



Introduction

Fear, Hope and Social Movements

The lively evening described in the preface was only one of many similar events that occurred during the revival, but it is not representative of normal everyday life on Ahamb. Ahamb islanders are mostly subsistence farmers and fishers whose daily lives rely on garden work on the hilly coastline of mainland Malekula. Here, people grow various root crops, breadfruit, bananas, fruits and leafy greens for food, while kava and to some extent coconuts for copra serve as cash crops used to pay school fees and the occasional cargo ship ticket to the capital, Port Vila.

In addition to garden work and some fishing or shell collecting, daily life on the island typically includes spending time with kin, planning and carrying out little projects in one's home or for relatives, and attending meetings in church and in community committees. Most Ahamb islanders live on Ahamb itself, and these count about 600. But since the late 1990s, a number of families – currently counting about 250 persons – have migrated to about a dozen new settlements on the Malekula mainland due to lack of space, land disputes, to stay closer to the gardens or to escape the environmental vulnerability of the small, flat island. About 100 islanders also live permanently or temporarily in Port Vila. The research for this book is based on a total of twenty months of fieldwork among Ahamb people – mostly on the island proper, but also among Ahamb families on the mainland and in Port Vila in 2010, 2014–15 and 2017.¹

Contemporary Ahamb society consists of a mix of patrilineal clan groups who trace their origins to the island itself and to previous settlements on mainland Malekula. The clans were brought together by conversion processes of the Presbyterian Church starting in the late 1800s, and the present-day Ahamb community, composed of kin groups from various places in South Malekula, was formed in this process. Ahamb people are proud of their Christian history and how it is materialised in their community and way of being: the Ahamb community has a primary school, dispensary, committees for just about any activity, and a thriving congregation, which all came about with the formation of the Presbyterian community church. Like many other societies throughout the Pacific, Ahamb people also take great pride in living up to moral values of love and care that are based in the reciprocal duties of kinship, but have

been reinforced and magnified with Christianity – a religion that emphasises compassion for others (see Brison 2007; Hollan and Throop 2011; McDougall 2016; Robbins 2004a).

The values of kinship and Christianity converge in islanders' ideas and practice of 'the Ahamb community' (*komuniti blong Ahamb*). For Ahamb people, 'the community' refers to a togetherness in kinship, in the Church and in the discrete island being just big enough, and far enough away from surrounding villages, to form a cohesive society. As anthropologists have been careful to point out, the term 'community' can be problematic if it evokes functionalist or organic images of a bounded entity (Amit and Rapport 2002: 42). Like every other society, Ahamb is not a circumscribed social entity, and there are fractures and contradictions among its inhabitants, as I will show in this book. But the term and idea of 'community' is something that the people themselves are passionately concerned about and something they are constantly seeking to achieve. We can therefore say that, for Ahamb people, community is often the goal, if not the ground, of social life (see also Eriksen 2008; Lindstrom 2011; McDougall 2016; Rasmussen 2015).

However, over the past two decades, the island has become particularly rife with disputes over land rights, leadership and questions about who should be eligible to live on the small island, particularly as space and resources are diminishing. The disputes have led to a persisting division in the community, which for many islanders is synonymous with failure to achieve good moral living. The divisions have sometimes led to a breakdown of vital community institutions, including the health committee that runs the dispensary, because committee members have been on different sides in disputes. Divisions have also kept people from participating in communal work and church activities. Moreover, there is a constant fear that disputes and rivalry could lead to sorcery activity whereby someone might hurt their opponent or their opponent's family in surprising and incomprehensible ways. The divisions and sorcery fears make people anxious about visiting kin in other villages as freely as they would like and about participating in larger ceremonies that attract many people. The context of dispute and division is thus making it harder to realise what most islanders find to be the ideal way of living, which revolves around living together as a unified community of Christian kin. This ideal even seemed impossible – that is, until the revival arrived, offering a framework for transforming society's maleficent elements into sacred beneficence.

