

7 Cultivating with Climate Change

Over the centuries, gardening and cultivation in Vanuatu have been characterised by constant change. When people had moved to the shores through missionaries' ambitions, founded new villages, installed coconut and cocoa plantations, started keeping cattle around the village and pigs in the village, their gardening also changed. These changes brought new cultivars, new planting material, but also diseases for plants, animals and humans, and shifts in nutrition habits and reduced working time for cultivation. When reflecting on these past transformations, people point to the ambivalences and aspects of violent inflictions through outsiders. However, my interlocutors in both Dixon Reef and Siviri took on these pasts not with total resentment, because they wanted to draw productive lessons from them. Since the early 2010s, through involvement in the adaptation programme, gardens and people entered the process of worlding climate change including changes within the community as well as in relation to their more-than-human surroundings – in a flexible and self-reflexive way. Underlining their own ability to act in terms of shaping their daily lives, my interlocutors embraced their responsibilities in terms of their futures on the islands. In this book, I have focused on mekem garen as a praxis connected to the idea of the Anthropocene and to worlding climate change through mekem garen. The latter became entangled in ni-Vanuatu national discourse about political, environmental, economic and social changes. It brings together village communities with urban narratives about issues connected to weather hazards and food security, and makes them part of a globalised narrative of climate change. Through these narratives, ni-Vanuatu horticulturalists engage both in changes in their gardens and with climate politics in the country as a whole. This they do out of concern for climate change meanings for gardens and communal life, mutually changing both. However, this concern has not turned into a desperate mood.

This corresponds to political approaches in the whole Pacific region, where islanders are inclined to take climate change issues seriously, but reject the idea that they might be disruptive or paralysing inconveniences (Crook and Rudiak-Gould 2018, 8). These ways of thinking and acting are also reflected in public appearances on international platforms. Pacific people have caught world-wide attention not least when the former Prime Minister of Kiribati, Anote Tong, addressed the international community with the words: “[T]he issue of climate change remains the most single pressing challenge for us in Kiribati [...] The global community cannot afford to NOT listen to our stories and the plight of our people.” (Tong 2014) Tong referred in his speech to poet Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner who addressed the international politicians of the United Nations with her poem expressing the goals of Pacific people in the face of climate change, writing it for her daughter: “[W]e are drawing the line here, because baby we are going to fight” (Jetnil-Kijiner 2014). These two representatives are both from low-lying island states in Micronesia, which bring with them their own specific issues and framings. Nevertheless, these two contributions to the UN Climate Summit in 2014 make us aware of important aspects when dealing with the topic of climate change in Oceania. Pacific Islanders will not passively stand back, but will fight, making the international community aware of the entanglement that climate change entails. They underlined, on the one hand, the fact that global action is needed, and on the other hand that Pacific people are already experiencing the consequences of global warming and will continue to do so to an even greater degree in the future, but that they will not passively endure its challenges.

7.1 Challenges and Changes

In Vanuatu, political policies focus on enabling citizens to continue living ‘on the islands’ in the wake of challenging weather and climatic conditions. The pair of events of Cyclone Pam and the drought of El Niño brought climate change projections into the present and initiated a whole discussion about agriculture and climate change. After several years of dealing with heat and dryness, in April 2019, my interlocutors in the Dixon Reef area and Siviri announced that their gardens and lives were finally ‘back to normal’ – rain and sun again made their usual interplay and gardening practices could be undertaken according to the seasons once again. With the harvest of 2019, it became clear that the cultivation of root crops had been highly successful and

the men proudly talked about the yam harvest, looking forward to giving it as gifts or for exchange.

