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**THE IMPACT OF CULTURE ON WOMEN'S  
LEADERSHIP IN VANUATU  
SECONDARY SCHOOLS**

A thesis submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the

degree of

**MASTER OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
**WAIKATO**  
*Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato*

by

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Hamilton, New Zealand

2009

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## **ABSTRACT**

The government of Vanuatu ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1995. Following the ratification, Gender Equity in Education Policy was developed in 2005 by the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu. One of the objectives was to increase the number of women principals. However, recent statistics on women in educational leadership in Vanuatu show a decline in the number of women principals. The low percentage of women in educational leadership in the secondary schools of Vanuatu indicates that gender equity in educational leadership is still far from being achieved.

This study looks at how Vanuatu culture affects women's leadership in secondary schools and identifies ways in which women's leadership might be developed. Qualitative methods were employed to study the experiences of six women leaders and five aspiring women leaders in several Vanuatu secondary schools. The findings from the study indicate three main areas inherent in Vanuatu culture that significantly impact upon the leadership practices of the participants. The findings reveal the existence of entrenched cultural barriers in the education system, in the social structures of Vanuatu and in the attitudes of individual men, women and some students towards women leaders. These barriers, it seems, are the major impediments to women's advancement in educational leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools.

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## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

This study would not have materialised without the help of many people, whose contributions I regard as equally important and very precious. However, to acknowledge humans without putting God first would be an insult to my Christian beliefs. Therefore, I wish to give glory to the Lord and thank God, for through Him I drew strength and peace to complete my studies successfully.

Many thanks go to the education authorities of the Ministry of Education in Vanuatu for allowing me access to schools to collect data. Thanks for their assistance go to the Acting Director of Secondary Education, Madame Madeline Lesines, Mr John Niroa, the Tafea Provincial Education officer, Shefa Provincial Education Officer, Sanma Provincial Education Officer, Moriel Simon, Samuel Katipa, Liku Jimmy, Grayleen Lapi, Mr Louis Toukoune and Mr John Atkins Arukelana.

My indebted gratitude goes to the participants: Flora, Christine, Chantal, Justina, Eva, Alice, Hanna, Katy, Betina, Linda and Valerie. Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study and for sharing your invaluable experiences. Your experiences have helped shed light on some major pertinent issues surrounding women's educational leadership in Vanuatu.

My sincere gratitude goes to my two supervisors without whom this study would not have been what it is now. My thanks go to Dr Jane Strachan and Michele Morrison of the School of Education at the University of Waikato, for their professional guidance and mentoring.

I extend my sincere gratitude to those in Port-Vila, Vanuatu, who assisted me in this study while I carried out the research in Vanuatu in the month of June, 2008. These people were Renoel Horhor and Valerie Iata at Warsal & Co Lawyers. Your assistance is much appreciated. Thank you very much also to Julie Warput and George Jero of Naio Band.

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A number of important professional people need mentioning as well. Many thanks to the education library staff, especially Yvonne and Diane, and to Bev Price at the Graduate studies office for organising all the administrative work to enable the study. Many thanks also to Heather Morrell for her help in formatting the thesis and for her assistance in checking the references. My thanks also go to Dr Margaret Franken and Rachel Saunders for their professional guidance. More importantly, I want to mention several people who contributed much to my academic development: the staff at the TLDU (Teaching and Learning Development Unit), in particular Jim Fulton and Andrea Haines. Thank you very much.

To friends and families who have helped in one way or another, I cannot name everyone due to limited space but would like to acknowledge you all. Many thanks to Rovea, Andrina and Leniker Thomas. Thank you for your invaluable help in taking care of my children while I was away in the field. I extend my thanks to Andrew Hoffman and Irene Ishmael for their assistance while I was studying.

To my parents, thank you very much for giving me this opportunity to reach this stage in my life. Without your earlier sacrifices I would not have made it this far.

My heart-felt gratitude goes to my father in-law and mother in-law, Chief Kalmasie Warsal and Lizzy Warsal, and sister in-law Lola Warsal of Hogharbour village, East of Santo, Vanuatu. Thank you for your loving care and support to my baby who was only five months old when I left him to embark on my studies in New Zealand.

