Kwate'a from Town: Gifts of Food as Home-Making Practices in Honiara, Solomon Islands

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Abstract
The Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp, an unauthorized settlement on the outskirts of Honiara, Solomon Islands, exchange gifts of food that circulate within networks extending up to their island of origin, Malaita. In this article, I draw a few analytical connections between the data collected during 13 months of fieldwork conducted between Malaita and Guadalcanal, and the existing literature on urban Melanesia. The result is a methodological and theoretical blurring of rural-urban oppositions that otherwise are so prominent in some ethnographies of urban Melanesia, as much as in the public discourse in Solomon Islands and elsewhere. Ethnographies of Solomon Islands and other areas of Melanesia rarely elaborate on such nuances and even less often the blurring of spatial oppositions is demonstrated on the basis of ethnographic data. This kind of data is provided in three tables and two figures included in the article, in order to contribute to shifting the focus of urban ethnographies of Melanesia away from the rural-urban divide. One of the foremost benefits of this shift is the realization that Kwara'ae migrants are neither importing their *kastom* into the town nor being absorbed by urban culture. What they are engaging in is a process of cultural creation that, although combining pre-existing elements, is fundamentally new. It follows that this article contributes also to the recent burgeoning of literature on home-making practices and migrants as city makers.
Keywords: Gift, Migration, Domestic Moral Economy, Solomon Islands, Urban Melanesia

Introduction

The theme of the incompatibilities between values in Melanesia is a complex one, although it is often simplified as the historical result of the introduction of the three Cs, namely Colonialism, Christianity, and Capitalism. Historical explanations of this kind are based on the assumption that Melanesian cultures, if not all cultures, are internally coherent systems of values which would have just continued to exist in their contradiction-free purity had they not come into contact with other internally coherent systems of values, such as 'Western culture' (Sahlins, 1985). This view resonates with popular associations of 'Melanesia' with, just to name a few, the gift,[1] reciprocity, and the dividual person on the one hand, and the 'West' with commodities, self-interest, and the individual person on the other (Carrier, 1995). The observation of social life reveals a rather different picture, one in which no act can be labelled as either purely selfish or purely altruistic (Graeber, 2012: 89-90, 262),

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[1] For an extensive elaboration on the relationship between ritual exchange of gifts and commodities in Gilbert Camp, see Maggio, 2017a.

totally relational or "unrelentingly individualist" (cf. Robbins, 2004: 293), and that there is no such a thing as a pure gift (Malinowski, 2013 [1926]: 22-49). Therefore, it is possible to explain the tensions between values in Melanesia as the mere historical outcome of contact between different cultures only as long as one deliberately ignores that contradictions and moral dilemmas are actually part and parcel of social life per se.

The Kwara'ae of Solomon Islands, like all human groups, live with their own contradictions, as well as their own ways of coping with such contradictions, which existed well before any contact with 'modernity' and will continue to exist thereafter. It follows that, when Kwara'ae people leave their island of origin, Malaita, and settle in the capital city Honiara, the tension between the values of tradition and the values that they associate with life in town is not the only kind of tension one can investigate in their culture. Before understating the tensions of their urban life and the ways of coping with these, the way in which they deal with tensions more generally should be carefully examined.

The study of how Melanesians live in the urban context is a relatively recent one (Dussy and Wittersheim, 2016), although it has been fairly popular in Papua New Guinea since the 1930s.[2] Much less has been written about the urban Solomon Islands. In 1964 Michael Bellam, at the time a graduate student in geography at the University of Wellington, was probably the first to investigate the lives of Solomon Islanders in Honiara. His observations on the urban male population depict an essentially home-oriented migrant who has no interest in town life beyond the immediate, mainly job-related, purposes of his temporary settlement (Bellam, 1964). Concomitantly, the urban geographer Terry McGee argued that the emphasis on the dualism between rural and urban context misled much of the then current research on urban-rural migration (McGee, 1964). In contrast, urban anthropologists of Melanesia sought to analyse the connections between urban and rural context in terms of continuity (Sillitoe, 2000: 163-180), rather than through the lens of a formal dualism. The result was a depiction of Melanesian town folks as culturally ambivalent (cf. Levine & Levine, 1979) and spatially bi-local (Carrier and Carrier, 1989).

However, some anthropological studies of the 'ambivalent' migrant in Honiara still place more emphasis on home-oriented attitudes and less on commitment to life in town. Cato Berg, for example, in his MA thesis defended in 2000 at the University of Bergen, described how urban Solomon Islanders envisage Honiara as a place for temporary sojourn and their village of origin as the place where their identity is derived and where they will eventually return (Berg, 2000: 6-7). To take another example, in her 2009 MA thesis presented at Concordia University, Michaela Knot discussed "how urban *temporality* reconfigures gender" (Knot, 2009:

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[2] See Belshaw, 2013 [1957]; Goddard, 2001, 2005, 2010; Gregory, 1980; 1982; Groves, 1954; Jackson, 1976; 1977; Levine & Levine, 1979; May, 1977; Oram, 1976; Rawlings, 1999; Salisbury & Salisbury, 1977; Strathern, 1972; 1975; Whiteman, 1973; Williams, 1932.

iii; my italics). She noted that "some migrants will enter Honiara for only short periods and other for longer periods" (*Ibid.*), as if their return to home was taken for granted. Furthermore, Knot's argument suggests that gender is *exported* from the rural context and modified in town, as if two mutually exclusive conceptions of gender existed. Ultimately, the modified notion of gender will re-enter the rural context, thereby altering it with its supposedly innovative urban elements. Although Knot seems to distance herself from modernist theories of migration, her argument of the rural-urban-rural movement represents Solomon Islanders as engaged in exporting tradition into town and importing modernity into the rural context in a rather unselective way,[3] thereby reproducing the rural-urban divide. Although circular migration has been the prominent type of migration in Solomon Islands for a long time (Frazer, 1985; Jourdan, 1985; Alasia, 1989; Berg, 2000), such preponderance should not be interpreted as a general lack of commitment to life in town by the part of urban migrants.