In terms of their daily routines, my interlocutors in Dixon Reef were happy to keep their rice diet to a minimum and invited me for meals into their kitchen houses to taste their freshly harvested taro and yam, praising the excellent taste. In Siviri, people had turned more to wage labour over the years, but were able to take advantage of their reinvigorated supply on the markets. Many used their free time to continue cultivation. Nevertheless, young people continue to be drawn to the urban lifestyle, where growing their own crops plays a lesser role. Their abilities are heavily dependent on how much they co-operate with their parents. Still many of my interlocutors in both locations were in a positive mood – cultivation was not restricted by bigger weather events. Although there were several warnings from the meteorological department about possible El Niño or La Niña threats, they were lifted again soon afterwards. Additionally, the cyclone seasons in March and April 2019 brought, according to the villagers, the usual wind and rain, which then supported their cultivation cycle. Officials of the government and NGOs also confirmed that the whole country had recovered, and that ni-Vanuatua could work their gardens again. Nevertheless, they added, this optimism had to be treated with caution, as conditions could change again quickly (which it did a few years later). People in the villages were equally aware that the events they had experienced could occur again at any time. According to them, they did not know what the future would bring, and since *klaemet jenj* was part of their daily routines now, they were aware of the uncertainties of this time. As I described in Chapters 3 and 4, Dixoners also identified those transformations as part of a wider development beyond their cultivation practices. However, they rooted their lives in practices of gardening and viewed this as a way to move forward.

By 2019, families in Dixon Reef again broke new ground, deciding to walk even further up into the mountains, preparing gardens there. They did this despite the fact that apparently conditions for cultivation at the coast were good. They went inland into the higher regions, in groups of extended family members, to their *nasara* land, where their ancestors had lived before the arrival of the missionaries. This meant that they had to accept a walk of, at times, more than a day and had to stay away from the coastal village for a couple of days or even weeks. At this time, they also built sleeping houses, formed small hamlets on their own land and started new garden plots, this time directly in front of their kitchen doors. They told me that there they could find excellent con-

ditions for gardening practices: fertile and, as they put it, cold, moist soil and mild temperatures all year round. The advantage for them was that temperatures ‘antap lo bus’ (up there in the bush) are cooler, rainfall comes at a higher frequency, and thus crops grow much better so that the gardens produce a greater yield. Due to this, horticulturalists did not have to burn the ground before starting a new plot, but could simply cut the higher plants to make room for the new crops. This would certainly have made representatives of the NGOs happy, because they constantly promoted approaches with lower emissions. However, when I asked my gardening group why they would refrain from slash and burn, they said that in some locations it is not needed, and the whole endeavour once again became a matter of working with the ground rather than forcing it (Chapter 4).

Many women and men continued to ignore the notion of working in only one location, investing their time for cultivation intensively at one garden plot. Instead of staying in one place to secure the main supply for difficult times, and further make sure that they spent less time on cultivation, people added even more garden plots in the mountains and extended their garden network further. In this manner, gardening time and gardening space was extended. At that time, I increasingly asked myself whether the members of the village would disperse and thus live again up in the mountains, leaving Dixon Reef at the shore behind. However, they started new home gardens in the village and started planting extra crops. In 2019, some of the households had small home gardens and some were keeping these skills for another time, some had abandoned the idea, because they lacked a water supply, but would pick it up when they considered it appropriate. In the village of Siviri, interaction with the idea of the home gardens presented itself a little differently. There, women expanded their own home gardens, with fruits, vegetables and yam, while their families drove to other parts of the islands, because they created new plots for planting banana and manioc there. Both strategies, installing new gardens and moving them, was followed in both communities. Moving plants and gardens meant for them also going forward and remaining prepared for any changes, while following their own paths of cultivation and expanding their repertoires.

