6 Making Relations for the Future

> Climate change is perceived as one of the main future threats to humanity among the vast majority of scientific experts and world leaders. This acknowledgement has spurred the release of international resources allowing scientists to predict the consequences of climate change over a long-term perspective with improved accuracy. […] And how does this shape people's perceptions and imaginaries of the future among those living in areas prone to flooding whereby climate change threatens the livelihood, housing, health and safety of one's friends, neighbours, relatives and the local population? (Sjöberg 2020, 185)

After having dealt with mekem garen as part of making the environment, I will now look at social aspects of the daily gardening practices of people in Dixon Reef and their way of shaping the future. In the climate change programme implemented in Dixon Reef, horticulture was categorised as a means to secure people's food supply and their future livelihoods – events like Cyclone Pam in 2015 and the El Niño drought afterwards being the first indicators of a challenging future. Therefore, new cultivation approaches of soil preparation and changing planting methods were aimed at providing immediate access to fresh food in front of the village houses and several other new methods were aimed at improving the productivity of gardens outside the village. I have demonstrated that, for my interlocutors, walking distances and moving gardens and plants represented *the* method of flexibility and being able to grow enough crops – and that such movement was in fact a practice of their 'humanized environment' (Mondragón 2015). In everyday gardening, people would interact with each other, through exchange of planting material and information, and through actual and enduring participation in the practice of cultivation itself. Looking at gardening as a way of being in relation with other people extends the view on everyday gardening as a practice of food security and sheds light on gardening as also constituting sociality. The future-oriented topic of

climate change now brings new implications not only to gardening as food security, but also as gardening as sociality. Since ni-Vanuatu make their living mainly through horticulture, national political actors in Vanuatu have framed cultivation as an important aspect for economic continuity and for food security. Political actors in town have anticipated future major difficulties for the praxis of horticulture and have requested people to interact with adaptation programmes in order to prepare for what is coming (Chapter 3). In terms of the programme in Dixon Reef, representatives sent the message to workshop participants, that they would face environmental challenges in the future, but that the nature and intensity of such changes remained unclear.

In anthropological literature about Oceania, authors have connected social aspects of gardening mainly with the activities connected to the yield of the garden, which give opportunity for exchange and ceremonies (Bonnemaison 1978; Rio 2009), allow the gardener to earn prestige inside his community (Calandra 2017) or build up special kastom relations to elders or ancestors (Caillon 2012; Rio 2007b). In considering gardening as a fundamental aspect of personhood (Calandra 2017; Malinowski 1935) and for the creation of communal life, I will now focus on the everyday practices of actual cultivation (clearing, burning, planting and harvesting) as they are involved in establishing and maintaining sociality between gardeners. In times of climate change, mekem garen contributes to the establishment and maintenance of spatial and temporal connections between people, also beyond kin relations, and thus helps people to deal with life's changes. Will Rollason's work looks at practices colliding with the future through people's current 'situated projects' of aspiration, what they do in order to live the life they want (Rollason 2014, 2–27). Rollason suggests considering current projects that give people meaning in terms of the future: "[We] need to ask why indigenous people respond to the challenges that they face in the particular ways that they do, inventively and resourcefully to be sure: where is their inventiveness and resourcefulness directed?" (ibid., 2) Anticipating that the future might come with challenges plays a key role in climate change practice in Dixon Reef – gardening becomes such a future project, but not for the sake of securing food alone.

6.1 At the Roundabout

During a garden day around the Dixon Reef area, movement was integral to the praxis of mekem garen, but sometimes this movement came to a halt. Peo-

ple and paths from different directions met at a point and formed a meeting place, giving the opportunity to take a break from the long walk and hide under the shade of a large tree. Moreover, meeting points created a space for people to exchange information, planting material and crops. One of these meeting places was the so-called raonabaot (roundabout). At the raonabaot outside the village of Dixon Reef, various small paths and two larger dirt roads intersected and formed an oval shaped clearing. This clearing was surrounded by fruit and nut trees and some fallen trees, from which someone had carved out benches. It had become aconvenient location with plenty of shady spots for rest and to sit down and connect to others. The location of the site was ideal, as it was here that paths from the village and from the different local areas met with the gardens. It connected the garden areas with the roads to Dixon Reef and the next village. At the raonabaot, one could sit down, drink from water bottles and eat nuts and fruits. This provided the opportunity to pause, take new strength during sunny, humid days and decide where to go next. People sat, cutting ornaments in the trunk of the tree, and had a short conversation. Sometimes the group would split at this point and one of the members would take a detour to the next coconut or cocoa plantation or another garden plot, meeting their companions again at some later point in the day.

Furthermore, this was a space for the exchange of yield, planting material and information. People chatted about the current state of crops in the various garden areas, at the river, in the swamp or on the hill. Maybe a person had passed another gardener's vegetable garden and could relate to the owner whether it would be worth a trip to harvest some island cabbage or capsicum. Sometimes people would send an order with the group going in the direction of their own garden plot, to bring ripe crops back with them. On my way to my own garden, I would meet other villagers and conversation might follow this routine: "Do you want bananas? I have many ripe ones in my garden and I am going to leave some for you at the roundabout under the tree." On their return to the village, I could then take those bananas back to my family's house or pass them on to others. If lucky, one of the two village trucks might pass and take the heavy bundle on its platform, dropping the bananas in front of the owner's kitchen house and leaving them free to carry other items. If a working group did not have the success they had hoped for that day, they could still hope for some relief at the raonabaot. Sharing what was brought back from the day of gardening was highly valued. When a garden group was on its way to see one of the gardening plots and still needed some corn to plant, they might receive some dried corn cob from others who were heading out to do the same work.

As Emma explained to me, the women in particular took this as an opportunity to exchange new material for their gardens. While sitting one day, Emma's kitchen neighbours came by and asked for some seeds, in exchange for food or small coins. These kinds of exchanges happened beyond kin or affinal relations. While men also exchanged planting material, this was mostly delayed exchange among members of the nasara kin group.

Furthermore, this raonabaot was the place where people chatted and therefore discovered what was going on that day, giving an opportunity for interactions in new constellations besides kin relations. On a Saturday, the village was normally deserted, because everyone left early to make their way to their gardens. The children, free from weekly schoolwork, followed their parents to work in the bush, learning valuable life skills themselves. The teachers, busy during the weekdays, would head to the garden, happily strolling around and in their words "getting some things done". Every week, people looked forward to this day on which they concentrated on garden work alone, leaving copra or work for the church behind. The raonabaot then became *the* meeting space for interaction for the villagers. There they enthusiastically shared gardening stories or what was even more important then, what was happening in the village community. Here, also women entered into conversations about current topics discussed in the village community and expressed their opinions to various conversation partners, rather than holding back as they would do when inside the village. In the village, visits were confined to houses, especially for women (although church meetings were an exception). Inside the village, women had to act according to affinal rules, which meant that spontaneous visits only happened between women taowis, the wives of brothers. Men normally met at one of the nakamal, kava bars, to have a drink of kava. This mostly happened according to kinship relations or other loyalties. In contrast to that, the raonabaot brought individuals together by coincidence and therefore in different and sometimes new constellations. While people would not stop for long elsewhere if they met someone or another garden group on the way, they took their time at the raonabaot. Garden days, if possible, included a stopover at one of the key meeting points.

6.2 The Sociality of Gardening

Pauses, such as the one at the raonabaot described above, represented the aspect of gardening that linked it to sociality. Such halts were less of an interrup-

tion of the movement of mekem garen than part of the movement that connected people, garden and paths. Brief suspensions of movement on the paths were a part of the movement of one garden day. When people met and came together at the raonabaot or any other meeting point, important interaction and a way of building relations took place – through the exchange of crops and information. It offered not only ways to secure enough food, but also to contact other people. As gardening is characterised by movement, and thus is also about paths making networks of garden locations, the movement of people and gardens is not only part of shaping the environment, but is also constitutive of sociality. People's horticultural practices in Dixon Reef built their relations with the environment and other people, and thus included both into their social relations.