In 2014, during my second period of fieldwork, Ahamb became the scene of a startling Christian charismatic revival, which upended many aspects of social life on the island. The discourse of the revival was that 'all of us must change' (*yumi evriwan mas jenis*) and the direction was set by visionary children through messages and visions from the Holy Spirit. At this point, many islanders were longing for a radical change in society because of the disputes,

divisions and spiritual insecurity related to sorcery fears. The revival became a collective therapy led by the Holy Spirit to move away from division and insecurity and into ‘the true will of God’ (*stret rod blong God*), which was a path of humility, reverence and unity. It resembled a collective sacrifice – in René Girard’s words (2013), ‘digesting’ society’s bad immanence so that it could be reborn in a new or renewed form. While the revival was a phenomenon that reached many Presbyterian villages in Malekula in 2014–15, it was regarded as having been particularly strong on Ahamb.

The overarching argument of this book is that in contexts of insecurity and upheaval, fear and hope are powerful sentiments that work together to become a potent driving force for change. My argument is influenced by philosopher René Descartes, who – in his last published writing, *The Passions of the Soul*, completed in 1649 – proposes the complementarity of fear and hope, two feelings that are often seen as contradictory:

Of hope and fear. Hope is a disposition of the soul to persuade itself that what it desires will come to pass . . . And fear is another disposition of the soul, which persuades it that the thing will not come to pass. And it is to be noted that, although these two passions are contrary, one may nonetheless have them both together . . . When hope is so strong that it altogether drives out fear, its nature changes and it becomes complacency or confidence. And when we are certain that what we desire will come to pass, even though we go on wanting it to come to pass, we nonetheless cease to be agitated by the passion of desire which caused us to look forward to the outcome with anxiety. Likewise, when fear is so extreme that it leaves no room at all for hope, it is transformed into despair; and this despair, representing the thing as impossible, extinguishes desire altogether, for desire bears only on possible things. (Descartes 2015: 264)

Put simply, an excess of fear drives out hope and leaves us paralysed, without the capability of acting for change. Similarly, an excess of hope drives out uncertainty and makes us too confident that things will turn out for the good; therefore, there is no need to act for change at all. But fear and hope combined becomes a generator for change: if we fear that something bad may happen, but also hope we can avoid it, we usually work for the good to happen rather than the bad. Similarly, if we hope that something good may happen, but fear that it will not, we are motivated to act for the good to happen instead of the bad.

I argue that the stronger the fear and hope, the higher the possibility that people will seek ritual events like the revival that allow them to ‘break free from the constraints or determinations of everyday life’ to possibly alter, change or transform them (Kapferer 2006b: 673). As Bruce Kapferer maintains, rituals imply a notion of temporary autonomy from one’s surround-

ings and can therefore become generative centres for creativity and change in which outcomes are relatively open and not confined to the limits of the current everyday world (Kapferer 2005: 46–49). Kapferer’s view resonates with that of Erika Summers-Effler (2002), who points out the importance of rituals in driving social movements forward. Drawing on Durkheim’s (2008) ideas of collective effervescence – that is, the extraordinary energy created when individuals come together in the same thoughts and participate in the same action – Summers-Effler argues that the moral solidarity generated by ongoing or repeated ritual is crucial for social movements because these depend so highly on the emotional energy of hope. Ritual experiences of solidarity and progress are necessary for social movements, she contends, because they have the power to transform participants’ feelings of depression, anger and shame into feelings of hope. It is this hope that generates participants’ willingness to take risks on behalf of the movement in order to work for creating change (Summers-Effler 2002: 54–55).

However, because of the potential openness of rituals, they can also become an unpredictable space that generates a range of different unintended outcomes. As shown at several points in this book, rituals meant to drive participants in a certain direction towards certain goals may easily lead to new risk, uncertainty and problems. I argue that this is because although followers agree on the movement’s ideological project, they may have different desires, interests and interpretations, which are revealed when the movement’s ideas are turned into practice as it moves along. Attempts of participants to resolve such ambiguities will eventually feed back into the dynamics and practice of the movement and affect its forms, meanings and outcomes in ways that can be as disturbing as they are ordering.