I asked my interlocutors in the Dixon Reef area about their reasons for starting more gardens on their ancestors’ land in the mountains and whether they wanted to move back to their land and their own *nasara* where they would find better conditions for gardening. Most waved this idea off and were not interested in moving permanently ‘antap’ (up there). What they wanted was to take advantage of the opportunity to live in the mountains temporarily and

follow their cultivation seasonally. Reasons they referred to circled around responsibilities of their life in the village, possibilities for earning money, better access to health services and that the children had to go to school. In any case, cultivation around the Dixon Reef area had to be continued and was simply complemented by new garden plots. Their seasonal movement to other areas was another step of orienting their gardening towards the future and dealing with *klaemet jenj*. Instead of investing additional time in adapting one place, they added more locations to their garden plots. This also included more time spent with their children gardening along paths of the *bubu* (ancestors) who had previously lived in the mountains. This was their way of dealing with the uncertainties of changing climate and weather and extending garden networks, ensuring the continuation of gardening.

In 2020, another kind of crisis entered the political agenda. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, the government of Vanuatu soon closed its borders, not only for tourism but also for cargo. Cash income through work that concentrated on tourism, other services or selling cash crops came to a standstill. As a result, even on the main island of Efate, many *ni-Vanuatu* were thrown back into growing their own food. When I caught my host family in *Siviri* on the phone, those at the other end of the line were more concerned because of the news in Europe. They told me that they were not affected by the pandemic and that life for them was much quieter. Since they all had access to land and had been involved in cultivation their whole lives, even if the children and other professionals had only had time for it on holidays or weekends, they could easily just turn to (only) being horticulturalists. They even saw this (temporary) change in their daily lives rather as a liberation than a burden, and happily spent their days preparing new garden plots. In Dixon Reef, everyday economic and social life is strongly shaped by gardening in any case; the general isolation of Vanuatu only impacted their lives in terms of income from cash crops being lost due to the lack of transport. In terms of continuing their daily lives, this crisis had affected them the least. Again, their focus on *mekem garen* could be interpreted as a strength, their method of securing gardening as preparation for crisis. These crises were never any less concerning for people on the islands, but were rather their progressive way of dealing with (new) challenges. As these challenges grew and changed, *ni-Vanuatu* were moving forward, incorporating and creating new knowledge, discerning what was best for them and including their own actions while remaining critical of them.

7.2 Moving Lives through Mekem Garen

In the course of this book, I have drawn connections between mekem garen and politics of climate change from national narratives to daily practices of ni-Vanuatu in rural areas. Like politicians and representatives of local and international organisations, horticulturalists on both Malekula island and Efate island trust that horticulture is important to secure future lives. In this way, gardening has been connected to a broader worlding process which must be considered when approaching climate change. Activities in Vanuatu not only present an example of what actors make of climate change effects, or how they localise the discourses, narratives, prognosis etc. of international forums. As Crook and Rudiak-Gould point out, Pacific Islanders are “living climate change” (Crook and Rudiak-Gould 2018, 1). From a focus on agency in local adaptation measures, I consider climate change to be conceptually worked out not only in international panels, with a radiating effect into individual places, but rather, as created by actors in different localities synchronically. In my ethnographic context of village communities in Vanuatu, people become part of a dialogue of both reception and observation. They also explained, discussed and acted on their experiences on a daily basis. In addition to the political engagement described above, in this actor’s perspective, encounters and practices further become defining moments of climate change (see Chapter 3).

People in Vanuatu do this creatively, with possibly surprising results in encounters with other people and practices. When dealing with encounters, I have drawn parallels to Tsing’s concept of ‘friction’ (2005). Tsing scrutinises universalities in environmental discourses through ideas, concepts and practices coming together. Exemplified through the case of the abandoned home gardens and the adaptation workshops (Chapter 4), I have argued that frictions occurring in the context of encounters regarding climate change adaptation can be interpreted as ontological frictions. This means that I decided to approach these moments of irritation in encounters ontologically, by ‘thinking through’ the topic of climate change (Henare, Holbraad and Wastell 2006). Concepts might be re-defined in the process of working with them, a process which is happening in daily practices (Holbraad and Pedersen 2017; Salmond 2017). Thus, ‘worlding practices’ bring different worlds into being through the interaction of people and ontological assumptions. Those climate change worlding practices are responsible for creating many ‘climate change worlds’; this also happened in Vanuatu, where the people I worked with created their

klaemet jenj world. There are several climate change worldings happening and people are involved in one or more of them to try to make sense of changes. In so doing, they create their own concepts and raise notions that highlight the demand for rethinking mainstream definitions of anthropogenic influences with their effects on living conditions which then need adaptation. I will now revisit my learning from horticulturalists in rural Vanuatu, especially people living in the Dixon Reef area, on how mekem garen shows connective points of thinking with climate change.