Scholars who scrutinise sociality in Oceania have taken up this point of the connection of movement and sociality (Hviding 1996; Munn 1986; Schneider 2012). The ability to move around and at the same time find routes of trade and exchange, creates space outside of kin relations. Katharina Schneider explains that, for the people in Pororan, living on an offshore island of Papua New Guinea, the 'freedom' of moving around on the water is what they describe as crucial for their lives beyond the terrestrial community days. This is where they could move freely, away from sight and the community rules of kinship. In Schneider's work, this freedom is contrasted to life 'in the bush', meaning on an island's land (Schneider 2012). The freedom of the waterworld stands in contrast to people living on land, since gardens are bound to a certain territory, and thus cultivators have to follow certain paths to reach them (Munn 1986). In the Dixon Reef area, during my daily hourly walks I learnt that although walking is earthbound and certainly has boundaries, gardening is less connected with specific places, but rather encompasses a number of practices, including movements. Paths are an inscription of these movements into the earth rather than forming boundaries of movement. Similar to the sociality of people on water elsewhere, in the Dixon Reef area through movement on land, new constellations of sociality emerge. As a result of this, I see parallels between being on the move on water and on the land in terms of creating relations through movement and its eventual intermittences.

Long and Moore define sociality as processual, and thus as a "dynamic relational matrix within which subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are co-productive, and continually plastic and malleable" (Long and Moore 2012, 4). The conceptualisation of sociality in Oceania, and especially Melanesia, was undertaken by scholars whose work is categorised under the term

'New Melanesian Ethnography'[1] – they identified sociality as 'relational'. This relationalism comes together with the conceptualisation of what makes a person in Melanesia (Scott 2007; Strathern 1988). Although I do recognise the critical discussion around Melanesian relationality (Rollason 2014; Scott 2007),[2] I find this useful because it can give context and insight into what makes a person in Vanuatu. When talking about themselves, ni-Vanuatu refer only in relation to their kinship ties (cf. Hess 2006). Dixoners define who they are primarily in reference to their own position in these kin relations. For example, for a woman this means that she sees and talks about herself as a mother *of* a child, a sister *of* a sibling or in affinal relations with a taowi (sister-in-law) *to* her husband's brothers and sisters. When they talked about themselves, villagers would always use terms in those categorisations, in reference to their own. Children would always refer to adults as papa blong [name], or mama blong [name] (father and mother *of*). For knowing your way around in the village community, it is always important to know who to address with which kin term (cf. Hess 2009). Saying Christian names out loud is often taboo, so talking about others can only happen in the context of the relationship network. Furthermore, as relational persons, people are entangled not as individuals but as people with relations to place (ples), which again evolve solely in correspondence to people's relations with each other (see Chapter 5). This is what Marilyn Strathern calls 'dividual' (Strathern 1988; see Chapter 5). Strathern writes that this relationalism is the core of being a person:

> Far from being regarded as unique entities, Melanesian persons are as dividually as they are individually conceived. They contain a generalized sociality within. Indeed, persons are frequently constructed as the plural and composite site of the relationships that produce them. (Strathern 1988, 13)

Building and keeping relations are an important part of the everyday lives of ni-Vanuatu. However, this does not mean that relations cannot change or be

1 The best-known representatives are Marilyn Strathern and Roy Wagner (Scott 2007).

2 Especially when dealing with the topic of Christian diversion, the theoretical assumption of the New Melanesian Ethnography has been criticised as having limits. Christian conversion is marked as a rupture of social relations (Robbins 2004; 2007). This opens up the discussion of whether a person sees themself as 'relational' or individual. Others have, however, argued that relations are extended and the concept of relational could therefore be transformed (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017).

extended. What this relationality contains is processual and when dealing with relation-building in Vanuatu, I consider it to be possible to change and be extended to new areas of life (cf. Holbraad and Pedersen 2017, 247–77). In order to capture the extension of these relations, Holbraad and Pedersen developed the term "self-relational individual" (ibid., 263), which continues relationality beyond kin relations. In Vanuatu, village organisations in particular develop new positions for a person which brings up new constellations moving beyond nasara relations. In talking about a certain male villager, therefore, the father of a certain child (papa blong) can also be referred to as the Chairman blong skul (Chairman of the school). In daily conversation, this position in the village organisation is used instead of using the name. I want to emphasise two aspects here, firstly the sociality that creates the community and secondly the person themselves. In my argument, these aspects also apply when it comes to daily horticultural practices.

The first account of the importance of gardening as sociality in Melanesia in an anthropological publication goes back to Malinowski's 'Coral Gardens' (1935). Malinowski emphasised the importance of gardening for Trobriand Islanders not solely for consumption but also for enabling entrance into circles of exchange. Being a gardener on the Trobriand Islands was a fundamental part of social life because it enabled a person to be part of the exchange system of kula (Malinowski 1935). Building relations through kula practices is a common practice of reaching beyond the island community as well as bringing prestige and material gain. Kula values can furthermore be accessed through garden yield, as well as giving a person access to garden land (Kuehling 2017, 198). Malinowski further wrote that if the harvest of the garden plots in one year was insufficient, the entire exchange system of the kula was postponed for one year. Gardening for Trobriand Islanders formed the base of sociality and working in gardens was driven by interests and ambitions to gain status (Malinowski 1922; 1935).

For Vanuatu, Joel Bonnemaison stresses the importance of gardening for sociality: "If the Melanesians spend long hours each day in their gardens it is not because they are driven by a problem of subsistence. They could in fact ensure their subsistence with less expense and with much less work." (Bonnemaison 1978, 29) Bonnemaison describes for the north of Vanuatu in the 1970s that the gardener used the surplus of his harvest as gifts in ceremonies and thus became a respected person (big man); the more he could give, the better was his standing (ibid., 30). Today, by contributing what they have gained from the garden, the male gardeners build relations in ceremonies inside the nasara group

as well as ties in the extended nasara. The yam root is of particular importance on many islands and is the most important ceremonial crop (Jolly 1999). Birch-Thomsen et al. have emphasised "the importance of yam gardens for cultural identity, in helping maintain the social institutions that still provide an important social safety net" (Birch-Thomsen et al. 2010, 38). The yam tuber takes on the purpose of a gift or payment in ceremonies of marriage, circumcision, death or grade-taking ceremonies (Rio 2007b, 112–16). Furthermore, cultivation itself also influences other aspects of the sociality of people in Vanuatu. Sophie Caillon describes how taro cultivation on Vanua Lava is a way of relating to the next generation and maintaining ties to elders and ancestors. Garden plots are passed on from generation to generation, and thus provide entrance into clan relations (Caillon 2012). Preparing plots for cultivation is, according to Knut Rio, an approach for male gardeners on Ambrym (an island in the Malampa Province) to create special ties between father and son. Through yam cultivation, the genitor becomes the father (Rio 2007b, 103–31). Gardening in Vanuatu is often interpreted as a performance and a creative interplay of social relations during cultivation and after harvest (Conan 1999; Rio 2007b). Furthermore, being a horticulturalist can be considered a part of one's personality as well as forming the nature of a person itself. Calandra stresses that a person on Tongoa is made through practices of gardening: through cultivation, the person enters into competition with others in terms of growing the biggest crops, also in a circle of exchange (Calandra 2017, 358). The author further writes:

> The work undertaken by the individual, his skill and involvement in his gardens are the corollary of his social recognition. It is because he devotes his life to his crops that he is a good worker, a Man-Tongoa par excellence. (ibid., 192, translation from French by D. Hetzel)

If the emphasis here is on the result of the work, which then measures the gardener, Malinowski again indicated that furthermore, cultivation makes it clear what a person stands for. He describes this status of horticulture for a person as follows:

> [T]he Trobriander is above all a gardener, who digs with pleasure and collects with pride, to whom accumulated food gives the sense of safety and pleasure in achievement, to whom the rich foliage of yam-vines or taro leaves is a direct expression of beauty. (Malinowski 1935, 9)

I gain two insights from this. One is that a person is made of their relationships and is therefore relational and thus these relationships also find expression in the events that revolve around gardening. Second, the work of gardening itself can be fundamental for a Melanesian person. In the following section, I will extend this approach and show that relations are made and maintained through the everyday practice of cultivation itself, from the first clearing of the bush until the harvest. Furthermore, I will address the practices of women and men.