In accordance with such a position, Jourdan notes:

«[…] new kinds of social networks based on neighbourhood, work place, church membership, and friendship cut across the traditional kinship and *wantok*[4] ties and allow new social relations to be established. To the permanent town dwellers this is an important aspect of urban life. […] It is at the same time an affirmation of the independence one has acquired from the omnipresence of the village social order, its structures of kinship and affinity. This newly acquired social (and to a lesser extent economic) incorporation into a *very much valued* way of life, serves to reinforce the town dweller's ties to the urban environment and contributes to a loosening of his/her ties with the village. (Jourdan, 1985: 72; my italics)»

Perhaps the tendency of some anthropological studies to reproduce the urban-rural dichotomy results from the more-or-less implicit perception of the urban context as a place largely devoid of 'culture' (cf. Carrier, 1992: 6; Jourdan et al., 1996), especially when compared with rural Melanesia, generally considered as a depository of overwhelming cultural diversity. Arguably, from this assumption derives the view that, for the urban context to have any culture, it has to be imported from elsewhere.

The perspective of the rural village, in summary, undermines the perception of how much urban migrants value life in town. In contrast, this article claims that Kwara'ae people in Honiara do value their life in town and that their commitment to life in town is illustrated in a continuous series of acts of valuation that are neither intended to export *hom* nor to import Honiara.

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[3] She writes: "migration for women signifies women's entrance into modernity" (Knot, 2009: 22).

[4] The term refers to a person from the same language area as the speaker or referent. However, it can also be used figuratively to indicate a person with whom a relationship is as close as that with someone from the same language area is assumed to be.

This idea is best illustrated by the perpetual circulation of gifts of food within the network connecting urban Kwara'ae settlers and inhabitants of their island of origin. This notion of food gifts as dynamic and ever circulating contrasts with a dualistic portrait of the Kwara'ae migrant as engaged in two opposed and mutually exclusive locations. Although the geographical juxtaposition of *hom* and Honiara might be articulated in the Kwara'ae discourse, the social space created by the circulation of gifts in no less real than the circulation of winds and currents between the Guadalcanal and the Malaita province. The separation between the Kwara'ae district and the can, thus, be perceived if, for example, the strip of sea that separates the larger islands of Guadalcanal and Malaita is taken as a metaphor for a culturally-meaningful situation. However, the meaning of such a separation has changed in recent years, as a consequence, among other things, of the increased traffic of material and symbolic transactions between peri-urban settlements and the Kwara'ae district.

Living in between, before and after

Before and during colonial times

One could say that the interest the first explorers had for the archipelago is eloquently described in the name they have given it – Islas Salomón (Jack-Hinton 1969: 28-67). Although the gold mines of King Solomon, which populated the dreams of several generations of navigators, were never found, the appeal of the area persisted during the British colonial era. The indigenous population usually welcomed the commercial interests of white traders for local resources, particularly tortoiseshells, copra and coconut oil. Indeed, the desires of the inhabitants for foreign goods, especially iron, firearms and tobacco, were not less compelling than those of the newcomers. Facilitated by such intersection of interests, exploitation of the land through cash crops was introduced and became common from the 1910s. Resources that had once been a major part of the entire population's wealth were increasingly becoming the saleable commodity of individuals. Islanders had always been used to trading goods and valuables (see, for example, Oliver, 1955; Einzig, 1949), and soon became interested in the places where new commercial enterprises were concentrating. With the end of the labour trade during the first decade of the twentieth century, the demand for experienced Melanesians rose, as did salaries that on occasions reached £1 per week. Working away from home was becoming increasingly profitable.

However, inter-island mobility is not necessarily a feature that Solomon Islanders developed in response to the changing economic situation. Rather, travels, raids, and migratory movements featured in the pre-contact period (Bennett, 1987: 6-7). As for the Kwara'ae people, however, that was only to a limited extent. Until the

arrival of the first *waitman*, the Kwara'ae had always lived as farmers of the inland forests, and rarely travelled beyond the territory of their neighbours on the coast (Burt, 1994).

The division between "saltwater" and "bush" people of Malaita is key to understanding the relationship between Malaitan economy and mobility in the pre-contact period. Harold Ross observed that "the salient feature of human ecology in Malaita is the separation between coastal and interior populations" (1973: 72-73). David Roe further explained:

At the simplest level of analysis bush and saltwater groups may be distinguished broadly by the major components of their subsistence production economies. In very general terms bush groups are associated with the production of dryland taro and yams, pig husbandry, and the manipulation and exploitation of upland forest environments. Although hunting and gathering of foodstuff is an important part of these subsistence regimes, bush communities are primarily horticultural. As crop production in tropical forests depends upon a swidden system of agriculture, settlements tend to be relatively mobile. This view of the peoples of island interiors contrasts strongly with that of the saltwater people which portrays them primarily as fisherfolk, although vegetable produce from small coastal gardens forms significant part of the diet. Settlements are relatively long-lived and tend to be larger than those in the bush. (Roe, 2000: 201)

These quotations suggest that both bush and saltwater people tend to move and migrate. Thus, they support the claim that mobility is a constitutive characteristic of the Malaitan economy as a whole, rather than one that emerged with the introduction of new economic opportunities.

However, by then no Malaitan had travelled further than those islanders who were recruited as labourers to work in Fiji, Samoa, and New Caledonia. During the 1870s and till the end of the 1890s, the great majority of them were from the coastal areas. Later, this tendency changed and between the 1890s and the 1910s plantation labourers were mainly from the 'bush'. According to Bennett, there seem to be compelling reasons for that. "Once a coastal population had a reserve of trade goods and was able to draw on more inaccessible groups for additional women, pigs, and other valuables, the imbalance so caused encouraged the inland groups to offer their young men for labor recruiting" (Bennett, 1987: 86). Among other things, local groups encouraged their men to go overseas because the bride prices were rising as a consequence of the engagement of other groups in new economic activities. In other words, leaving one's homeland was not just convenient in terms of possible profits. It was becoming increasingly necessary.

Nowadays, some of the most influential and wealthy families in Honiara are descendants of Malaitan labourers in Queensland or Fiji (cf. Corris, 1973; Moore,

1985). Plantation labourers and their descendants were among the first who migrated to Honiara after the war. However, there are other ways in which the interaction with overseas labour modified Malaitan societies and influenced their subsequent development. For example, women working in gardens became the main producers, as many young men were absent. On the other hand, young men had become the main suppliers of Western goods, "a new economic role that potentially threatened elders' authority" (Bennett, 1987: 121). That does not mean that the traditional political economy was necessarily disappearing. Indeed, young Malaitans were using their Western commodities within the framework of their culture. For example, a Malaitan returner had to offer a portion of his wealth to the elders in order to be readmitted into his clan. He also had a whole new set of problems to solve: he had no gardens to cultivate, nor pigs to offer in marriage transactions. Therefore, he had to exchange his wealth with his fellow islanders in order to regain some of his earlier privileges and status. It follows that the innovations introduced with the new economic possibilities could be incorporated in the local value system through exchange. "Malaitans during this period", Akin wrote, "displayed remarkable flexibility and creativity both at home and abroad" (Akin, 2013: 8). Like other Melanesian people (Robbins, 2004: 47-49), they made efforts to comprehend the colonial and pre-colonial order in terms of their indigenous categories.

