–101.
Smaill, T., 1891. A Missionary's Notes from the New Hebrides. South Aust. Regist. 6.
Soja, E.W., 1985. The Spatiality of Social Life: Towards a Transformative Retheorisation, in: Gregory, D., Urry, J. (Eds.), Social Relations and Spatial Structures. Macmillan, Basingstoke, pp. 90–127.
Speiser, F., 1996. Ethnology of Vanuatu: An Early Twentieth Century Study. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
Stark, O., Taylor, J.E., 1991. Migration Incentives, Migration Types: The Role of Relative Deprivation. Econ. J. 101, 1163–1178. doi:10.2307/2234433
Stirrat, R.L., 1989. Money, men and women, in: Parry, J., Bloch, M. (Eds.), Money and the Morality of Exchange. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, pp. 94–116.
Strathern, M., 2002. Externalities in comparative guise. Econ. Soc. 31, 250–267. doi:10.1080/03085140220123153
Strathern, M., 1972. Women in Between: Female Roles in a Male World : Mount Hagen, New Guinea. Seminar Press, London.
Taylor, J.P., 2008. The Other Side: Ways of Being and Place in Vanuatu. University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.
Thomas, N., 1990. Sanitation and Seeing: The Creation of State Power in Early Colonial Fiji. Comp. Stud. Soc. Hist. 32, 149–170.
Thomas, P., 1998. Conspicuous Construction: Houses, Consumption and "Relocalization" in Manambondro, Southeast Madagascar. J. R. Anthropol. Inst. 4, 425–446. doi:10.2307/3034155
Tonkinson, R., 1982. Vanuatu values: a changing symbiosis. Pac. Stud. 5, 44–63.
Torres, A., 2015. Migration and Development: Equalisation and Inequalities in Ecuador's Southern Sierra. Anthropol. Forum 25, 350–369. doi:10.1080/00664677.2015.1068161
VNSO, 2009. 2009 National Population and Housing Census. Vanuatu National Statistics Office., Port Vila.
Wagner, R., 1986. Asiwinarong: Ethos, Image, and Social Power among the Usen Barok of New Ireland. Princeton University Press, Princeton.

Wagner, R., 1981. The Invention of Culture. University of Chicago Press, Chicago.
Wardlow, H., 2005. Transformations of Desire: Envy and Resentment among the Huli of Papua New Guinea, in: Joel Robbins, Wardlow, H. (Eds.), The Making of Global and Local Modernities in Melanesia: Humiliation, Transformation and the Nature of Cultural Change. Ashgate, Aldershot, Hampshire, pp. 57–72.
Weiner, A.B., 1992. Inalienable Possessions: The Paradox of Keeping-While-Giving. University of California Press, Berkeley.
Wilk, R., 2001. Consuming morality. J. Consum. Cult. 1, 245–260.
Wilk, R., 1994. Consumer goods as dialogue about development: Colonial time and television time in Belize, in: Friedman, J. (Ed.), Consumption and Identity. Harwood Academic Publishers, Amsterdam, pp. 71–85.