6.3 Relational Gardening in Dixon Reef

Learning the process of how to cultivate starts at an early age. While children first accompany their parents and observe them in their work from infancy, they begin to work the soil themselves at the age of about eight (Chapter 4). In this way, they not only gain access to the ability to feed themselves, but also become a person connected to other gardeners. In contrast to people on Vanua Lava, reference to the ancestors is not given through the ritualisation of cultivation in Dixon Reef (Caillon 2012). Nevertheless, my interlocutors could exactly point out who has already planted a garden in which place, and thus weave these locations of former gardens and owners into their own garden network. They stress the importance of learning how to cultivate a garden and this gardening as sociality binds them to communal life. Next to ceremonial exchange, here everyday practices of gardening build up and maintain social relations, first through entering into gardening and then through its continuance, through the work of others.

6.3.1 Being a Communal Person in Mekem Garen

"No-one has to go on hungry when passing a garden", Marie-France explained to me, pointing around her. I was on my way back from the gardens and had only a meagre harvest of a few maize cobs in my bundle. I had already been introduced to gardening practices and could follow the rules of cultivation, but was still waiting for my garden plot to reap rewards. This was one of the few times I went alone to the garden areas, because most of the time this would worry the family with whom I was staying. However, after months of me walking around in the area, they sometimes let me leave on my own. This day I visited my own garden and chatted with some people on the way. On my way back

to the village, being exhausted from the walk but without obvious success in gardening, I met my friends walking back from their work. Marie-France and Claudine were on their way to what they called 'go kam back' (let's go fast and come back), a short round of gardening in the afternoon, putting a few crops into their cloths on their backs. We took a rest to exchange stories from the day. They looked pitifully at my corn and asked me if I could not have taken the ripe bananas at the road which belonged to one of them. "There are nice bananas next to the road, we cannot eat them all." Not saying that I was not even sure which road and which banana plants she meant, I expressed my hesitation that I was not sure whether I could just go into another person's area and gather crops. I thought that those were their bananas and therefore were only for them to harvest. The women were amazed at my hesitation, which in turn irritated me. Of course, I could just take off ripe bananas, they insisted. When someone passed a garden and felt like he or she needed something to eat, they could just take it. Normally people would pass the kitchen house of the owner in the evening or send a child to let them know of their bounty, but sharing was an unspoken rule in the community of Dixon Reef.

A story of an incident in which this access to garden crops was denied illustrates this. The story, some of my interlocutors told me individually, goes as follows. Some of the boys were strolling in 'the bush', having been on their journey for several days, hunting, taking care of the more distant gardens and spending time on the road, being on the move. On their way towards the village, they passed by the garden of a relative of one of the young men. They cut a bunch of bananas, prepared them on the spot in the fire and ate them. After returning to the village, this group of young men did not consider this meal to be an incident of any importance and neglected to tell the owner of the garden. They thus also did not immediately tell their mothers and fathers about their meal. When the wife of the garden owner heard this, she was not pleased at all. She accused the young men of stealing her bananas and of unauthorised entry into her garden area. The woman's accusation provoked members of the family and the nasara of each of the boys to feel aggrieved. They, in turn, did not agree with the woman at all. They first started a discussion that in their view the young men had behaved according to the rules and had only taken what they could consume. Since the woman who started the accusation would not refrain from her accusations, the members of the different nasara took a course of action the next day. They all left for their garden areas in order to look for fresh harvest. Each couple gathered as many ripe crops as they could find. They then carried these heavy loads back to the village and stacked them in front of the

accuser's kitchen house. Thus, in front of the woman's house, a considerable number of crops were accumulated, including a wide variety such as cassava, banana, taro, various vegetables and island cabbage, all of it in such quantities that it was hopeless for one person (or even one family) to consume it all without refrigeration. The accuser then had to endure the whole village seeing this abundance of crops in front of her kitchen for some days, and inevitably, some of the crops rotted.

My interlocutors considered this to be a sign that someone had not kept to the unspoken agreement to share the yields of the gardens. The punishment was to humiliate the accuser by showing that she had received more than she could eat. The woman had broken the rule of allowing a person, a fellow gardener who was hungry, to enter her garden and take what they needed. The reaction of the members of different nasara was a common practice to embarrass the person who did not show respect for the unspoken social rules of gardening. Following this background story, I will return to my unplanned meeting with the women on the road to or from the garden areas. For the women, the behaviour of the accuser would have been criticised as being 'selfish', for they, and by extension also their husbands, would gladly share the harvest from their gardens. This was not only true for kin relations but also for other people with no direct kin relations. I concluded from this episode that although gardens have an owner who also owns the yield of this area, gardening is a praxis of sociality.

Around Dixon Reef, garden plots were always assigned to one person or one couple by the landowners, who themselves always had the first pick of the best spots. Non-landowners had to obtain the permission of landowners to use a particular garden plot. In general, this was not a problem, and everyone could have as many garden plots as they liked. Once people started gardening next to the village of Dixon Reef, they became part of the social relations, which, as I will demonstrate in the next paragraph, reached far beyond the community's land borders. Moreover, when it then came to the yields, there was no longer any great sense of exclusivity. People would give and receive harvest out of their gardens on a daily basis. This does not mean that everyone could just take what he or she wanted. As we learned from the story above, the rule which allows everyone to take part in another's crops allows everyone to have enough to eat and be part of the exchange system. In other words, as soon as any person started to share, they became part of the social relations in the village community on the assumption that they, too, would share when the times called for it. When the women with who I was speaking at the beginning of this section said "No

one would go hungry", they implicitly referred to the rule that you cannot deny someone food but also that you are part of the social community and thus are allowed to take when you have given.

These activities can be read as principles in terms of food security. Everyone receives enough food to get by, also in times of bigger and smaller crises, for example if one's own garden did not show the yield expected. This means that the practice of laying out gardens in different locations and planting different crops (see Chapter 4) is extended beyond the nuclear family circle or the lineage structure of the nasara. An example of an extension of this kind on another island in Vanuatu is Cyclone Pam. This storm had milder effects on the crops in Malekula, mostly affecting those on the eastern and southern parts of the island nations and Port Vila, where I was staying at that time. People there experienced immense solidarity with the islands to which they felt connected by common origin and could share some of their harvest.[3] As soon as people on Efate and Port Vila had any shortage, they turned to people on other 'home islands' where relatives lived and had something sent to them, so that crops were exchanged across the islands. In the immediate aftermath of Cyclone Pam, the local airport in Port Vila was overflowing with parcels containing local produce from another island. Residents of the town would hold up their end when it came to sending products out of the town, such as rice. Some women in Dixon Reef had found friends in town with whom they had conversations over the phone, posting orders to fulfil their needs and exchanging parcels, sending garden crops and receiving manufactured foodstuffs in return.

This part of the exchange of the harvest among gardeners can also be read as a process of establishing and maintaining social relations and thus a person can be considered to be a communal person. Assuming you participate in gardening, you can be part of (immediate or delayed) exchanges. This is different to the display of the success of one person's cultivation in ceremonies which shows their skill (Calandra 2017, 103–05)[4] or participation in ceremonial interactions which render them a woman, a wife or a man and thus grant them a certain position in the village (Rio 2007b). My point is that through gardening you enter into relationships with people – you are giving something and

3 In Port Vila, people originate from different islands, and thus, although they might never have lived on one of the other islands of Vanuatu, they would refer to themselves as 'man Malekula' or 'man Tanna' (see Kraemer 2013; Lindstrom 2011).