The starting point of my research were the policy measures on climate change adaptation in Vanuatu. Those measures were developed in the context of scientific climate projections which show that current adverse weather phenomena will intensify all over the Pacific, including Vanuatu. This depicted a future in which islanders in Vanuatu experience more forceful and frequent cyclones, more dry periods as well as heavy rainfall events and shifting seasons due to intensification of the ENSO weather phenomenon (such as El Niño and La Niña). Representatives of the Vanuatu Agriculture Department, the Ministry for Climate Change and NGOs stated that the consequences of global warming and effects for weather events in Vanuatu could be especially harmful for rural communities, because there ni-Vanuatu mostly live off what they grow in their gardens. Cultivation of food crops remains the strongest economic branch in Vanuatu. Stemming from the discourse in urban areas, I have shown that town residents' concerns were related to family members in rural areas, 'on the islands'. Their connection to information hubs has brought them into new roles as experts. They perceived their role because of being, on the one hand, 'aware' of climate change-induced environmental threats and, on the other hand, given the tools for dealing with such threats (Chapter 3). With this they supported programmes for information dissemination and adaptative measures. In the village of Dixon Reef, one of those programmes called 'kakai fo laef' (Food for Life), conducted in the form of workshops and several visits per year over a period of almost 10 years, aimed to introduce alternative methods for cultivation based on permaculture principles. This mainly included climate friendly methods of preparing the soil with mulching, organic fertiliser, nitrogen fertilisation with trees and intercropping of different plants as well as irrigation with grey water. The use of these methods was intended to benefit the installation of home gardens, next to the family's kitchen houses. At the same time, people encountered topics that included natural scientific explanations like greenhouse effects as a cause and change in weather patterns as an effect. The sense of this approach of awareness and

first-hand strategies for adaptation by national officials was considered to be confirmed by the two events: first, the category 5 Cyclone Pam, which had devastating results for that year's harvest, and second, what disturbed lives of ni-Vanuatu even more, the subsequent El Niño drought. Consequently, the political atmosphere that emerged with those two events was concerned, although not desperate. This progressive and pragmatic attitude was also reflected in the adaptation programmes. The representatives of the organisations expected climate change measures, especially soil preparation and home gardens, to be useful tools in order to face problematic times for horticulture, such as dry periods. So-called environmental problems were supposed to be countered with methods to work with this shifting environment.

Urban discussions drew a more dramatic picture when they addressed the possibilities of losing grounds for food production, framing this as nature 'will die'. Especially for younger ni-Vanuatu in Port Vila, climate change is considered to be an environmental problem and a way of life which relies on the weather; the environment renders people less prepared to address these new problems. Furthermore, they took the view that problems must be solved by incorporating new practices, especially by those parts of the population living in rural areas (Chapter 3). I have shown that by taking the conceptualisation they called 'klaemet jenj' as a new phenomenon, originating elsewhere but re-created in encounters and thereby influencing their lives, connecting them to places beyond their village, Dixoners have ultimately become part of global practice. Instead of seeing themselves as affected by but not responsible for global issues, my interlocutors in Siviri and Dixon Reef addressed the activities of both industrial countries and their own and thus formulated argumentations of universal self-blame. They included scientific explanations into their *klaemet jenj* practices, as well as observations of changing weather and experiences of changing human behaviour (Chapter 3). Responses to their own contribution to reducing damage and avoiding further fuelling of *klaemet jenj* is characterised in what they call 'respektem envaeromen'. This is their newly-named principle of taking care of everything around them, human or more-than-human, and equally taking care of the community in which they live. They act in their "humanized landscapes" (Mondragón 2018, 25), crafting everything around them, which includes building houses, relations to others – and gardening. *Mekem garen* bridges climate change worlds and shows that 'envaeromen' and community are part of what people call *klaemet jenj*.