After the war

Malaitan people were historically familiar with the idea of travelling to seek economic opportunities, and therefore readily relocated when new opportunities arose in Honiara. The spatial position of Gilbert Camp, then, served well the purpose of settlers to take advantage of these economic opportunities. Kwara'ae people were also favoured by the proximity of the Kwara'ae district with the wharf of Auki, where ships to and from Honiara have been operating for decades. However, these very material reasons shall not rule out the importance of Kwara'ae ideas about urban life. Ultimately, it is on the basis of such ideas that they took their decision to leave, settle in Honiara, and construct their identity as migrants. Nowadays, these are the chief references that they use to illustrate the rationale that motivated their choice to migrate. Ideas, stories, and images of what was happening across the sea influenced their attitudes towards life in town, which they began to see as something they wanted to engage with (cf. Strathern, 1975: 53-58). They sought the opportunity to take part in it, and Gilbert Camp provided them with a "good" location to begin with.

That does not necessarily mean that Gilbert Camp became *hom* for them. Indeed, most Kwara'ae migrants who left their homeland and settled in Gilbert Camp describe that as a temporary condition. Rather than referring to Gilbert Camp as their final destination, most describe their future within the classic scheme of circular migration (Chapman and Prothero, 1985). Some, especially older migrants, say that

they want to go back *hom* because that is where they belong. Men in their thirties tend to say that going back would be desirable, but not something one can do overnight. "For those who live at *hom*, I am like a stranger", Thompson once told me. "I do not have a house, a garden, pigs, I do not have anything there. That is why I cannot go back". Others say the same thing, but do not put it as if it was a waiver. Roswell, for example, said straight away, "This is our *hom*, now".

Be it because they think they want to stay, because they think they have to, or because they want to leave later, Gilbert Camp is their current dwelling place. They do not use the term 'squatter settlement'. They call the settlement their *fanoa*, their "community", and by that they mean a place they (are trying to) belong to. But that is far from easy, for Gilbert Camp is a settlement on the threshold of Honiara not only in terms of geographical location, but also in terms of its linkages with both the urban and rural context. The concept of an 'arrival city', coined by journalist Doug Saunders, captures these features:

The arrival city can be readily distinguished from other urban neighbourhoods, not only by its rural-immigrant population, its improvised appearance and ever-changing nature, but also by the constant linkages it makes, from every street and every house and every workplace, in two directions. It is linked in a lasting and intensive way to its originating villages, constantly sending people and money and knowledge back and forth, making possible the next wave of migrations from the village, facilitating with the village the care of older generations and the education of younger ones, financing the improvement of the village. And it is linked in important and deeply engaged ways to the established city. Its political institutions, business relationships, social networks and transactions are all footholds intended to give new village arrivals a purchase, however fragile, on the edge of the larger society, and to give them a place to push themselves, and their children, further into the centre, into acceptability, into connectedness. (Saunders, 2010: 11)

Connected by, and to a certain extent trapped into, these linkages, the people of Gilbert Camp are constantly involved in negotiations between the values of the city and those of their village of origin. When they live in Gilbert Camp, even if it is only for a limited time span, they mediate between contradictory values to make it a "good" place to live, and by "good" they mean something that goes far beyond the mere availability of resources, the proximity to their workplace, the presence of facilities, and relatively free access to land. Their notion of good is informed by their *kastom*, understood both as tradition as well as contemporary ideas based, or perceived to be based, on that tradition and negotiated in the urban context. That does not mean that they just want to reproduce their *hom* in Honiara. Rather, they are creating a new *hom* that is not there yet, and yet, "in a sense, already there" (Graeber, 2001: 77).

In this sense, rather than answering the question concerning what is Gilbert Camp, these notes show that the question shall be posed in a different way: "what do Kwara'ae people *do* to express what they want Gilbert Camp to be?" I address this question by looking at a series of economic transactions (gifts and debts) in which Kwara'ae values are concretised in social actions (Graeber, 2001). In relation to the specificity of their condition as migrants, these transactions can also be interpreted as home-making practices (Blunt and Dowling, 2006: 23).

The moral economy of the Kwara'ae household in Gilbert Camp

Kwara'ae morality prescribes that each household should produce the resources for its own subsistence, and not rely on other households. However, although no regular contributions come from other relatives or related households, nor are they expected, some food and presents do sometimes enter the household as a consequence of connections with local churches or visiting relatives. These are essentially seen as occasional concretions of the value of relatedness, rather than regular assets. It follows that these contributions are not considered part of subsistence. Below, I deal with subsistence production first, and second I look more closely at the concept of self-reliance in the Kwara'ae household in Gilbert Camp.

Subsistence production

As mentioned above, an important aspect of a "good" life for the Kwara'ae of Gilbert Camp consists of food and material goods. One way in which they put food on the table is to cultivate a horticultural garden, whereas it is necessary to have a paid job, or other income-generating activity,[5] in order to produce money and pay for commercial goods.

Typically, people cultivate cassava,[6] sweet potato,[7] and yam.[8] As for the greens, those that are usually cultivated include slippery cabbage,[9] sweet fern,[10] and yard-long beans.[11]

Plants also stand for metonyms of place and "symbols of identity" (cf. Muke & Gonno 2002: 79): cassava is associated with Guadalcanal, sweet potato with Malaita. The food that results from their cultivation bears some important

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[5] Ethnographic accounts and interpretations of income generating activities in Gilbert Camp can be found in Maggio, 2017c.

[6] Kw.: *kaibia*; S.I. Pidgin: *kasava*; sc. name, *manihot esculenta*.

[7] Kw.: *kumara*; S.I. Pidgin: *kumara*; sc. name, *dioscorea esculenta*.

[8] Kw.: '*afā*; S.I. Pidgin: *yam*; sc. name: *dioscorea alata.*

[9] Kw.: *ba'era*; S.I. Pidgin: *kabis*; sc. name: *abelmoschus manihot*.