4 Something that I never experienced in Dixon Reef although I was told about it a number of times.

you are expected to give something in return. Through gardening, my interlocutors are part of the making of relations. Malinowski formulated this in a drastic way for the Trobriand Islanders:

> A man who had no gardens would be an outcast, whereas a man who for one reason or another is no good at gardening is an object for contempt. Everybody has to make gardens, and the more garden plots a man is capable of tilling, the greater is his renown. (Malinowski 1935, 60)[5]

In Siviri, an interlocutor even explained in Bislama that gardening "hemi laef" (it's life), and an essential part of being human. If younger people spend too much time in boarding schools, their parents or grandparents make sure that they visit the garden sites during their holidays in order to learn the basic skills. At the time of Arno Pascht's and my stay in Siviri, we identified only one community member who did not follow up his gardening practices. The only reason, and this was an exception, that this person was still part of the community, was because he was praised for his pig breeding. People underlined the connection between agricultural methods and a person's contribution to the community of Siviri. Being in a relationship with others is what makes one a (social) person, and gardening is an important part, if not the most important part, of being related to people. If a person was not present in the community, their relatives would still make sure that they were represented in the garden networks and had their own garden plot. Once children started gardening, they not only showed their skills by being able to actually do it and become a skilful gardener which Calandra describes as the highest reward for a ni-Vanuatu person (Calandra 2017, 103). They also become a person through the relational practice of gardening themselves, since without gardening you do 'nothing'.

Thus, gardening is sociality in the making through entering the praxis of cultivation itself. Through this, ni-Vanuatu become part of the exchange systems among kins and over islands (nation-wide). If, on the other hand, one person does not participate in cultivation, people become sceptical. This person has not built up relations, and not being part of the community, through gardening, they cannot offer anything that is valued to the community. Furthermore, they do not even follow the basic practice of being human. Once a per-

5 Women and men in Vanuatu both have their gardens and are considered owners of their garden plots. Even though the landowners are mostly male, there are also some elder women who hold rights to land.

son has started gardening, they enter social relationships which are also maintained when the person cannot be physically present (Jolly 1999; Rodman 1992) and continue this practice of gardening. Other people make sure to continue mekem garen on behalf of absent members of the community. Arno Pascht and I had once been developing my own garden and were becoming part of the garden cycle through the planting of a new yam garden. People from Dixon Reef passed by, explaining the most important techniques and bringing us especially valuable planting material. Immediately, once we started gardening, people proudly announced to visitors that we were really learning how to live there, the women happily telling outsiders that it's good to spend time in the bush and get gardening. Those of my interlocutors who had given some of their yam tubers at planting time took some back at harvest. Gardening not only brought us together with people while working, but also some conversations in the village revolved around our actions in the garden areas. Commencing our own gardening made it possible to be included into their relations and to become part of the community. Interestingly, when Arno Pascht and I were not present, our host family continued to work our garden, following a principle I further describe as gardening for others (by also securing cultivation land).

6.3.2 Mekem Garen for Others

Mary, one of the girls from Dixon Reef in her 20s, did not live in the village in 2019. She had moved to town in order to work in a shop and take care of the children of some of her family members. It was not uncommon for younger women to spend time in another region of Vanuatu, either going to school, earning money as 'house girls' or holding several jobs in town. During their adolescence, before marriage, they would visit their parents and home village, a stay which normally extended up to a few months. Some young men who were also trying their luck in town resumed their gardening activities when they happened to be in the area.[6] Some married men who had left Dixon Reef and followed their wives to their own villages also tried to continue their cultivation in Dixon Reef, securing their rights to land and keeping up gardening there. This is how things were handled by Mary – during her time in the village, Mary, like every other adolescent, participated in every family and village activity, including gardening. However, people such as Mary might miss the

6 Boys had stronger ties with the village and therefore returned regularly. Girls, however, were prepared to move away because of exogamous marriage rules (Bolton 1999).

season for planting or sometimes an absence could last for several years. At one point, at which Mary had already been working in town for many months, I was sitting in her mother's kitchen, while she prepared the meal for the rest of the family: "I have to go and take care of Mary's garden today", she said. It was the time of the calendar year to prepare new gardens by planting yam, marking the start of a new cultivation cycle. This was also the time when the villagers spent more time gardening than making copra (to which they usually dedicated equal amounts of time), simply because people always needed money for their children and school. On our way to the garden sites, we passed another couple busy preparing the ground, digging holes for yam tubers. We stopped for a quick exchange of words and I heard them say that this new garden was for their daughter. I had never met their daughter and was told that she lived with one of her sisters on another island in the north. Apparently, she had not visited her parents for some years. I asked again whether this garden was not actually assigned to them, the parents, as the daughter in question was not present and was probably not going to return any time soon. They laughed because of my naïve question and confirmed that they definitely had planted this garden plot for their daughter. It was certainly her garden – she had asked her parents to continue her cultivation in the Dixon Reef area.

When Mary's mother and I reached the garden in question, I noticed that some of the yam tubers had already sprouted and the shoots snaked across the ground. I then realised that this too was no garden from last year, but a newly-planted garden plot. Mary had never worked on this garden herself. Her brothers had planted the yam in her absence and started the new garden.[7] That afternoon, it was our turn to make what Mary's mother referred to as 'tanna soup' within the design of her garden. "I am surprised that we make a garden for the daughter. She is not even here and will not eat any of this yam" I said. Her mother looked at me and I saw that she was astonished by my statement: "But we will eat it, we all need a garden." Mary's garden was for everyone. Her mother told me that she was very happy that I was working with her that day, because it was Mary's garden and for me to work in it would make her very happy and feel connected to me. It was clear that her daughter would need a garden in the Dixon Reef area, even though she herself would not prepare it, and likely not see or use anything of the harvest. We then started our work, transplanted corn and carried heavy banana shoots (banana suckers) for

7 See description of alenge wowol, the new garden and alenge elewir, the old garden in Chapter 5.

placement between the growing yam tubers. In the afternoon, back in the village, Mary's mother called her on the mobile phone to tell her about the work we had accomplished, and I overheard her happy voice. We had worked in her garden and now her garden would grow very well.

This method created a family garden, despite the owner of the garden being a person who was not present in the community at that particular moment or any time within the foreseeable future. This is distinguished from someone who merely had to leave the village for a day or two, or even a month, for hunting or visiting relatives. Despite prolonged absence, this garden and the resulting yield stood in connection to this person. I learnt during my time with the people in Dixon Reef that families did not like to lose the area in which they had once gained the right to start a new garden, and therefore they continued to cultivate that space. If they moved on, or left the area fallow for more than a couple of years, others could come and see that it was an area where no one was working and start their new gardens on the spot. However, this was only one way to look at it. The other reason for the shared maintenance of family gardens is that people had already started their gardening and now others wanted to continue this work, in order to keep up relations with family and the wider community. Mary's mother, as well as the couple we met on the way, explicitly told me that they had continued to cultivate crops *for* a family member. They could have continued working on their own garden or start cultivating a different spot for themselves. It was not unusual for the number of garden areas of a family, or a couple, or even an individual, to increase within a year. Having many gardens was also considered a sign of being a hard worker or having exceptional skills in cultivation. Thus, people's emphasis on the fact that this work was explicitly done for someone else pointed to the social relationships that this person had built up and which were maintained by the continuation of 'their' gardening.

In terms of my own yam garden, since one tuber apparently was very long and heavy, an exceptionally beautiful one, when I was back in Germany my host family decided to carry it with them to church when the first harvest of that season was blessed. Following that ceremony, they made laplap of it and invited several families to partake in it. This harvest was shared among everyone, and people shared their thoughts on the taste of our yam, which had apparently been very tasty. When we returned to the village at the beginning of 2019, the season for planting the new yam tubers had already passed. We would have missed our chance to continue what we had started the year before, moving our yam garden to the next spot, transforming the yam garden of last year into

an old garden, and planting more bananas, manioc and taro. Villagers always choose a larger area and start in one corner, in order to shift the garden to the side the following year. When we returned to the garden areas, we therefore expected to find our plot overgrown with Burau trees (Hibiscus tiliaceus). The first time we returned to the bush, however, we found that our host family had started a new yam garden next to the one from the previous year and had transformed the garden we had prepared into an old one, planting mainly taro and banana plants. They still referred to it as our garden and this was also common knowledge among the rest of the villagers. They thereby extended our social interaction in the form of gardening to the following year. At harvest time, the yield was then distributed among community members (not by us but by our host family who represented us). Participating in walking through the garden areas and collecting planting material for a new garden makes up one part of the relations extending the community via cultivation. As I have exemplified through activities of parents continuing cultivating for their children (which also occurred the other way around, when parents were absent for a longer time period), relations were continued by family members remaining within the village. As a result, the relations once built up through gardening, which is a central human activity for ni-Vanuatu, are continued through periods of absence. Relationships are also maintained, even if a contribution to the community is no longer made through physical presence and one's own work. It was important that this person remained a part of the relations she had built through gardening. Since gardening made a person, this then leads to her being part of a community and island, or a kin group. Through this method, relationships are extended over time and place.