Pertinent to the Ahamb revival, Ernesto Laclau (2018) claims that those who unite in popular political movements often do so because of a shared frustration with current authorities and the status quo. The movement’s adherents are constituted as ‘the people’, which appear as a unified political force of opposition. However, Laclau argues that such movements are normally fragile constructs. The unity of the group is often based on participants identifying with one another by and through their common opposition to something or somebody. But this does not mean that the unity of the group is secured by common desires and demands. In reality, the demands of the followers are numerous and heterogeneous, and often even incompatible (see also Bennett 2012: 19). The movement itself, its rituals or its images – which have come to represent the totality of unsatisfied social demands – thus become an empty signifier. It merely points to a lack, an absent social fullness – a longed-for but unrealised possibility (Laclau 2018: 85).

The revival on Ahamb shares many features with the movements characterised by Laclau. The revival was born out of experiences of lack and re-



Figure 0.2. The revival was a deeply affective ritual process. In this photo from December 2014, the women and children sitting on the floor are just waking up, allegedly after being struck by the powers of the Holy Spirit during a revival event in the Ahamb Presbyterian community church. Photo by the author.

sentment, and it was also fragile, in that participants proved to have different interests and stakes that, in the end, did not ‘correspond to a stable and positive configuration which could be grasped as a unified whole’ (Laclau 2018: iv). However, I argue that the revival was not only based on empty signifiers; it was motivated by largely shared notions of what constitutes a good and bad social world, and largely shared hopes of realising people’s ideas of the former and escaping their fears of the latter.

Fear, Hope and the Good

When I speak of fear and hope in this book, I explore, in the deepest sense, how Ahamb people and others strive to create what they think of as good in their lives. When I say ‘good’ here, I refer to Joel Robbins’ use of the term as what people take to be desirable, all things considered (2013a). This book is thus part of the emerging field of the ‘anthropology of the good’, as articulated by Robbins and others (e.g. Fischer 2014; Haynes 2017; Knauff 2019; Malkki 2015; Ortner 2016; Venkatesan 2015; Walker and Kavedžija 2017). This field includes studies of value, morality, imagination, wellbeing, empathy and hope –

topics that foreground possibility and develop new models of temporality and social change. However, while studies of ‘the good’ enrich our understanding of how people strive for change and betterment crossculturally, there is a comparative lack of research situating fear, anxiety and violence within processes of constructing the good.² By incorporating a focus on fear and crisis with recuperation and hope, I address in this book less-examined questions of the place of negative emotions in an attempt to fulfil positive visions of the future.

While the anthropology of hope has had a ‘boom’ (Kleist and Jansen 2016: 373) at the start of the third millennium (see e.g. Appadurai 2013; Cox 2018; Crapanzano 2003; Kleist and Thorsen 2016; Miyazaki 2004; Pedersen 2012; Srinivas 2018), fear has not received much explicit attention in the discipline, although most studies of violence, conflict and oppression may be said to be about fear in one way or another.³ In my approach to fear, I find Martin Holbraad and Morten Axel Pedersen’s efforts to couple feelings of fear and danger with (in)security useful. In their book *Times of Security* (2013), they insist on acknowledging that (in)security means different things to different people. This acknowledgement resonates with Robbins’ (2013a) reminder that different people have very different senses of what constitutes a good life. Similarly, people also have different perceptions of how their notions of a good life might be threatened. By combining ideas of the good (including hope) and of insecurity (including fear), I aim at an approach that is sensitive to the potentially multifaceted stakes people have in their everyday lives, which emphasises in-(security) as culturally, socially, historically and situationally variable.