[10] Kw.: *tàkuma sisìmia*; S.I. Pidgin: *kasume*; sc. name: *diplazium esculentum*.

[11] Kw.: *bini fuana rada*; S.I. Pidgin: *snake bean*; sc. name: *vigna unguiculata, sesquipedalis*.

significance in "the maintenance of the identity of […] migrants who have left their "homeland" behind" (Sutton, 2001: 17). On the one hand, they miss the Malaitan foods and recipes, and the affective elements attached to them. On the other hand, they incorporate cassava in their daily diet, thereby making it a constitutive aspect of their current identity.

The area of land where most gardens are cultivated lies outside Gilbert Camp. Gardens can be reached by walking eastward for about 15-20 minutes. They begin to appear on both sides of the path and become increasingly frequent and dense. The inexperienced eye of the external observer can easily recognize their presence on the surrounding hills and ridges. It is harder, though, to realize you are walking into a garden if you do not know of its existence.

In a similar way, it is hard to tell where the garden of one family ends and that of another begins. In Malaita, it was common to see a pole or a signpost marking the plot area. This custom has not been imported in Gilbert Camp, arguably because no one feels confident enough to indicate as 'private' an area of land whose ownership is contested.[12] However, the absence of clear signs marking the boundaries between gardens seems not to be a problem for the settlers. "I only need to know where our garden is", Jacob once said. In that way, he meant, he knew that all the other gardens did not belong to his family, which was as much as he needed to know in order to avoid cultivating land where other people would eventually harvest, and also the risk of being accused of stealing, should he harvest the crops of another family by mistake.

Such set of norms, however, does not protect the crops from the thieves that sometimes venture into the garden areas during dark, moonless nights. When a garden is depredated, the family is in big trouble because it is deprived of its basic staple, a problem that can only be resolved with expensive solutions such as bread, flour, or vegetables bought from vendors (possibly the same vegetables that were stolen the night before).

Cultivation is everybody's business. However, there is a clear division of labour that dates back to ancient times. Clearing the land area and hoeing the ground is "a job for men", since it is perceived to be too hard for the relatively "weak body" of a woman. Women, thus, are responsible for tending and harvesting. This task can sometimes be delegated to children and teenagers if their mother is busy. It is very uncommon for a woman who is fit to work in the garden to be unemployed. So children and teenagers are often responsible for cultivation. On some rare occasions, though, even their father can be in charge of digging out some last-minute cassava.

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[12] Security of land tenure regularly emerges as a value with important practical implications. For an extensive elaboration of this theme, see Maggio, 2017.

Self-reliance and dependence

Household self-reliance means that the members of each single household have to provide each other with all the resources that are necessary for their survival. It follows that self-reliance and the practice of sharing food and money among members of a household cannot be substantially distinguished.

The general principle of household cooperation is that every member works in order to help every other member: the wife helps the husband with work and money, and the husband does the same with her; both parents (including classificatory parents, uncles and aunts) help their children, and their children will help them in turn when they will be old and needy; older brothers and sisters help their younger siblings, expecting them to do the same when they grow up.

Sharing has, it follows, important consequences on the construction of identity. It expresses not only the concept of kinship as the mutuality of being (Sahlins, 2013), but also the principle of generalized reciprocity (Sahlins, 1972), which, ideally, results in a form of transactional equilibrium. Indeed, what is given to the unproductive part of the household by the productive one will be repaid in the future.

Like in many other parts of the world (see Hiatt, 1982: 14-15), the most important social value is that of generosity, regardless of whether what is given will be returned or not. In other words, it is not necessary that there be a form of equilibrium in people's reciprocal transactions. Rather, Kwara'ae people believe that giving should be unconditional. The following excerpt from my field diary provides an illustration of how these values concretize in the everyday lives of the Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp.

[Excerpt from field diary]
Friday, November 18, 2011

Stephen is a man of about 35 years of age, who has never contributed to the domestic economy of his brother Matthew. Yet, he goes to his brother's house whenever he wants to eat something, and Matthew's wife never refuses to feed him. Matthew believes that, according to Kwara'ae *kastom,* there should be some reciprocity among relatives. However, Stephen has never brought any food into Matthew's house, only taken. Moreover, Stephen has never contributed to any fundraising for the family businesses, such as the bride price for Matthew's son. However, even in that case, no one dared saying anything to Stephen. On the contrary, Matthew continues to welcome him to his house, lets him take any food he wants, and refers to him as "my brother". Stephen, on the other hand, takes advantage of this situation. He has two jobs, no wife nor children to take care of, does not pay rent, but still eats at his

brother's expenses. Unless he dissipates his resources in some secret business, by now he should have put a small fortune aside. Yet, he has never even brought a gift for the children. Matthew is disgusted by his brother's behaviour, but he does not say anything. His culture, he says, does not allow him to openly address the subject. It would be 'defiling' for Stephen, he explained to me. In summary, according to Kwara'ae moral codes, Stephen is behaving wrongly, but it would also be wrong to reprimand him. Therefore, the situation remains deadlocked: Stephen is never explicitly rebuked for his behaviour, and continues to do what is considered to be wrong, i.e. sponging *ad infinitum.* Today, Matthew told me that, if Stephen has something "in his head", sooner or later he will realize how wrongly he is acting and will change his attitude. However, after so many years, this has not happened yet.

At the time when I was writing that page, I believed that I was observing a contradiction: Kwara'ae *kastom* prescribes a standard of behaviour but forbids enforcing it. However, rather than failing to enforce it, Kwara'ae people opt for a sort of non-confrontational resistance against behaviours considered to be wrong. Instead of defying the wrongdoer outright, they prefer forms of indirect communication that decentre the 'accuser' and de-target the 'accused'. In this way, the accused is given a chance to realise the inappropriateness of his behaviour and, without losing face, redress his conduct with practices of sharing.

The following brief considerations, again from my field diary, illustrate the point. Two days after the events narrated in the previous excerpt, I observed a scene that helped me to understand how Kwara'ae people can 'suggest' that a man changes his behaviour through forms of indirect communication.