6.4 Future Projects in Uncertain Times

According to Rollason, it is worth turning to the small everyday activities of Pacific Islanders to find out about their aspirations[8] as projects for the future. Those projects can take any form and can include both personal and communal wishes (Rollason 2014, 2). Craig Lind argues that ni-Vanuatu thereby do not strive to change current situations; by taking on future projects, they are placing wishes in the present that refer to what they experienced in the past, and

8 In a similar vein, Appadurai uses aspirations to grasp the future in terms of possibilities (Appadurai 2013; Haug 2021, 75).

now lead the present to what lies ahead. He writes, that "[the] future does not appear to be a conservative reproduction of the past or a simple break from it; rather, it emerges as a range of potentials that must be responded to creatively, with an aim in mind" (Lind 2014, 72). Furthermore, in Vanuatu, the projects of a person are seen in relation to the totality of their relationships with others. For ni-Vanuatu this also directly influences their social relations of today and the future accordingly. Lind explains in his ethnographic example for people from the island of Paama, that if ni-Vanuatu women do not bear children, this concurrently influences the people she stands in relation to. Through migration to town and leading a life as an 'individual', this kind of self-determination breaks with the kin-making of their islands of origin. This influences how 'man Paama' (the people from Paama) as a community in town can secure their status in evolving urban social space. Children are a driving force keeping this community alive, as well as a perspective on the future (Lind 2014).

Annelin Eriksen also poses the question whether different intergenerational approaches of ni-Vanuatu from Ambrym to Christian beliefs might form a radical break within their community (Eriksen 2014). She states that this might sometimes mean that there are several visons for the future which can lead to generational conflicts. In Eriksen's example, the question of how to build up church communities is on different levels a negotiation between individual and community ideas (Eriksen 2014, 147–49). These projects move in the field of tension between the interests of the community and individual choices. In addition, this can lead to a new constellation of a person per se, which defines itself through its relations and thus in turn has an effect on the group itself (cf. Eriksen 2007; Hess 2006). Future projects, in these examples, always stand in connection not only to the immediate kin group, but also larger social groups like the group from the island of origin or church groups. What is at stake in the future might be social relations. Climate change discourses bring people to consider matters of future changes by analysing the current circumstances and also referring to the past.

Taking into consideration the aspect of uncertainty when approaching the topic of the future (Bryant and Knight 2019), practices around climate change can be traced back to the idea that the future is expected to change conditions, but how this change is shaped is still a projection, how changes might look and how challenging this will be remaining imprecise. Scientific projection for the future depends on modelling what might come, using scenarios. With regard to climate change, this would mean that the expectation (that something will happen) of the changes also anticipate how it will affect peoples' lives, and

this in a negative way (Bryant and Knight 2019, 28). Even if peoples' lives are not turned upside down by a "radical" rupture or change (Robbins 2007, 293) like that projected by climate scientists, such changes might still raise uncertainties for people's lived realities. According to Bryant and Knight, one has to look at "future oriented actions: ones that projected the present into the future and attempted to shape the future in the present" (2019, 22). They have distinguished expectations from anticipation when writing about the future. Whereas 'expectations' means to know that something is happening, 'anticipation' shows how it is happening and means 'imagining the future in the present' (ibid.). Anticipation is thus a human drive towards an end in terms of something that is wanted (ibid.). However, anticipation is also linked to an evolving uncertainty, as the authors further explain:

> We find that anticipation is linked to particular moments of uncertain or threatening futures. Anticipation, in these instances, is a collective way of addressing the anxiety of uncertainty, and of forestalling or altering something that threatens a radical revision of the present. (Bryant and Knight 2019, 48)

Climate change brings up the topic of uncertainty for the future, alongside anticipated problems, which moves hand in hand with the worries of Pacific Islanders. These fears are also directed towards the future generation, anticipating that losing their land (should the land become uninhabitable) could not only pose risks for food supply but also for their entire way of living (Hereniko 2014). The challenges of the Anthropocene could change the way we live together in certain localities, but also the way in which we interact as a global community. For the island states of Oceania, these challenges include migration and international trade relations or dependencies as well as climate change itself (Jolly 2018). Environmental transformation and social transformation cannot be separated from each other, and responding to one means addressing the other (Hau'ofa 2008). Climate change threatens people in terms of food security but it also leads to a far greater threat – existential in the broadest sense (Schorch and Pascht 2017, 117). Although adaptation is in Vanuatu a declared aim of national policy, and thus draws a picture that shows people how to 'adapt', discourses and practices still transport negative connotations of uncertainty with the subject. In the climate change workshops, the topic of changes that can be met by transforming cultivation practices was meant to prepare for all probabilities. Mekem garen became a

future project in itself, stimulated by urban political discussions of challenges through weather and seasonal changes, which were then met by Cyclone Pam and the subsequent El Niño drought, proving that changes can happen but nevertheless it remains unclear when they will happen and what effects they will have on people's lives. Over the last chapters, I have described how these uncertainties through climate change might affect not only food supply but also the creation of sociality. Dixoners underlined that what they consider as klaemet jenj (Chapter 3) also initiated new ways of living together in the community, taking more time for individual pleasures, staying in the village on their phone or increasingly following village administration. Since gardening is also a way of being relational and being part of a community, this brings another aspect to this project, not only in the sense of livelihood but also in the sense of being a person within a community. Before I go into further detail about mekem garen as a future 'project', I will now discuss the role of mekem garen in reference to perception of time and the future of Pacific Islanders.

6.5 Perception of Time through Gardening Cycles

For women, men and children in the Dixon Reef area, horticulture provides a reference point to organise their daily lives:[9] when they wanted to explain the time of year at a particular moment, they referred to one of the two major seasons of gardening and thus the year. The first season is Lewudau (in Novol or Nasarian) which means 'everything grows'. This indicates the start of a new round of mekem garen with the steps of klinim (clearing), bonem (burning) and planem (planting) the alengen wowol (the new garden), putting the yam tubers into the ground (see Chapter 4). At the same time, the old yam gardens of the last garden year are transformed by planting bananas and manioc. This also means that at this point in the cultivation cycle, crops would be about to grow but people would still have to wait for the yield to ripen before they could consume it. Due to this, Dixoners also referred to Lewudau as the season where they would have to go hungry because the stored yam tubers were

9 I describe how time is expressed in relation to horticulture, or how horticultural practices give insights into temporalities of Dixoners. This is not intended to give a general definition of time in Dixon Reef, but rather expressions of time practices (cf. Mondragón 2006). For examples of seasonal calendars which also show that start and end of yam cultivation are markers of the year, see Lindstrom 2011 and Mondragón 2004.

already consumed and only manioc was available. During that period, people would eat manioc with island cabbage every day for every meal. The start of this season of Lewudau is marked by the beginning of heavy rains within the month of November. However, since the rain does not come at fixed times, the beginning of the season of Lewudau is variable, can vary by weeks and can be pushed back as far as mid-December. Mondragón describes this as the typical "overlapping of time-related spheres" of the Gregorian calendar and the actual time when cultivation takes place (Mondragón 2006, 6), which gives a hint to the characteristic that time for ni-Vanuatu is flexible, albeit constituted by repetitions.