After initial successful implementation, the food security part of the adaptation project in Dixon Reef temporarily concluded in the case of the

'abandoned home gardens' and discussion about it began (Chapter 4). Debates between villagers and representatives of the NGO were initiated through this heated discussion over those home gardens, because of the different approaches to it. The NGO's approach considered 'taking care of the ground' with methods of soil preparation and a constant build-up of a humus layer in one location. In the view of the NGOs, this gives gardeners permanent access to fresh food, especially when they are prevented from taking on the long and time-consuming walks into 'the bush' every day. People in the Dixon Reef area did at first embrace new techniques of mulching, composting etc. outside, but especially inside, their home gardens according to the NGO's intention, and the project accordingly became an early success story. However, during the El Niño event, they did not follow these methods up. During that time, people in Dixon Reef did not focus on the home gardens. Discussions were characterised by friction and did not reach the point of talking about what gardening actually is for people in Dixon Reef. Reflecting on these events, I interpreted their approach as the frequent statement of 'we cannot force the ground' in their relational approach to the ground. Villagers continued to prepare gardens according to shifting plots and following the principle of cultivating in different locations and different gardens with a diversity of plants. Instead of seeing these moments as a problem or possible failure of the whole programme and workshops, I argue that these frictions opened up discussion and moments to reflect about practices among my interlocutors and between me and my interlocutors, to further make sense of these ontological differences. In their own discussions during the programme, villagers tried to reflect on their own approaches to cultivation, opening up discussion about their climate change worlding. They approached mekem garen as constant innovation, in time of crises but also through circular approaches to starting and re-starting their cultivation parcels, both inside and outside the village.

Gardening practices in the past have been inspired by and alternated through contact with people, crops and plants from elsewhere and people have created what other scholars considered as 'traditional ecological knowledge' (McCarter and Gavin 2015). In contrast to the methods of the food security programme seeking to complement 'traditional' with new 'outside knowledge', I argue that this approach is part of a constant worlding praxis that needs encounters. The way people acted was different from what the NGO representatives wanted, but the new methods certainly did not fall on barren ground. Instead, some ideas and practices were taken up in the Dixoners' gardening practice. For my interlocutors, learning how to garden always means

embracing the new and adapting it according to individual preferences and experiences. Learning mekem garen is characterised by doing and by adding observations and reception of new practices. Every workshop participant was able to repeat the content of the workshop or at least to refer to someone who seemingly knew. The application, however, was tied into flexibility and seasonality. Here, horticulturalists followed the NGO's linear practices only temporally – and this temporality itself brought up discussions. Interactions preliminarily resulted in the villagers' gardening practices taking the form of the elaborated new ways. People's actions are the product of their engagement with ontological assumptions and thus diversification and flexibility marked additional aspects of mekem garen. Planting many kinds of plants in one location and relocating them to other locations in the next season according to weather conditions was commonly practised, including new ways of mulching or composting. Through shifting and relocation, gardens, plants and people were constantly in motion. Although adaptation programmes did not aim for this, it brought in new ideas and also sparked discussions about how to deal with challenges.