The revival on Ahamb was a movement but also a startling ritual context and event that for the time being turned life on the island upside down. In this book, I build on Kapferer’s work and argue that rituals and events can give us particular insights into how new sociocultural realities are formed. To paraphrase Kapferer, the revival entailed a radical suspension of ordinary everyday life and offered a generative moment of innovative practice that reconfigured some existential and social structural matters in society. This realisation of new and as-yet unrealised possibility is typical for the uniqueness and creative potential inherent in rituals and events (Kapferer 2005, 2006b, 2015a). However, as both Kapferer (2015a: 18) and fellow event-theorists Marshall Sahlins (1980, 1985, 2005) and Michael Jackson (2005) argue, events first obtain their importance and effects through the meaning and significance that people attach to them. As shown in this book, the revival entailed battles over life and death, which are essential themes to most people. But I also suggest that the revival became so important because it addressed and actualised some of the most vital social values of Ahamb society – values that people hoped to realise and feared they would lose. In this way, we can see the revival as both ‘cultural’, as it draws on the past and the present, and going ‘beyond culture’, by virtue of realising potentials in a future that did not yet exist (see Robbins 2016: 707).

From being a relatively understudied theme in anthropology, at least in an explicit and focused sense,⁴ the anthropology of morality, values, and ethics has recently been rapidly expanding. Signe Howell's edited book *The Ethnography of Moralities* (1997a) became something of a landmark for a new generation of anthropological enquiries focused on values, morals and ethics. Howell's volume was the first to acknowledge explicitly not only the centrality but also the complexity of these themes, stressing that societies are composed of a variety of moralities rather than one all-encompassing moral order. It also established an approach to morality and value that takes them as dynamic processes in which individuals are reinterpreting moralities, instead of simply conforming to a moral order. Several influential books, edited collections and special issues have emerged since then, all offering perspectives on how to understand and analyse morality, moral values and ethics in everyday lived experience (e.g. Fassin 2012; Faubion 2011; Heintz 2009; Hollan and Throop 2011; Kapferer and Gold 2018; Keane 2015; Laidlaw 2014; Lambek 2015; Otto and Willerslev 2013; Robbins 2004a; Sykes 2009; Zigon 2008).

The following chapters explore different moral discourses operating on Ahamb. Each of the moralities is predicated upon a specific kind of sociality (such as male and female, lineage and community) and is made operational by different people according to context (such as in peace or dispute) (see Howell 1997b: 5, 11). I agree with Howell (1997a), Martin (2013), Robbins (2013b), Toren (1999b) and others on the importance of acknowledging that in any social milieu and social situation, a variety of moralities and equally important and antithetical values are at play. It is only reasonable to assume that differently positioned people, with different social and emotional experiences, would have different perspectives on morality and the good in different contexts. However, if everyone would impose his or her own unique set of values on the world, social life would be an even more chaotic place than it already is. This, Robbins (2015a) argues, is where culture comes in and where values, an intrinsic part of culture, offer ideas that motivate action and can create a relatively orderly world because certain values are shared between members of a society. However, because everyday life involves many different concerns, it is first in the social form of the ritual that these values are expressed in their 'fullest form' (Robbins 2015a: 21).

From the outset, the revival appeared as a ritual that promised the realisation of the local value of love (*napalongin* or *lav*, comprising care, peace and unity) in its fullest form. I argue that the movement largely amassed the force it did because people were hoping to reinstate the central place of this value in society while simultaneously fearing it was going to get lost. But the revival was also constantly an ambiguous site for evaluating what values should entail in practice, the clearest example being that a murder was committed in the name of love by people who normally insist that murder is the most explicit

antithesis of love. This illustrates how even religious values, which constitute the ultimate value spheres of society for value-theorists Louis Dumont (1980) and Talcott Parsons (1935), may become ambiguous when put into practice (see also Bratrud 2021a).