The other season, of Renbunde (in Novol or Nasarian), refers to the time when there would be an abundance of food crops – the yam and banana harvest would be in full swing, while fruit trees would bear fruits. People referred to Renbunde as the time of the year when they had plenty to eat and everybody's stomachs were always full. This sequence of gardening remained the same, even during rainy seasons and scarcity of rain such as at the time of El Niño, and people explained that they would keep the routine and start planting by December at the latest. These two seasons, marked by the beginning of the yam cultivation and its eventual harvest, structured the year; once the yam is harvested, six months have gone by and after another six months the rain starts again. Indeed, the vernacular word for year in both Novol and Nasarian, 'etam', is equivalent to the English term 'yam'. For Tanna in the south of Vanuatu, Lindstrom explains that people "pay attention to specific time marks as spurs to practical activity" (Lindstrom 2011, 145) and similarly to Dixoners they mark the beginning of the year when they start a new garden cycle and end the year at the end of the cycle. Time is measured according to time spans; time spans are experienced in a circular way, in which activities are constantly repeated. The Gregorian calendar's years, months or days are mainly important in connection with Christian holidays. Otherwise, people orient themselves within the planting cycle. Everyone can name the Latin calendar months' names, but in everyday lives they are not significant. Duration and measurement of time are of less concern (Lindstrom 2011; Mondragón 2004). Lindstrom also refers to this conception of time as 'static time', because the past falls together with the future.[10] In this static time, there is a centre, while future as well as past are arranged circularly around it (Lindstrom 2011, 144–47).

10 He does not imply, however, that everything always remains the same. Lindstrom refers to changes as "sudden temporal disjunctions" (Lindstrom 2011, 147).

In addition, weather events in Vanuatu are recurring, e.g. storms, and environmental fluctuations caused by weather events are well known and help plants to regrow (Mondragón 2015). Horticulturalists live their lives according to these phenomena and cultivate their food accordingly (Bonnemaison 1978). They do this in relation to what surrounds them, which is at the same time part of the spiritual world and a connection to the ancestors, inscribing past relations in their current practices (Mondragón 2015, 19). In the Dixon Reef area, relationships with 'spirits' are not established or maintained in the form of gardening, yet the environment is dotted with tabu places where certain rules of behaviour apply. For gardening, people concentrate on relations between living community members. Circular approaches to time through gardening become apparent in the context of the Climate Change and Food Security Programme. The case of the abandoned home gardens illustrated that horticulturalist in the Dixon Reef area left them behind at one point but eventually turned their attention back to these small gardens: techniques of mulching, composting and gardening next to the houses were recommenced when people considered it appropriate. This adds to the picture of never leaving something behind but building up on aspects learnt over time.

These relationships to a circular time through gardening are also related to the larger context of dealing with time, past and future in Oceania. Emde, Dürr and Schorch have stated, by referring to Hau'ofa (2008), that "in Oceania time is both circular and linear" (Emde, Dürr and Schorch 2020, 8). Hau'ofa noted that in Oceania, the environment, environmental changes and the histories inscribed in them dictate time. Explaining the circular character of time, Hau'ofa wrote that things in the past are not behind – they lead the way: "The past then is going ahead of us, leading into the future, which is behind us. Is this, then, the case of the dog chasing its tail? I believe so." (Hau'ofa 2008, 67) He differentiated between "traditional notions" of linearity (ibid., 66), which he characterised as "sequential" rather than evolutionary and teleological, and a "notion of linear progression that takes little or no consideration of natural cycles" (ibid., 66). Both can be found in Oceania today, whereby Pacific Islanders encounter the latter notion together with new technologies into the region. Hau'ofa stressed that the notion of linear progression "is the necessity and hence the moral imperative of the transfer of technology" (ibid., 68). Although he considered that people living in rural areas engage in coping "with invasive technologies and adapt them to their familiar cycles" (ibid., 69), he stated that linear developments connected to the introduction of technology have to be considered when working with Oceanic people today.

Global climate change discussions can be seen in line with a teleological view of slow but steady changes leading to a degrading planet, a narrative which Pacific Islanders have encountered over the centuries and perceive as such. When talking about klaemet jenj, Dixoners recognised changes that might lead to problematic futures in a teleological way, such as the intensification of solar radiation. However, they also perceived alterations as recurring, such as El Niño in 2016. I will go into this in more detail shortly. So far, Hau'ofa proposes to capture this simultaneous view ahead and backwards with "the notion of the spiral, which connotes both cyclic and lineal movements" (Hau'ofa 2008, 69). This happens in order to maintain connection to the "natural surrounding" in which time is inscribed (ibid., 67). Or, to rephrase Hau'ofa and look at connotations of time in Dixon Reef, how the past practice of mekem garen is moving ahead of Dixoners, leading them into the future, which lies behind them. Through their explanations, they differentiated between events and changes that have short-term effects and may recur (such as the weather phenomenon El Niño) and long-term changes (such as certain gardening practices) that have changed their lives over the course of time. Referring to Hau'ofa's statements of 'time' in Oceania, these processes as circular and linear aspects of changes both influence the perception of the future of people in the Dixon Reef area.

6.5.1 Gardening over Time

All over Vanuatu, historic interactions have led to alterations in gardening practice and to the introduction of new plants and species (Pollock 2017) as well as other fundamental changes. One important discussion along the west coast of Malekula was that with klaemet jenj, challenges could make gardening harder. This led to discussions about the present status of their garden work. "We already see that things are changing, our lives are changing", the men would say in the evening while enjoying their kava and the news of the day, referring to things that started in the past in order to say that this might or might not affect their future. People not only perceived the introduction of technology such as the mobile phone as a linear process, but also, for example, the irreversible changes through loss of language and kastom knowledge for ceremonial purposes or their responsibilities for church work which affected the structure of everyday life (Regenvanu 2005).

Such changes have also influenced horticultural practices. Both elderly people, talking about their own experiences in their youth, and younger peo-

ple, referring to what they heard from their parents, stressed that substantial changes had occurred when people moved down from the hills in the interior of the island to the coast to join the Catholic mission, which founded the compound village of Dixon Reef. Since that time, people explained, gardening practices have steadily changed, which has affected the quantity and diversity of yield. This in turn has influenced how residents scheduled their daily lives according to gardening days. Many community members criticised those changes because in their view a reduction of gardening could have far-reaching consequences for their communal living. During our discussion, when my interlocutors talked about this status and the changes in their gardens and crops, and the concomitant changes of community life, they often referred to changes they had already seen in comparison with how their parents approached cultivation. Such argumentation mainly revolved around assertions that villagers now cared less about their gardening because they were forced to focus more on monetary income. Ni-Vanuatu are in constant negotiation between following monetary work and having time for gardening. Although this is widely discussed as a problem of urban dwellers (James n.d.), there are aspects of these challenges all over Vanuatu (and the Pacific):

> A secure future has become problematic in the face of globalisation, where householders must choose between a range of moral concerns every time they provide for their families. Cash does not necessarily increase the range of foods accessible to those households, or simplify moral concerns. (Pollock 2017, 283)

Jean Mitchell and her two local research partners, Lesbeth Niefau and Joan Niras, noticed the same for inhabitants of villages on Tanna, an island in the southern province of Vanuatu. People had not spent the same amount of time in their gardens because monetary pressure did not allow it (Mitchell, Niras and Niefeu 2020). What my interlocutors explained gives more context to this new lifestyle and working in the gardens part time.

In Dixon Reef, plantations of coconuts and cacao had spread and now occupied a large part of the area around the village and along the coast. Cash crops were introduced by the missionaries around 1950 and have continued to gain importance. People expressed their ambivalence about the coconut plantations: working there shifted attention away from gardening, but they also depended on the plantations as a steady source of income. Because plantations were expanding, Dixoners had to move their garden areas further away from

their homes, thus increasing the distance for daily work. The space for plantations continuously expanded, because people would replant coconut trees once they had harvested their gardens. The space was thus transformed and villagers had to look for other locations to make new gardens which increasingly led them further away from the village. Although, on the one hand, they were not convinced that they wanted to invest so much of their time into working on the coconut and cocoa plantations, they also felt pressured to earn money from copra to support their families (especially their children). "We are also responsible, there was a time when my father replaced every harvested yam with a coconut", one of the women explained. Old gardens were then slowly replaced with coconut plants, meaning more time spent on the cultivation of copra.