 [Excerpt from field diary]
Sunday, November 20, 2011

Today was a special day (the first communion of Charles, the fourth son of Matthew) and there were some relatives visiting. All relatives (plus myself) gathered in the kitchen. Stephen, instead, was standing in the porch right in front of us, alone. He was staring into the void, as if he was trying to blend in with the upholstery, and disappear. In contrast, we were sitting close to each other in the kitchen, laughing and making jokes. Stephen stood in that corner the whole time, silent as if he was in punishment.

Refusing food outright is equivalent to breaking off relations.[13] That would not be an appropriate reaction to Stephen's behaviour. Although he does not

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[13] Kwara'ae people make use of some kind of intentional vagueness (Alpher, 1993: 99) that removes their personal character from the accusation (cf. Kendon, 1988: 455) and makes it sound or look more like a consequence of the person's behaviour.

reciprocate, he is still a relative and relatives shall never be refused food. Reciprocity generally rules relationships between Kwara'ae people, but that does not mean that it *has* to. In other words, if someone does not reciprocate, that does not mean he will be abruptly ostracized or disinherited. Rather, people begin to treat him as a relative who can still be fed according to, so to say, the law of hospitality, but who is not granted access to the sphere of intimacy.

It follows that transactions of food and money do not necessarily give a measure of people's intimacy and participation in each other's lives. In turn, sharing and/or generosity are not only ways to attain self-reliance through cooperation. They are also ways to maintain "good" social relations, although with a variable degree of intimacy.
In addition, residential proximity is not a necessary condition for intimacy, as the excerpt above suggests, and sharing does not only take place among members of a single residential unit. Sharing, indeed, can unite people living in different areas, which suggests that multiple households can be looked at as a bundle of simultaneously centripetal and centrifugal social relations, rather than a separate cluster of related individuals concentrated within the tin walls of a Gilbert Camp cabin.

Relatedness

Extending the limits of the household to the limits of sharing implies the recognition of the power of transactions to create and maintain kinship and kinship-like interpersonal relations. In this sense, relationships between members of different autonomous households can be looked at as concretising both the value of autonomy and that of relatedness, which in itself constitutes a compromise between virtually incompatible principles. Sharing, also, can be considered as the result of specific strategies among subjects interacting in particular socio-historical contingencies. The tendency to interpret sharing in this way can be identified in anthropological approaches to kinship as a post-natal construction and constant reconstruction (see Sansom, 1988; Martin, 1993). Following such interpretive tendencies, it is possible to see the Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp as attempting to live a "good" life through acts of sharing performed towards other members of their community. Income-generating activities and garden cultivation constitute the basis of their household subsistence and self-reliance, but they are not sufficient. Social relations are equally important.

However, the creation and maintenance of "good" social relationships depends largely upon the circulation of food and money, which creates a fundamental incompatibility with the principle of household autonomy. It follows that, in order to maintain "good" relationships, people have to negotiate the value of household autonomy with the value of relatedness. Negotiations take place according to

different regimes of value depending on the types of relationship between transactors. In autonomous connected households the regime of value is essentially the same as in the household. In the household, Kwara'ae people understand their transactions as sharing, which for them constitutes the concretion of "love" (*laf*). I will deal with transactions among interconnected Gilbert Camp households in the first sub-section.

The household is the primary site where kinship and norms of sharing tend to concentrate. Its classic organization is that of a system of production that is not intended to generate forms of surplus (Sahlins, 1972: 82). The economic transactions that take place inside the household are meant to respond to the moral value of love and reciprocal care among relatives, rather than the accumulation of resources. It is in accordance with these same values that transactions of food and money take place among the members of the Gilbert Camp community, as well as those who reside in the Kwara'ae district. In this sense, their households extend not just beyond the tin walls of their urban dwellings, but even to their homeland. I deal with such extension in the second sub-section.[14]

Transactions among connected households

The relationships among members of the same household extend and connect people living in different households of the Gilbert Camp community. That is because the people of Gilbert Camp perceive each other as interrelated individuals. Most commonly, they describe their relationships as based on kinship. They can call anyone cousin (*kasin*), brother (*brata*), sister (*sista*), or uncle (*ankol*), even if they might not be able to illustrate their genealogical connections. However, that does not mean that they cannot tell the difference between a close relative, a distant relative, and someone with whom a connection cannot be traced.

That they can tell such difference is particularly evident in their acts of giving. In general, the norm is that Kwara'ae people demand something from someone they know well, and feel uncomfortable to do the same thing with someone they do not know very well. The meaning of 'knowing someone well' is very variable. They might know the name of the person, but not their genealogical connection, or they might know the terms of their connection but not each other's name, or character, and so on and so forth. So, when it comes to requesting and giving, numerous variables are at play. The general norms, however, are those of generosity and reciprocity. Although there is no explicit expectation of return, everybody seems confident that the day when one might happen to need something, one will be able to count on all the people he or she has helped in the past.

Any social interaction constitutes the ideal situation for an act of giving. Most commonly, gifts are given as a consequence of a visit to someone's house. I

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[14] Table 1 and 2, and 3 list all the analysed transactions.

frequently observed people giving food to their neighbours when they pay visit, but also how easily they take food without asking. The following ethnographic account exemplifies the reasons and consequences of this pattern of behaviour.

Towards the end of January 2012, I received a bag of mangoes from William, whom I had just visited. I brought the bag home, left it under the porch, and went to the water tap to bathe. Upon my return, I found out that "my" bag of mangoes had disappeared. I interrogated everyone in the household, but no one seemed to know where it was. Two days later, Anna was passing in front of our house and sought the opportunity to let Gordon know that she had taken the bag of mangoes. Later that day, Gordon told me that and I asked him a couple of questions about Anna.

He explained to me that she was an in-law for him, having married the matrilateral first cousin of his own wife Helen (see Fig. 1). Neither Gordon nor Helen knew Anna very well. They only knew she was affinally related to them. Gordon explained that it was not strange she felt entitled to take that bag of mangoes: "If my relatives know they have a relationship with me," he added, "they can come and take". However, because they do not know each other very much, she might also feel the need to pay a second visit to let them know she took the bag, which is indeed what happened.

A few days later, when Anna passed once again in front of Gordon's house, Helen handed her another bag of mangoes. When I asked Helen why she had thought of preparing a bag of mangoes for Anna, she gave three interrelated answers: there are so many mangoes in the season that not even the children can eat them all; Anna lives on the side of Gilbert Camp where there are no mango trees; and, if Anna took a bag of mangoes few days before, that means she needed them then and she might need some again now.