Moving crops to better spots in order to gain higher yields is only one reason why people decided to walk longer distances between gardens (Chapter 5). The second reason is that they practise what I frame by referring to 'wayfaring' (Ingold 2007), following paths, with the aim of connecting the various locations along the way. When I followed my fellow Dixon Reef gardeners throughout their garden day, they led me from the coast up the hill, through swamp sites and through plantations. Every step of the way was one essential part of their gardening practice. Gardens and people around the area of Dixon Reef move. If people decide to move their gardens to other locations, they follow weather conditions and conditions of the soil. Then they follow new routes and thus create new paths. This process goes far beyond food production but is also a way to create the location and environment in which they live. I tried to capture this through discussions about mobile gardening and questioned the image of the garden as the sole place where activities happen. I first drew on the conceptualisation of place (Cresswell 2014; Massey 2005), which argues that place is shaped by human practices, and that although it contains and is made by practices, it remains within a certain locality. I complemented this with an approach to the concept of ples in Vanuatu. Here in this relational form, locations themselves are not fixed, but are rather made by relations between people and their surroundings (Hess 2009; Rodman 1992). The paths and garden locations are the visualisation of practices that have been carried out

during the garden day. Accordingly, gardening is first and foremost to be seen as a practice that keeps people in motion and is created in motion. Thus, gardening is not place-bound but praxis-bound and, I argue, therefore the environment also comes into being through sequential activities that Ingold (1993) calls 'taskscape'. Thus, this taskscape is being constantly evolved and reshaped. What horticulturalists in Dixon Reef emphasised was that this environment in the context of *klaemet jenj* is one worth preserving. They are making this happen through following up on their gardening work. Cultivation in different places is also an extended practice to produce the environment, transforming dark bush into bush and then gardens.

Siviri presents a different picture due to its proximity to Port Vila, but one can also draw some parallels. Women have moved their gardens closer to the house so that they can grow their own crops at shorter distances. Supplies are diversified in families by the fact that additional products can be purchased through wage labour. This has intensified since the experience of El Niño. Nevertheless, gardens are still highly valued, forming a connection of land and family ties as well as backup in times of crisis. By acquiring new land and moving around with their own vehicles, residents are even expanding their network of weekend gardening. Either they distribute growing areas among family members in different villages around the island, or, if financially possible, new growing areas are developed through new joint land purchases or leases. In both cases, opportunities for cultivation are pushed further and gardeners are not stationary but move through the environment in their cultivation practices.

In these movements, interactions with plants and people become equally important, for food production but also for aspects of villager's sociality. Meeting points, like the 'raonabaot', in Dixoners' garden areas are characterised by practices of exchange – both information and plants or harvest change hands (Chapter 6) – and I have shown that everyday gardening practices are embedded in the production of social relations. The garden as a space of sociality has so far been connected by several scholars to exchange of crops in ceremonies, the cultivation of the ceremonial plant yam and on prestige through the special skill of the individual man through high crop yield. The sociality of gardening practices in Melanesia relates back to Malinowski's descriptions in his work on the Trobriand Coral Gardens (1935) in which he considered gardens in Melanesia as both social and personal. I referred to sociality as processual in the making (Long and Moore 2012) and then combined it with Melanesian sociality in a person itself as being a part of their social relation-making (Strathern 1988).

The sociality of mekem garen is expressed in how ni-Vanuatu enter and maintain their position in a network of social relations (even through gardening for others) and consider it as a daily activity which is fundamental for being a (relational) person. Everyone should learn and participate in this practice. Now, when political climate change practices present trends for the future as increasingly difficult for rural life, this is also an aspect that needs to be considered. People in Vanuatu very much see gardening as a “situated project” for the future (Rollason 2014), which integrates a perspective from the past and considers past changes and, in the eyes of my interlocutors, continues to change, considering what is ahead by looking back (Hau’ofa 2008). The uncertainties of anticipation (Bryant and Knight 2019) in relation to climate change did not make people want to leave their gardens behind but rather made them value them even more. Also, because gardens secure relations, i.e. something fundamental for a person in Vanuatu itself, the fact remained: “we will always make our garden”.