Grasping Social Movements in the Making

This book seeks to understand the ways in which the intersection of fear and hope may drive novel sociopolitical movements. However, as my ethnographic material of the revival and other accounts demonstrate, such movements often run the risk of exacerbating the very problems they seek to address. To grasp this complexity, I am inspired by the classic extended case study, or situational analysis, developed by Max Gluckman (1958[1940]) and the so-called Manchester School of Social Anthropology (see also Evens and Handelman 2016; Mitchell 1983). In a situational analysis, the researcher focuses on the ongoing process of social life, which is often complex and full of contradictions. By examining in detail situations of breaks and conflicts, the researcher seeks to identify the mechanisms underlying the development of these breaks and conflicts, which can then reveal the social and political tensions at the core of everyday living. The goal is then to develop theoretical insights from the ongoing process of social life rather than from selected illustrations of it. Victor Turner's influential argument about the potential for change during liminality in ritual, and the universal dialectic relationship between structure and anti-structure, are examples of this approach (see Turner 1974: 272–93; 2008 [1969]). To utilise the potential of this method to identify the driving forces of social movements, in this book I give more prominence to the place of social values, ontological assumptions and future visions than has previously been done by scholars of this methodological perspective.

An important aim of this book is to say something about contemporary sociocultural life on Ahamb by examining the revival. Here, I lean on Turner, who argues, following Sigmund Freud, that studying disturbances of the normal and regular often gives us greater insight into the normal than can be gained by direct study of it (1974: 34). Events, as an instance of liminality or anti-structure, ignore, reverse or cut across the normative order and may in this sense put the normative order into relief. Michel Foucault (1991) has a similar view, arguing that what we call events only reveal more dramatically that which is already simmering under the surface of things. Turner's and Foucault's views allow us to say more about the power dynamics at play that may hinder certain issues of conflict from emerging in the structures of everyday life, but may be expressed in the event. I suggest that this approach is particularly relevant when assessing how Ahamb women and youth, who normally lack a public arena in which

they can speak to the male leaders of the community, could use the revival as a stage for expressing their criticism of community leaders.

Radical Christian revival movements have also been the subject of previous studies. The most well known is Joel Robbins' seminal book *Becoming Sinners* (2004a), which analyses the social changes brought about by a Christian charismatic revival movement among the Urapmin of Papua New Guinea in the 1970s. Other scholars have also examined the radical force of such movements that occurred in several places in Melanesia in the 1970s (Barr 1983; Burt 1994; Flannery 1983; Griffiths 1977; MacDonald 2019; Robin 1982; Tuzin 1997). The revival movements, sparked by new mission campaigns coinciding with the growth of political independence movements, can be seen as successors of the classic Melanesian social movements, often referred to as 'cargo cults', which have been widely discussed in the literature (e.g. Burrige 1960; Jebens 2004; Lawrence 1964; Lindstrom 1993; Otto 2009; Schwartz 1962; Tabani and Abong 2013; Worsley 1957). Underlying the 'cargo cults' was also desire for radical change – or, as Peter Lawrence puts it, the goal of 'completely renewing the world order' (1964: 222). But their ultimate aim, Lamont Lindstrom (2011) argues, was to create new unity among people who were variously oriented or divided. This desire, which I will discuss in Chapter 2, is rooted in the cultural notion that failure to achieve social cohesion not only threatens the social order, but also threatens the very constitution of persons themselves. Achieving unity therefore becomes an existential matter in relation to which many Melanesians direct considerable amounts of energy. From this perspective, the Ahamb revival is part of a continuum of social movements in Melanesia aimed at breaking free of a disintegrated problematic present by reimagining and changing it through ritual and religious means (see MacDonald 2019: 400). Since the 1970s, these attempts have mostly taken place within the Pentecostal-Christian charismatic framework, which promises a 'break with the past' (e.g. Eriksen 2009a, 2009b; Eves 2010; Jorgensen 2005; Robbins 2004a), but also through neotraditional nativistic movements, new political parties and other social innovations (see Hviding and Rio 2011; Lindstrom 2011; Schwartz and Smith 2021; Tabani and Abong 2013).

Doing Research on the Revival

Impactful charismatic revivals do not occur that often, and previous studies have been based on fieldwork carried out in their aftermath. Accounts of them are thus necessarily based on oral accounts and archival material. However, the study of this book is based on my full embeddedness in a revival community during the course of its advent and growth until its demise. This has allowed me to study the phenomenon in its broader context as well as from

its centre, which has been both a rewarding and a difficult task. The revival was an event that brought surprise, wonder, hope and fear to most people on Ahamb, including myself as the ethnographer. I admit that I had many experiences that could not be easily represented based on my previous logic and anthropological toolkit.