Situations of this kind can be looked at as instances of demand sharing. In this respect, Peterson and Taylor wrote that these forms of 'passive giving' "can be understood in part as an outcome of living in societies with modest means and with universal systems of kin classification where everybody is kin of some sort, and where the obligations to others far outweigh the resources to service them" (Peterson & Taylor, 2003: 108).

The analysis of this transaction is not exhausted by the concept of demand sharing, if only because its consequences cannot be accounted for. As I was listening to Helen, Gordon laughed and exclaimed: "I will go to her house and demand her to name her baby after me!" And then he added, "It's just a joke. According to *kastom*, if I say: I gave you some mangoes, now call that baby after me, no, that is not a family. It is up to them. I just wanted to suggest, that when her baby is born, then she might name him after me!"

The short ethnographic accounts reported above illustrated the tight interpenetration of *kastom* and economy. Just as much as tense kinship relations, such as the one between George and Stephen, can be *maintained* through feeding, so the

naming of a baby can *originate* from a theft of mangoes. Transactions of food constitute the most common type of everyday acts of giving and they are inextricably connected with the creation and maintenance of "good" relationships. Acting generously takes place both as spontaneous action and response to people's demands (Peterson, 1993; Macdonald, 2000; Martin, 1995). Kwara'ae people, in this way, maintain numerous relationships of mutual dependence with other people in the settlement. They tend to see this pattern of behaviour as exemplary of their traditional *kastom*. They say they imported it from Malaita in order to make Gilbert Camp a "good" place to live. However, the circulation of food in Gilbert Camp cannot be substantially distinguished from the circulation of food at *hom*. Indeed, a constant flux of transactions bridges the urban context with the Kwara'ae district.

Transactions between Gilbert Camp and the Kwara'ae district

Transactions taking place among people coming and going between Honiara and the Kwara'ae district are an important part of living a "good" life in Gilbert Camp. Performing this kind of transaction, though, can be particularly difficult because of the high costs of shipping, the weight and quantity of items, and the price of the tickets. The fact that people are ready to spend so much energy, time and money to perform these transactions suggests that there must be very important reasons for that. Ralph, a 30-year-old taxi driver, once shared some of his anxieties with me. He was worried that his relatives at *hom* could think he had forgotten them. He was afraid to be seen as someone who disregards his culture. He was anxious they would say that distance and *waitman* culture had transformed him. So, when he sends gifts *hom*, he does it also because he does not want to be perceived as '*nogud*' (bad). So, he sends gifts in order to tell his relatives: "I am still a man of my *kastom*. I do not just think about myself. I am still able to help you and do my part". Indeed, for Kwara'ae people, "A man who is not connected to his home is a nobody. He is no longer a person" (Kwa'ioloa & Burt, 2013: 148). As cultural geographer Joel Bonnemaison argued about the people of Tanna, lack of connections to one's place of origin results in becoming a "nameless and homeless creature" (1985: 52).

Another illustration of the importance of inter-island transactions is provided by the following account of a trip to Malaita in which Rose Wuru, a young Kwara'ae woman, paid visit to her paternal and maternal relatives. Rose went to Malaita over Easter because she had some days off from her job. She arrived at the wharf with a large amount of food in her luggage. Hers was a mission, rather than a holiday. Part of that food was addressed to her relatives on her mother's side (see Fig. 2). But she was firstly going to pay visit to her relatives on her father's side, in Laugwata. So, in order to avoid the embarrassing situation of going away with the food for her maternal relatives, she preferred to leave it in the custody of a friend who lives not far

from the wharf of Auki. Later, she arrived in Laugwata, where she remained with her paternal relatives for two days.

On the day of her departure, she was given some taro pudding, which is traditionally cooked in sections of bamboo (*bamboo ara*). Passing through Auki, she called at her friend's place and retrieved the food she had left in custody. She gave it to her maternal relatives with the rice, soap, sugar and the pudding prepared by her father's relatives. She also gave some money to her maternal grandmother. At the end of the Easter celebrations, she was again at the wharf of Auki to get the ship to Honiara. She was carrying numerous bags of taro, pana and mangrove she had received from her maternal relatives. At the last minute, a man from her father's side brought seven additional bags of potatoes.

In Honiara, with the help of some relatives and a taxi, she finally managed to bring all this food to Gilbert Camp, where it was promptly distributed. One bag of potatoes was given to each of the three youngest siblings of Rose's father, John, two to his older (married) daughters, and the rest was distributed, along with the food from the maternal relatives, to a neighbour, the pastor of the local Pentecostal church, and a friend of Rose's in virtually equal amounts.

As in the numerous other cases I recorded, various commentaries were provided as a companion to these transactions. The food sent to the relatives in Malaita was presented as a way to substantiate the value of relatedness. In this case, the first transaction took place between Rose and her father's mother. John organizes these gifts of food, because he feels compelled to reciprocate the gift of nurture he received when he was a baby. He even mentioned the milk he sucked from his mother's breast. "This is why we have to buy things for them" he added, "so that they will know that it does not matter that we are living in town: we still love and respect them".

Would it be the same if they just made a phone call? Today that is quite easy, and although the two grandmothers might be too old to use a mobile phone, there is always a young relative who can help if necessity arises. But words are not enough, or maybe they are actually not appropriate. Food is seen as apposite, maybe because it is on food that we live, and by sending food they are making sure that the people they love stay alive.

However, as a matter of fact, the intended recipients do not always consume the food that they receive. Rather, the gifts are reinserted into new trajectories, directed towards other valued members of the network. In this case, this is manifest in the distribution of the food from Malaita to the relatives, neighbours, friends and church affiliates in Honiara. In the end, there was almost nothing left for the Wuru family, not to speak for John and Johanna, who were the original givers and thus, at least in theory, the supposed receivers.

They did receive food, but rather than using it as part of their subsistence, they employed it as part of their social interactions. In this way, they connected their

Gilbert Camp community with their *hom* in Malaita. Interrogated by me, they said they wanted to avoid being seen as selfish people by their relatives and neighbours. The same kind of motivations can be found behind Rose's decision to hide the food for the maternal relatives while she was visiting the people from her father's side. And these paternal relatives, who rushed to the wharf to give their contribution, were also acting according to that rationale.