In all of this, mekem garen as climate change praxis moves and is in motion, shaping surroundings, lives and futures. While it moves people, plants and gardens, at the same time people move mekem garen into new contexts, through challenging times and into the future. It is a praxis that guides people to act flexibly and is itself characterised by change. Mekem garen creates and preserves social life and the environment. Moreover, this environment is again made up of social lives – people’s relations to each other – in the same way that activities are also related to making the environment. It has become evident that the focus on everyday gardening in relation to climate change solely as the basis for food security is one-sided. Like *klaemet jenj*, people consider their gardening to touch upon every aspect of their lives, and stamp it as being both influenced by their doing and an influence on themselves. Changes in behaviour and actions are at the same time explained as causes of and methods of dealing with all aspects of *klaemet jenj*.

Following encounters in climate change programmes, people in the Dixon Reef area actively demanded implementation of novel techniques in their village community. They welcomed the interaction with measures of adaptation, because encounters also raise new ideas. Their lives, and this is also apparent in their gardening practices, is characterised by a dualistic view, facing both outward and inward (Hviding 2003). Knowing about climate change discourse was felt to be a necessity to deal with changes around them. People do not wait for help, but rather take up the opportunities offered. However, while they encounter new practices, they continue to follow their own gardening practices.

Mekem garen is self-determined and thus, according to my interlocutors, also brings self-responsibility. If one aspect of life changes, e.g. communal life, so does gardening, as does the environment. However, the praxis itself, people want to remain a constant.

I started with a depiction of worlding practice and then showed how gardening fits into it and how the two influence each other. I have argued that apprehending mekem garen as a worlding praxis within the context of encounters in food security programmes also helps us to understand the climate change worlding of people living in Dixon Reef. My interlocutors' *klaemet jenj* world is characterised by both temporal and permanent changes, which both affect their community life and vice versa. Workshops, in their linear approaches, projected that climate issues are increasing in severity and explicate this phenomenon as a rupture that might be disruptive to *ni-Vanuatu* lives. The located adaptation methods are received with interest by the many *ni-Vanuatu* horticulturalists I have worked with over the years. However, rather than being taken on board wholly, such methods are woven into the flexible praxis of mekem garen and thus into their *klaemet jenj* worlds. Practices such as fishing or gathering shellfish are, like mekem garen, part of both everyday life and food supply. The way in which those practices of the sea, or water in the broadest sense, constitute 'worlding practices' could thus itself be a topic of further research. In other places in Vanuatu, small-scale fishing and the creation of marine spaces play a greater role than in Dixon Reef (cf. Calandra 2017). In the context of climate change, the national government emphasises 'conservation', i.e. preserving what is available (Westoby et al. 2020). In Dixon Reef and *Siviri*, people formulate their view of the sea as something that is "always there" and gives them what they need, although only seasonally. However, fish and shellfish constitute variety rather than staples in the diet of the villagers and in their view, their work evolves around their horticulturalist practices.

During my time walking and working with people in the Dixon Reef area and *Siviri*, I met my interlocutors as climate change actors. Although they move in a context of being conceptualised as the victims of circumstances who can no longer rely on what they currently 'know', they continue to move confidently in this context. They do not let themselves be told what to do or how to act according to climate change implementation. Risk and new developments are taken seriously but they do not see climate change as a radical rupture that cuts through their lives, preferring to continue their praxis in mekem garen, worlding new ontological assumptions. When they formulate that everything

is different than before, pointing out permanent changes, they then look to mekem garen as a project for the future. The former foreign minister of Vanuatu, Ralph Regenvanu, argued against the vulnerable status of his country, because ni-Vanuatu are determined to do everything possible to address issues of climate change today. I see something similar at another level in Dixon Reef. People want to be informed, but do not allow themselves to become irritated or divert from their paths. However, what has to be borne in mind is that their *klaemet jenj* world is not yet included into political discussion.