Martin Holbraad (2012) argues that ethnographically driven aporia – the state of puzzlement – is important for anthropologists as a condition for gaining new insights. Whenever an experience of alterity causes an anthropologist to marvel, Holbraad argues, one should resist the inclination to explain that alterity away as indicative of ignorance, metaphor or madness. Instead, we should allow this alterity to generate new insights that might destabilise what we think we know (see also Scott 2016: 478). I have followed Holbraad's advice in this book and avoided quick conclusions and explanations to incidents that I could not readily understand. Instead, I have aimed at providing sufficiently detailed ethnography to make the event 'speak for itself' and let the participants' explanations come more to the foreground than my own attempts at understanding. In this way, I also try to avoid the habit that many anthropologists have, according to Roy Wagner, of confusing the ways in which we study phenomena, and the theories through which we understand them, with the phenomena themselves. Wagner says: 'We talk about the world (quite understandably) in the ways we have come to know about it . . . conclusions are to a certain degree pre-determined' (1974: 119). By using our own models of the world when trying to understand others, *we* are creators of the culture we believe we are studying no less than the people we study (1974: 120; see also Wagner 1981: 4, 12).

In this book, I focus primarily on my interlocutors' experiences during the revival and what the implications were, but I also include some of my own experiences to show how I was not left untouched myself. It became clear to me early on that I could not study the revival properly without taking part in the situations in which it manifested itself. To come as close as I could to understanding what the revival signified for different people, I allowed myself to be caught up in the events, observing and participating in prayer sessions of healing and the neutralisation of sorcery, including sessions to pray against and neutralise sorcery that was aimed at myself.

Like many others in Malekula, I was granted spiritual gifts during the revival that gave me access to special prayer meetings and consultations.⁵ I think this gave me some access to the revival discourse and allowed me to join a fellowship with other community members who were caught up in it, like myself, both voluntarily and involuntarily (see Favret-Saada 1980: 15; Goulet 1994: 20). As a result, when talking with Ahamb people about the events, they still tell me: 'You understand because you have experienced it.' I should note here that even though I have not had a particularly religious upbringing and have

not participated in much organised religious activity, I have always believed in what I call ‘God’ in some form. Therefore, it was not so difficult for me to accept the transcendentalism of the revival itself, even though some parts of it were very difficult to deal with and went far beyond my own register.

Outline of the Book

The title of this book, *Fire on the Island*,⁶ points to three themes in the book. First, it refers to the ‘overheated’ (Eriksen 2016) sociopolitical turbulence in which the revival emerged and that it was meant to overcome. Second, it reflects how the revival itself became an overheated site of hope and fear with unintended consequences. Third, it refers to how the Holy Spirit was described to burn ‘like a fire’ by the visionaries, who often conveyed that there was fire on the ground where healing sessions took place, and fire on the heads of people who were anointed with the Holy Spirit. The image of the Holy Spirit as fire is well known from the Bible. At Pentecost, for instance, which marks the coming of the Holy Spirit to dwell in Christian believers, the Bible says that tongues as of fire appeared over the heads of each of those who gathered together (Acts 2:3).⁷ The revival came to Ahamb as a fire, but also appeared before the visionaries as a windstorm, a white cloud, a thick fog and rain. Common for these forms was that they penetrated everything in sight. And, as out of a bush fire and nourishing rain, new things would grow.

I start in Chapter 1 with a prominent climax in the revival – that is, the lynching of two men who were feared to be sorcerers and responsible for most of society’s problems. This happened nine months into the revival and after five months of ‘spiritual war’ with numerous sorcerers. I approach this event as an existential panic in which extraordinary collective action is needed to counter perceived threats to society’s wellbeing. I discuss the murder as a sacrifice, in Girard’s terms, when during a period of crisis, a victim takes the blame for all accumulated fear, anxiety and violence in the community. The victim is taken down – sacrificed – in order to purify the community from its problems and allow a new start. However, when the panic subsided and the implications of the act became clear, it was evident that the two men, who were family and community members, were not legitimate victims of sacrifice after all. This chapter sets the stage for my unpacking of the revival process in the succeeding chapters.