The maximisation of outgoings to gain a large number of gift-debtors is seen by Gregory as the opposite of a capitalist drive. Transactions between *hom* and Honiara seem to respond to the need to give away gifts, especially gifts of food, in order to maintain a relationship with valued members of a network. In the light of transactions taking place in the household, the settlement, and between *hom* and Honiara it appears that, for the Kwara'ae people's living in Gilbert Camp, the maximization of outgoings is at the basis of the creation and maintenance of social relationships that make life "good".

However, 'maximisation of outgoings' is obviously not the term that they would use to describe the rationales behind their acts of giving. They would rather say that this is "love". There are two words that Kwara'ae people use when they speak about love: *alafe'anga* and *kwaima'anga*. An attempt to understand their etymology reveals that the first one relates to the word *alafe* (kind, gentle), which is the adjective used to describe someone who shows kindness to someone else. *Kwaima'anga* (generosity), in contrast, expresses a behaviour that is more transactional in character. The first syllable of this word is the same as in *kwatea*, which is translated with the verb 'to give', and in *kwate'a*, which indicates a gift. Unsurprisingly, *kwaima'anga* is used mainly in the sense of observing obligations to give to and help the others, and it is also the term that most closely expresses the concept of reciprocity (cf. Burt, 1994b: 176). However, after careful observation, I agree with my informants that the two terms are used interchangeably, that they are synonyms, in other words. When I interrogate them regarding the semantic difference between love as kindness and love as generosity, they insist that such difference does not persist in the pragmatics of everyday life. Of course one can feel love without necessarily giving evidence of it in the form of a material transaction. However, Kwara'ae people unanimously agree that there is no such a thing as love without *kwatea*. For them, love is a free gift, one that does not have to be reciprocated. But, if it is true love, it inevitably will.

The concerns of Ralph, Betty, Rose, John, Johanna, Helen, Gordon and all the others about behaving as "good" relatives/neighbours/friends reflect a general attitude of the Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp. They are all trying to concretise the value of *laf* in their peri-urban community. It is through these acts of giving that they lay the grounds for the kind of "good" life they want to live in Honiara despite the economically hard times.

Conclusion

In order to be "good" Malaitan persons in Gilbert Camp, Kwara'ae people rely on each other for food, shelter, and gift-giving is a continuous occurrence in the daily life of the settlement. They say this is their traditional *kastom*, and are proud to live in this way, which they see as something that defines them. In the peri-urban context, though, they find it more difficult to do that. One reason they recall is that "there are many different colours", many people from other places. That, it appears, dilutes the ethnically specific density of their interactions. One of the main differences between *hom* and Honiara lies indeed in the ethno-linguistic heterogeneity of the urban population, as opposed to the highly homogenous Kwara'ae district, where everyone is, to a certain extent, linguistically and genealogically connected. Different degrees of heterogeneity and homogeneity in Gilbert Camp make it a cluster of interactions (cf. Gupta & Ferguson, 1992) that requires what Berg has termed "managing difference" (Berg, 2000). Being surrounded by "different colours", by people they do not know or trust, as well as threatening figures such as *raskol* (criminals), *masta liu*,[15] or *man blo taun* (a man from downtown) is less reassuring than living among *wantok,* not only because the Kwara'ae people think they can expect "good" relationships with these. Wantokism is also a social strategy to organise their life according to their new identity in the city. Financial assistance, moral support, and a place to sleep are only some of the benefits that result from being included into a network of *wantoks* (Goddard 2005: 13).

This is common to other Melanesian urban contexts. Marilyn Strathern argued that Hagen migrants in Port Moresby value this kind of support as part of what Hagener identity means for them (Strathern, 1975: 289). Similarly, I argue that it is this kind of support that makes it possible for the Kwara'ae people of Gilbert Camp to live in what they consider to be their *fanoa.* As illustrated above, they overcome social estrangement through acts of giving that concretise the value of relatedness, thereby attempting to make Gilbert Camp closer to the idea of *hom*, a place where "we know everybody". It follows that acts of giving such as those analysed in this article are *hom*-making practices, to the extent that they concretise through action what *hom* is yet to be.

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15 The term *masta liu* refers to the urban man who has no job and relies only on his relatives (cf. Kushel, Takiika, & 'Angiki, 2006: 219). The expression unites the pidgin term for 'master' and the Malaitan word for "walking", suggesting the idea of a person who is a master only of his own stroll.
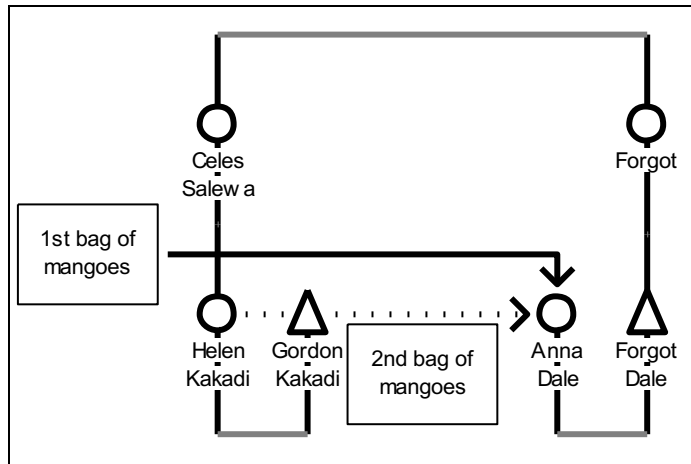
Figures