During certain times of the year, Dixoners would dedicate themselves to copra production in work groups several times a week. This work includes a number of tasks, separating the pulp from the coconuts that had been split in half, drying the coconut flesh in drying stoves and then packaging it. A similar approach applies to the production of cocoa beans, except that harvesting is much rarer. This work and church services, people continuously complained, took too much time from their gardening processes. Tambi Alfred explained to me: "In those days, while people were living separated in women's houses and men's houses, couples would meet during the day and spend it gardening. The couple with their children are together in gardens, the women doing their work, and the men theirs." Since gardening was the main occupation, days were structured by it (as was social life).

The changes this elder man saw in modern life mirrored what people around the village had noticed: that they had other responsibilities and thus spent less time gardening. The time they spend in the garden today needs to be used more effectively. They justified this by saying that nowadays more time is spent on work within the village. The school and kindergarten needed attention and the entire village community was responsible for repairing the buildings. A number of villagers said that community work took up most of their time, meaning that their time in the garden was reduced. Time dedicated to gardening practices in Vanuatu had generally decreased over the generations, something that was reflected in a reduction in variety of the subsistence practices of gardening (Mitchell, Niras and Niefeu 2020). Other villagers mention that spending less time in the gardens had led to a decrease in the variety of species and cultivars. When discussing this among my interlocutors, they explained that the yield of gardening in the past was plenty. People referred to their own memories or to the tales of their parents of the

numerous and bountiful harvests of yam. The fathers and mothers of today's village inhabitants planted many yam tubers and thus had numerous stories to tell about their successful work. The yield of the yam plants was stored in so-called 'yam houses', houses directly in the gardens, of considerable size, which were stuffed with yam tubers up to the roof. The surplus produce had reduced over the years, as people adjusted to new life in the village.

Mama Agriculture, as one of the oldest women in the community, remembered that she and her father, many years before, would walk towards their yam gardens to fill the beds and follow the principle of auraur mambele (in Novol or Nasarian), which meant that they would make a house for the yam. She further mentioned that if surplus was not forthcoming in a particular year, and people were not able to rely on their own gardens' yields, they would turn away from the new gardens and walk along the paths they had walked before. Along those paths, several wild yams would have been planted in previous years. Wild yam can stay underground for years and remain fresh. Thus, people could harvest them when needed. In those days, not only did people plant more inside their new garden plots, but they also spent more time securing crops for difficult times. "I remember my parents still planting wild yam everywhere when I was younger, today not that much." "Do people today still know how to plant wild yam?" I asked. "Yes, of course they do [know], but they're not doing it anymore." Additionally, people not only consider this a downfall for keeping up aelan kakae (island food) but they also see that it is keeping community members away from building up relations, because they spend less time in 'the bush'. Thus, people interpret this on the one hand as a linear change, but on the other hand they do not preclude the possibility that they could restart planting wild yam in the future, because specific gardening practices might always recur. In the past, according to the stories, there were several tabu, which accompanied cultivation, mostly concerning yam cultivation and taro gardens. These tabu mainly restricted interactions between humans and plants, with the idea being that this would lead to the growth of the plants not being disturbed. It was seen as detrimental to the growth of the yam plants to go to the garden, for example, when just returning from a journey, or having just said goodbye to people, just having had intercourse with a spouse or having been at a funeral over the past few days. Today, complaints are aimed towards the people who do not follow these tabu, but ultimately, everyone had to admit that hardly anyone would follow those rules anymore, with some key exceptions, for example during the mourning period after a member of the village community had passed away. The strict rules of the past were losing considerable weight. Another change is

related to laying out the gardens. People told me that they do not fence their gardens anymore, which makes it easy for wild pigs and cattle to walk in and eat the harvest. Although losing harvest was frustrating to many, when I asked them, most of the women and men were reluctant to invest their time to resume this practice.

My interlocutors explained that those changes today in relation to the past pave the way to the future, and that they consider it a necessity to spend as much time mekem garen as possible. Here, past, present and future coincide (cf. Hau'ofa 2008); life may change but mekem garen remains constant. However, mekem garen can be transformed in itself. New responsibilities aside from gardening have reduced the working hours of my interlocutors, who then placed less focus on cultivation rules or storage. Gardening had to be adjusted to the multiplication of further responsibilities in their lives. Furthermore, diversification of plants was reduced and people said that they had fewer varieties – the food for dinner after a successful garden day accordingly differed to before. Through those developments in the gardens, however, people came to value their praxis of mekem garen increasingly and the importance of knowing gardening formed the basis of many conversations with me, but also those I overheard when parents were talking to their children. Despite regarding some knowledge as having been lost, Dixoners also perceived a general change in gardening. The model of a spiral, which Hau'ofa refers to in his deliberations about time in Oceania (Hau'ofa 2008, 69) may be apt to grasp these linear and cyclic movements. Some changes were permanent, but other practices could be picked up again under different circumstances. Some of these changes were criticised and people expressed their wish that more time could be spend on gardening in the future. However, they anticipated that other aspects of klaemet jenj might make mekem garen harder for them and bring about new aspects in the future. Dixoners recognise linear as well as cyclical processes regarding changes in their lives. Those influenced mekem garen as well as alternations in mekem garen influencing them in return.

6.5.2 "We will always make our gardens"

When we discussed changes, klaemet jenj was one of the topics of most concern, especially for those who had attended many of the adaptation workshops. Practices in the adaptation programme in Dixon Reef on the one hand highlighted problems for future agriculture, and on the other hand pointed to 'solutions'. This included the notion that current cultivation techniques seemed

lacking for the future and therefore people had to 'adapt' them. Thus, people were aware of changes in gardening style and community life during the last decades and the ideas about future changes and effects such as El Niño introduced problems in the gardens. Having encountered climate change practices, for example, people recognised the El Niño drought as something exceptional, but also as something that had happened in another place in the past, which opened the possibility for it to recur in the future. Particularly the women of Dixon Reef, who came into the community by marriage and grew up in another part of Malekula or another island of Vanuatu, referred to their experiences on other islands of Vanuatu when they were younger and reported that similar events had occurred there. Asking them their opinion about whether an event like El Niño could happen again, they agreed. They anticipate that it could happen again. Everything that had happened in the past might occur again today or in the future. When I asked about the destructive force of climate change, they expressed their concerns for the future, because problems might occur which are worse than those today. Changes they mentioned regarding klaemet jenj are part of a changing world that progresses and always returns or recurs in a cyclical movement. When talking about klaemet jenj and the question whether something could be done to keep it from worsening, there was unanimity among all the people I talked to: my interlocutors regarded it as a matter of permanent renewal that must be accepted. The way forward is to pursue community cohesion and for many that meant to focus on gardening to the extent that it was possible, alongside the changes that their gardening practices had already been through.

During one of our conversations, I asked Mama Agriculture what she thought about the lifestyle of her children and grandchildren and whether she thought that they would still be interested in gardening in the future. I asked this because children of today were more often absent from the village due to school or work opportunities, and the fathers and mothers in the village had to supply for their children's lives as well as their own. I asked her what might happen if younger people spent more time in school surroundings, or working in Port Vila or Luganville. Moreover, I asked whether they would still be interested in spending time tilling the ground and cultivating their own food, and what would happen if they simply bought it instead. She shook her head and assured me: "Children come back for their holidays, they come back and they go with us and work." She was convinced that they would continue to know this kind of work. "Everyone has to learn how to make their garden." She pointed at her daughter and said: "Yesterday she [the daughter] went and

worked around her new garden, and she took the little one with her [the girl living with them], this one did her own work." Her daughter nodded and said: "I was working in that way [pointing in one direction], and she did her work over there [pointing in the opposite direction]. She is still small, but she has a garden."