Chapter 2 offers a background for understanding how the revival constituted a religion-political platform from which all kinds of social problems were addressed and attempts were made to solve them. I outline one of Ahamb people’s core social values, often summed up as love, and how it is rooted in two main domains that shape and inform choice and practice on the island

today: kinship, with its duties and obligations of sharing and reciprocity, and Christianity, reflected in Jesus' commandment to humankind that everyone shall love one's neighbour as one loves oneself. I go on to discuss how disputes over land rights, triggered by postcolonial land reforms and a subsequent turning of custom land into tourism real estate, threaten Ahamb people's realisation of these values. As a result, many islanders felt their society to be morally adrift, which made them long for new means and sources of power to deal with these challenges.

Chapter 3 discusses the revival's beginnings. As background, I explain how specific conflicts in the two years before the revival made community leaders try different strategies for changing society, although without success. People were resigned and angry about how division and leaders' inability to create change led society into spiralling decay. I argue that the revival, which was introduced by visiting 'born again' youth with spiritual gifts, offered a new and different space in which the problems of society could be articulated. Already in the revival's first week, local children and youth received spiritual gifts and visions from the Holy Spirit and made chiefs reconcile longstanding disputes in public. Many islanders experienced these reconciliations as miracles, which mobilised them around the visionary children and the revival. Building on the theoretical work of Robbins, Kapferer and Sahlins on values and events, I discuss how fear of losing important values, in combination with new hope that they may nevertheless be fulfilled, are key to understanding the mobilising power of stand-out events.

Chapter 4 shows how mobilisation around shared values, hopes and fears does not necessarily create order. Drawing on ethnography of the revival's first two months, I show how the social values promoted in the revival were ambiguous because differently positioned people interpreted unfolding events in diverse ways and expected conflicting kinds of appropriate action. I focus particularly on how the revival banned the popular intoxicating drink kava, which normally plays an important role in the everyday social life of men. For the men, the revival, which was a hopeful project based in fear and insecurity, was thus generative of new insecurity and risk. Further, I show how the revival ritually inverted gender- and age-based hierarchies on Ahamb because little children became society's new leaders, and male chiefs and leaders were blamed for most of society's problems. I discuss how this inversion created challenging ambiguities that had to be negotiated by the community.

Chapter 5 presents the revival's most intense periods of fear but also of hope. I describe how the revival's importance exploded in May 2014 when a 'spiritual war' between Ahamb's Christians and invisible sorcerers broke out. The visionary children started detecting sorcery objects on the island and identifying their owners – knowledge that is normally secret. The spiritual war engaged people intensely: everyone in the community, including myself,

was caught up in daily sessions to stop the influence of sorcery. I discuss how through the perceived availability of the Holy Spirit, who ‘sees everything’, the revival, like other charismatic-Pentecostal movements, offers a space through which harmful forces can be targeted. However, by articulating and targeting evil forces, their activities may also generate new experiences of risk, fear and insecurity as much as they offer relief from them. I therefore argue that in the Ahamb revival, as well as other movements that localise forces believed to be responsible for one’s misfortune, the cultivation of fear and hope as opposing forces may result in the two reinforcing rather than counteracting each other.

Chapter 6 discusses the conflicts that emerged in the wake of the killing. These conflicts demonstrate that even though people mobilise around the same fears (e.g. sorcery) and hope (e.g. that sorcery can be evicted), they may not agree on the appropriate action to handle their shared fear and hope. However, common values, social obligations and political interests may bring people in crisis together in new ways. The chapter thus illustrates how shared ideas and values do not necessarily lead to uniform practice, yet senses of crisis can still create new common ground in surprising ways. The ethnographic focus of the chapter is the first six weeks after the killings (when I was still in the field), the next three years of negotiation about their meaning, and the circumstances around a major reconciliation ceremony organised in November 2017 during my third period of fieldwork on Ahamb.