7.3 Climate Change Revisited

In October 2023, we gathered around the kitchen table in Makin's kitchens right at the shoreline in the village in Dixon Reef. I was invited to join the family for lunch after attending church. Since my previous visit to Vanuatu, the country had experienced a series of cyclones. Two consecutive storms occurred at the beginning of 2023. The twin tropical Cyclones Judy and Kevin were the subject of discussion when I was seated at the table with my hosts. Dixon Reef was situated within the cyclone's eye this time, and thus experienced the consequences of the storm to a particularly acute degree. During the course of the meal, Makin and her husband informed me that they had once again lost all of their banana plants (referring to Cyclone Pam in 2015) as a result of the storm and that they were still engaged in the process of rebuilding the destroyed kitchen structures. "Of course we are tired of storms, but we have to go on", they explained to me when I asked how they put this into context after experiencing several such storms. Furthermore, they stated that the clean-up work and planting of root crops would be at risk of being impeded without the involvement of younger villagers. In recent years, there has been a notable decline in the number of young people in the area of Dixon Reef, because they have chosen to reside in the city for extended periods of time. Those still residing in the village have become increasingly concerned about the impact of these developments on the community. It was emphasised that gardens sometimes had to be visited by their actual gardeners, but that family tasks could be shared out. These events were challenging for community life and were of significant concern to my hosts, meaning that they required concerted action. The mention of these two events and developments simultaneously aligns with the explanations of climate change provided by ni-Vanuatu, in which the causes and effects of climate change come together, as well as the

social and environmental aspects (Chapter 3). The media raised the narrative that Vanuatu is particularly vulnerable to new and intensified weather phenomena (e.g. *The Guardian* 2023). This gets explained from a new angle by the ni-Vanuatu population on the islands.

This short sequence again illustrates what I have explicated over the course of this climate ethnography. When Hulme asks why we disagree about climate change (2009), this is because we are supposed to strive for a universal definition, but he does not recognise that there are several climate change worldings which come with their own explanations. Having diverse explanations does not mean, however, that they cannot be placed in dialogue with each other, or that one is taking the situation less seriously than the other. I have provided a climate ethnography which gives further insight into the topic of man-made climate change and human activities. In so doing, I not only follow ‘worlding practices’ but have also included ‘islanding’ the phenomenon (Teaiwa 2007) in the context of climate change practices in other island societies in Oceania. The aim has been to show how a specific group of people in Oceania lives in an unsettling yet also transformative era called the Anthropocene. This example from Vanuatu shows important aspects of the volcanic islands of Melanesia. People in Dixon Reef and Siviri once more show themselves as people of the land and emphasise their role as gardeners. The option of migration, as considered by Pacific Islanders living on low lying atolls, is not discussed at the moment. Rather ni-Vanuatu think about and practise possibilities for creative handling of anticipated challenges for living conditions on their islands.

In the context of anthropological climate change research, this book is on the one hand ethnographically informed but on the other hand an ‘experiment’ of thinking further about the concept of climate change (Salmond 2017). In order to consider this, we have to look not only at how we use concepts, but further how we visit and re-visit political concepts within our research spaces. One important question must be how we can see and engage with the experiences and conceptualisations of climate change for different people in different localities. Further theoretical insights can be taken from Arno Pascht’s contribution on knowledge practices and climate change in Vanuatu (Pascht 2019). I have concentrated on practices in Dixon Reef and therefore employed myself with the ‘what is’ and ‘how’ people see and live the concept of climate change. This book has not followed an approach in which I asked about how people act upon climate change or how they have interpreted it in their local context, because I approached this topic through exploring climate change encounters and climate change worlding practices. Inequalities and hierarchies

in the politically-informed conceptualisation of climate change inform many academic and political discussions. The question of interpretive sovereignty of current status quo in climate change debates and actions was raised at the beginning of the book and I have shown in the course of my research that people in Vanuatu perceive themselves as agents in the dialogue on climate change. At the same time, of course, there is also a political issue: when Blaser and de la Cadena (2018) demand a view of the world as being many worlds, they call for a change in political thinking, which can equally be applied to the issue of climate change. The demand stands thus: the need to acknowledge a world of many climate change worlds that encounter and re-encounter each other in order to learn together how we approach the challenges of our time.