One of the younger men, Yannick, stated that although he was sometimes lazy, he had to listen to what his parents told him and work in their garden. However, their actions drew a contrary picture, in fact implying that young men happily strolled through the garden area, not working. Next to hunting, horticulture in one of the areas far from the village (and of course watching movies on their mobile phones) was one of the favourite activities of younger men. They walked for several days towards their land in the interior of Malekula and cultivated the land there, for example by raising kava crops in order to sell them for cash. Their hunting activity would additionally supply their families with meat. Around the garden areas closer to the village, younger boys were the ones helping their parents to clear the bush for new areas of gardening and they were the ones who helped carry the large bundles of bananas. When I asked them about the future, these boys would become very serious and said that one day they wanted to provide for their families, and that meant that they needed to know how to do the work. One day, the brother of my host father came to visit. At that time, he spent most of his time in the town working for hotels and other service providers. After the first night in the village, he grabbed his knife early in the morning and set off to the garden area, as it had been so long since he had been out to look around. He also wanted to plant a few yam tubers. After a long garden day, he returned, very tired but very happy. At dinner he laughed with his brother, my host father, who in turn explained that the reason for this good atmosphere was because for our guest it was important to have done some 'real work' again, and make a new garden, 'mekem wan garen'. Our guest's children, on the other hand, had only seen urban life, and both brothers regrettably recognised that they would probably miss out on knowledge of horticulture. All my other interlocutors who grew up in rural areas were sure that they had and would continue to follow practices of gardening. For them, gardening was a 'project' they wanted to continue.

A mother of four children, however, described her worries for the future: "Of course I'm a bit scared. Things are happening because of the [climate change] things. I think in the future our life will become much more difficult. I think that will also affect our aelan kakae (island food)." In March 2019, we experienced a prolonged low-pressure area in Dixon Reef, with high swells

and recurring gusts of wind. The principal chief of the village simply shook his head and said "Another long depression, how is this going to continue in the future?", referring to the unsettled weather predicted by climate experts for the coming period. People made short trips to their gardens. I stayed at home as the people around me were too worried that a coconut would fall on my head en route. When a tropical cyclone actually came over this stretch of coast, it destroyed the banana gardens already in bloom. Shortly afterwards, a group formed to assess the extent of damage in the gardens. Group members were male representatives of the different nasara, as well as myself. We went around the garden areas and documented what had been damaged and what was to be given to the regional government for possible reception of compensation (in the form of emergency relief). As we walked around, we saw some areas badly damaged and some only mildly, but everywhere the men threw their hands up in the air and said that they had never seen anything like this before and that this was another sign that the times were changing. "We may see more of this now." "And what can you do about it?", I tried to ask in passing. "Nothing, you have to accept it", I received in response. Another of the younger women agreed with this statement in a different conversation and confirmed that those changes are in fact permanent. Additionally, people see that klaemet jenj might affect their gardening. "I think it will be harder for us to do our gardening in the future" one of the women explained. I asked her what that would mean for the future of their garden practices: "Will you still make your gardens?" She replied, and this mirrors opinions of others, "Yes, I think so. We will have to find solutions. For example, move our gardens to other spots like the riverbed." Thus, she expressed what I described in Chapter 3 in terms of 'humanized landscape' (Mondragón 2004), namely that people refer to their own agency in terms of changing gardens and gardening practices. Both women and men firmly confirmed that they see themselves as responsible for gardening and that they are able to change their gardening practices themselves. They would refer to the changes that they experienced in the community in reference to gardening.

Returning to the conversation at the beginning of this subchapter, Mama Agriculture, whose family included even the smallest children in their horticultural activities, put this into one phrase: "Yumi stap mekem garen blo yumi" (we will always make our garden). "This is just what we do", she added. With this statement, she emphasised that the villagers wanted to keep on gardening. The mother of the four children cited above also emphasised that one way of doing this is to concentrate on educating children: "We just have to talk to

our children a lot now. Our children are the future now. Now is the time to teach them the right things and to correct them in what they are doing. Only in this way can we not lose our kastom." With this expression that gardening will be what they want and anticipate doing in the future, gardening becomes one of the key projects for the future, if not the primary one. Although it undergoes changes over time, gardening itself remains a constant in ni-Vanuatu lives.

6.6 Conclusion

People around Dixon Reef regarded gardening as a practice which they wanted to continue, but by discussing the future, they first looked at changes to their past. This looking forward and backward I frame with Epeli Hau'ofa's concept of time in Oceania as being both linear and circular (Hau'ofa 2008). My interlocutors were aware that life may be more difficult in the future. Nevertheless, they were not in despair because they relied on their gardening. When I asked them about future gardening, they first discussed long-term transformations in gardening and described a line of changes that led to how they live and work today. They referred to what has happened to their parents and bubu (ancestors) and then connected this to future generations. What they want to do in the future is articulated according to terms of gardening today and in the past. Referring to Hau'ofa's perspective, who saw the need to deal with Pacific lineal as well as circular perceptions of pasts in order to "present to the future" (Hau'ofa 2008, 69), I learnt that Dixoners' pasts are important to them to explain what they want to do in the future, however neither by a delimitation nor by a linear continuation of the past, but in an articulation between returning aspects and a processual present. Mekem garen has been a constant from the time when people lived up in the mountains to when they moved down to the sea and founded Dixon Reef, but it had to be altered to fit new circumstances and it changed because people purposefully reformed it. Now, with climate change looming and with the adaptation programme becoming part of a future directed discourse, mekem garen becomes once more a future project, representing what my interlocutors aspire to and simultaneously expressed in reference to the past by weaving in aspects of anticipation. They dealt with the anticipation of an uncertain garden future in relation to gardening in and as sociality as a reocurring pattern, rather than focusing on climate change-related food insecurity as a possible destructive future. Gardening as the constant in their lives has changing connotations and influences but recurring practices

within. It returns in different phases, different times and different styles, but is never lost. Mekem garen is a praxis of making relations and thus remains a constant in people's lives, with its inherent changes. Thus, the future projects incorporate this dynamic.

In this chapter, I have illustrated how mekem garen is part of sociality among ni-Vanuatu horticulturalists. Once introduced to the praxis of gardening, a person is embedded in various social relations as well as part of the community, which means making relations beyond kin relations. Mekem garen is social because it contributes to making a relational person (Strathern 1988). Knowing what to do in the gardens means to enter a network that is an essential part of being a human, a person in relations. Gardening provides access to the community, information, trails and areas in the land that are meant for gardening. At the same time, people are involved in a network that keeps everyone 'alive' – not only through access to food, but also through the constant building of relationships. Mekem garen is only a basis of social relations if people work on it constantly. When it is no longer possible for some villagers to be on site, others continue to run their gardens and thus secure the original gardener's status in the community. People continued to cultivate gardens for others who had at one time entered the social relations. This was extended by the circle of exchange in which my interlocutors were included because they had been able to give harvest and therefore could receive the fruits of others' planting. Without a garden, people would fall out of the web of relationships and lose an important quality that makes them a socially-constituted person.

At the same time, changes in gardening praxis were considered as problematic, precisely because of this importance for sociality. My interlocutors expressed this by underlining that when they gardened, everything in the community worked too. This is why, for the future, they see no other way than to continue to mekem garen. In this sense, mekem garen becomes a future project, including social life, food, urban political climate change narratives and the changes ni-Vanuatu in rural areas envisage. From what I learnt from my interlocutors in the Dixon Reef area, they do not question that this practice must be continued. They communicated that klaemet jenj as a new phenomenon could also bring changes that people did not know about before. However, people had to make sure to continue gardening. One of the travelling men, who often spent his time in the city, waved off objections and my doubts as to whether less gardening will be done in future years, saying: "Oh, we here, we concentrate on our lives. Yes, the white people have to develop new tech-

niques. But that is for them, not for us." People living on the islands, however, clearly see the advantage that they are closer to learning cultivation practices from an early stage. Even there, however, villagers dispersed over islands and communities loose from the common praxis of horticulture bear the biggest risk for radical ruptures, as many have explained to me over the years. At that point, keeping up with gardening becomes a project for all to see that klaemet jenj will not be allowed to take over.

The uncertainty that comes with the anticipated challenges of climate change discourses did not make people doubt the importance and persistence of their own gardening. My interlocutors live in a time in which they experience a lot of change, including klaemet jenj (which touches many parts of their lives). They accept and sometimes even embrace these changes but this does not prevent them from taking care of their gardens. On the contrary, continuing gardening is part of these changes. Thus, the future is connected with the past and provides new options for the future. Fundamentally, things will not change, and climate change does not represent a break here either. This is because the process of gardening is under continuous change, regardless of climate or any other transformations.