Chapter 7 draws together the ethnography of the previous chapters and argues that senses of fear and hope mutually constitute people’s strategies for managing complex contexts of insecurity and social change. I begin by discussing how the children, who from certain perspectives are the lowest in Ahamb’s social hierarchy, could amass the support and force they did. I go on to compare the Ahamb revival with similar renewal movements elsewhere where people have perceived their values and order to be under threat, which mobilised them in hope of change. Common to these movements, I argue, is that in contexts of insecurity, when people feel powerless and out of control of their lives, locating the source of misfortune in morally deviant persons or groups offers relief and hope for betterment and change. The blaming is often amplified by new charismatic actors of governance who present themselves, or are presented, as the solution to the crisis. An important part of the appeal of these actors is that they appear to take people’s concerns seriously in a way that established authorities do not. In contexts of uncertainty, they become an alternative, good ‘other’ to mobilise around, which symbolises a radical break with the problematic past. I make comparisons between the hope associated with Ahamb’s visionary children and the role of similar figures elsewhere, including Swedish activist Greta Thunberg, who, like the Ahamb children, shows no regard for established hierarchies and has mobilised hundreds of thousands of climate activists demanding radical change. I also make com-

parisons to former US President Donald Trump, whose ‘anti-political’ strategy turned him into a symbol of hope of a better future for fearful white Americans who felt alienated by the dominant political order.

In the conclusion, I argue for the importance of a deep ethnographic approach to the multiple ways in which people experience the ‘good’ and how it may be threatened. I advocate for an emphasis on context not only in anthropologists’ attempts to understand diverse people’s real lived lives, but also in their detection of distant yet powerful forces that shape people’s fears and hopes and their responses to them. I argue that fear usually has its basis in complex problems, but that people, across cultures and history, often blame a deviant ‘other’ for their problems. In Vanuatu, for instance, postcolonial land reforms to attract foreign capital have resulted in land grabbing, which has put pressure on indigenous landowners and generated conflicts believed to create sorcerers. Still, it is the sorcerer who is blamed for the problem. Similarly, in a town in the United States, immigrants may be blamed for the lack of employment possibilities and rising crime rates. However, the main reason for job losses is likely to be the automation or outsourcing of unskilled positions to lower-cost countries by profit-seeking company owners. By engaging critically with context in this sense, I propose that there is hope for advancing our understanding of what is really at stake for different people in our fast-changing globalised world and the strategies they employ to realise a good life in the midst of it.

Notes

1. My fieldwork periods were January to July 2010, January 2014 to January 2015 and November 2017. Some material also comes from my sporadic but continued contact with Ahamb people through phone, email and Facebook.
2. However, see Ortner’s (2016) and Knauff’s and others’ (2019) proposal for uniting ‘dark’ anthropology and an anthropology of the good.
3. For the few explicit works on fear, see Linda Green’s (1999) examination of Guatemalan women’s life of fear under state violence and Ruben Andersson’s work on how the politics of fear are creating global ‘danger zones’ (2019).
4. However, this is a contested claim, as many anthropologists may say they have been studying morality when studying religion, gift-exchange, gender, conflicts or kin relations.
5. My gifts were creativity, the ability to pray for miracles, and qualities associated with a pastor. The gifts were conveyed to me by at different times by various visionaries.
6. I owe the title idea to evangelist Alison Griffith’s book *Fire in the Islands! The Act of the Holy Spirit in the Solomons* (1977).
7. Fire also appears as a symbol of God’s presence in descriptions of God as a ‘consuming fire’ (Hebrews 12:29), the burning bush on Mount Sinai from which God spoke to Moses (Exodus 3:2), Ezekiel’s vision (Ezekiel 1:4), and descriptions of how the people of God were led by a pillar of fire at night during the Exodus (Exodus 13:21).