Figure 1 - Kinship diagram of Anna's transactions with the Kakadi household.
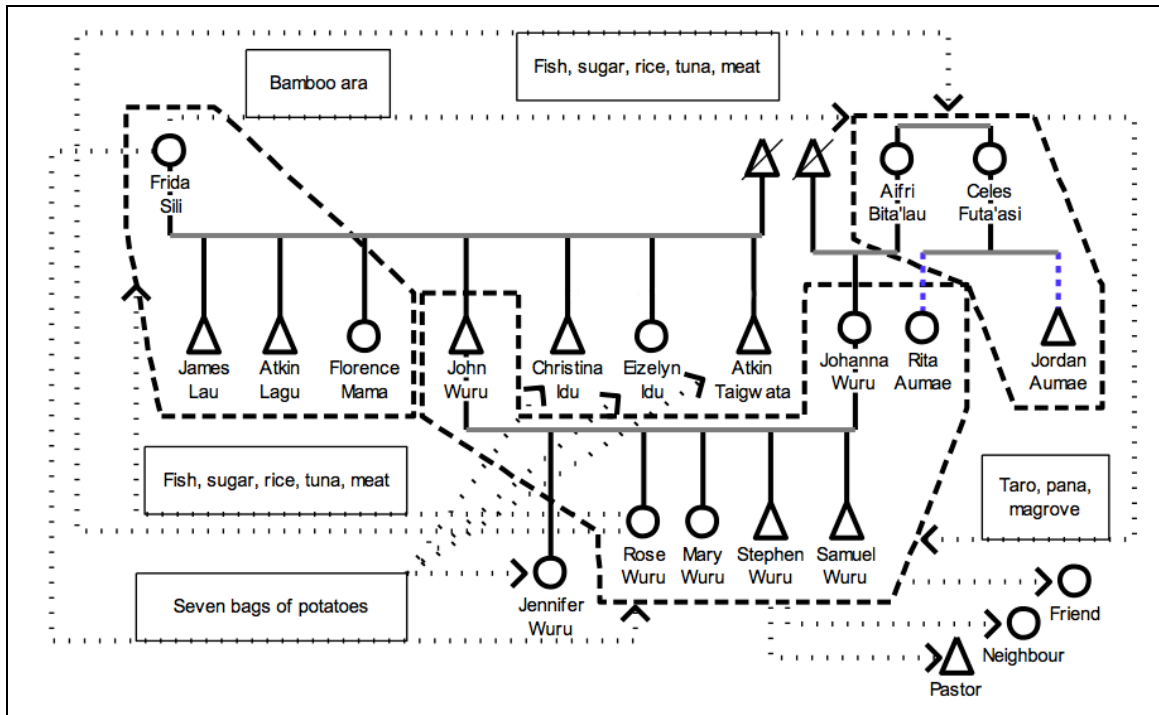*Key:* O female, Δ male, Π siblings, I descent, marriage, ➜taken by, ᐳ given to

Figure 2 - Kinship Diagram of Rose's Easter transactions
Key: ▬ ▬ ▬ household, ⋮ adopted child, ⋯ ❯ transaction

Tables
Table 1
Transactions observed in Gilbert Camp*

N°	Items	From	To	Rationale
1**	36 gifts	Women of the Mothers' Union	Women of the Mothers' Union	Celebrating friendship
2	Food	About 30 families	ACOM of Gilbert Camp	Celebrating confirmation
3	$900	9 contributors	Pastor	Pre-Christmas party
4	1 Tafuli'ae	My host	Rodolfo	Paying son's debt
5	Money	Rodolfo	My host's S	Care for my namesake
6	Candy	F***	D	Sold for $1, teach market values
7	$1 coin	F	D	Pay for housework, teach market
8	Bag of mangoes	FZDH	WMBD	Taken when passing by, appreciation
9	Bag of mangoes	FZD	WMBD	Given when passing by, appreciation
10	1 Pipe	WFZDH	WMBDH	Respect
11	Pineapple	FBD	FBD	Care and love
12	Trash	Neighbour	Neighbour	Feeding the pigs
13	Timber	UPC	Pastor	Getting rid of the wood
14	1 pair of shoes	N/A	N/A	Fraternal love
15	Food and $300	Bride's side relatives	Couple married soon	Pre-wedding help to the couple
16	One watch	WFZ	BDH	Appropriation
17	Food	ZH & Z	WB & B	Respect and love

*	The details of each transaction are available upon request.
**	Numbers refer to the complete list of transactions, available upon request.
***	For glosses, refer to Table 4.

Table 2
Transactions observed between Gilbert Camp and Malaita

N°	Items	From	To	Rationale
18	Food	W	H and Ch	Saying "I think of you all"
19	Food	H	W	Saying "We think of you too"
20	Food	H	W	Saying "I think of you all"
21	1 bag of potatoes	D	F	Familial love
22	Food	ZH	WB	Respect and familial love
23	Taro pudding	BWZ	ZHB	Thanking for assistance, taste of *hom*
24	Food	BSs	FB	Familial love and appreciation
25	Food	BS	FZ	Respect and familial love
26	Pieces of pork	MBS	FZS	Return on bride price contribution
27	Food	D	Many	Saying "We think of you all"

Table 3
Transactions observed in Malaita

N°	Items	From	To	Rationale
28	$670	Groom rel.	Groom's F	Collecting bride price
29	$10,000	Pastor	Church committee	Fund raising
30	$10	Pastor	Church committee	Financial help
31	$10	Pastor	Woman	Financial help
32	20Kg rice	Family	Plantation worker	Payment for work
33	$100	Man	Fishermen	Payment for work
34	Food	Neighbours	Man	"You are welcome"
35	$2,000	MZS	MZS	Payment for pigs
36	Bread	ZH	WB	Respect
37	Beans	?	FZS	Cooperation
38	10 fishes	Kasin	Kasin	Fraternal love

Table 4
Kwara'ae and Pidgin Kinship terms

	Pidgin		
Kwara'ae	Rural	Urban	Gloss
Te'a	Mami	Mami	M
Te'a	Mami	Anti	FBW, MZ
A'ai	Anti	Anti	MBW, FZ,
Ma'a	Dadi	Dadi	F
Ma'a	Dadi	Ankol	FB, MZH
Ngwai	Ankol	Ankol	MB, FZH
Ngwai'futa	Brata	Brata	B
Ngwai'futa	Brata	Kasinbrata	FBS, MZS
Di'i	Kasinbrata	Kasinbrata	MBS, FZS
Ngwaingwaena	Sista	Sista	Z
Ngwaingwaena	Sista	Kasinsista	FBD
Di'i	Kasinsista	Kasinsista	MBD, FZD
Aloko	San	San	S
Aloko	San	Ankol	BS, FBDS, etc.
Ngwai	Ankol	Ankol	ZS, MBDS, MZDS, FZDS, etc.
Diofo	Dota	Dota	D
Diofo	Dota	Ankol	BD, FBDD, etc.
Ngwai	Ankol	Ankol	ZD, MBDD, MZDD, FZDD, etc.
Ko'oko	Grani	Grani	MM, MMZ, MMB, MMZH, MMBW, SS, SD, DD, DS, ZDD, ZDS, ZSS, BDS, BDD, BSS, BSD, FF, FFZ, FFB, etc.
Sai	Tabu	Tabu	WZ, HZ
Luma'a	Tabu	Tabu	WB, HB
Sata	Tabu	Tabu	WZH, HZH, WBW, HBW
Funga	Tabu	Tabu	WF, WM, HF, HM

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