To my husband Ronald Warsal, through life's toils and challenges you stood beside me. Thank you for your unwavering support. Finally, to the most important people in my life: my sons, Tristan Yelgren N. Warsal, Dwayne Ling Warsal and Ronald Warsal Jr., if there is anyone who is worth acknowledging, it is you. Thank you for your support and inspiration.

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For the joys, frustrations and tears we shared together, I dedicate this thesis to you.

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT</b> .....	ii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b> .....	iii
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
1.1 AN OVERVIEW .....	1
1.2 MY EXPERIENCE .....	3
1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP .....	7
1.4 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY .....	9
1.4.1 Geographic and demographic profile .....	9
1.4.2 Cultural context .....	10
1.5 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM.....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW</b> .....	14
2.1 INTRODUCTION .....	14
2.2 UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP .....	14
2.2.1 Positive legislation for women but with little effect.....	14
2.2.2 Forces that counteract positive legislation .....	16
2.2.2.1 The effect of school reforms on the education system.....	16
2.2.2.2 Culture and organisational structural forces.....	18
2.3 CALL FOR INTEGRATION OF BOTH MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT AND SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS .....	19
2.4 BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS .....	21
2.4.1 Sex role stereotyping and socialisation .....	21
2.4.2 Discrimination.....	22
2.4.3 Lack of confidence .....	25
2.4.4 Work-life balance.....	25
2.4.5 Gender and race .....	27
2.5 THE NEED FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT .....	29
2.5.1 Mentoring .....	29

2.5.2	Networking/professional development programmes.....	31
2.6	MELANESIAN WOMEN AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP .....	32
2.6.1	Barriers.....	32
2.6.2	Cultural influences.....	33
2.6.2.1	Patriarchy/Big man leader .....	33
2.6.2.2	Missionisation and Christianity.....	35
2.6.2.2.1	Early missionisation.....	35
2.6.2.2.2	Modern day Christianity .....	35
2.6.2.2.3	Colonisation.....	36
2.7	VANUATU WOMEN AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP .....	37
2.7.1	Patriarchy.....	37
2.7.2	Sex role stereotyping.....	38
2.7.3	Women's status in the society .....	38
2.7.4	Women's networks.....	39
2.7.5	Vanuatu women in educational leadership .....	40
2.8	SUMMARY .....	41
	<b>CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1	INTRODUCTION .....	42
3.2	QUALITATIVE RESEARCH.....	42
3.3	FEMINIST RESEARCH.....	43
3.4	SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS.....	46
3.4.1	Limitations of semi-structured interviews.....	47
3.5	FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS.....	47
3.5.1	Limitations of the focus group interview.....	50
3.6	VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS .....	50
3.7	RESEARCH PROCESS .....	51
3.7.1	Procedure for the selection of the participants .....	51
3.7.2	Ethical procedures.....	52
3.7.3	Access to participants and informed consent. ....	53
3.7.4	The right to privacy through confidentiality and anonymity.....	54
3.7.5	Social and cultural issues.....	55
3.7.6	Conducting the interviews .....	56
3.7.7	Conducting the focus group discussion .....	57

3.8	MY ROLE AS THE RESEARCHER .....	57
3.9	DATA TRANSCRIPTION .....	58
3.10	DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES .....	58
3.11	THEMATIC CODING ANALYSIS .....	59
3.12	NARRATIVE .....	59
3.13	SUMMARY .....	60
	<b>CHAPTER 4: THE FINDINGS</b> .....	61
4.1	INTRODUCTION .....	61
4.2	THEIR BACKGROUNDS.....	61
4.3	LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPALS .....	63
4.4	LACK OF CONFIDENCE .....	65
4.5	DISCRIMINATORY ATTITUDES .....	67
	4.5.1 Resentment .....	68
	4.5.2 Sexism/Patronizing attitudes.....	69
	4.5.3 Nepotism.....	69
	4.5.4 Violence .....	70
4.6	LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE EDUCATION AUTHORITIES.....	71
4.7	CHRISTIANITY.....	72
4.8	WORK-LIFE BALANCE .....	74
4.9	LEADERSHIP STYLES .....	74
4.10	WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT.....	75
4.11	THE STORIES.....	77
	4.11.1 Flora's story .....	78
	4.11.2 Chantal's story.....	85
4.12	SUMMARY .....	89
	<b>CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION</b> .....	90
5.1	INTRODUCTIONS.....	90
5.2	SYSTEMS .....	90
	5.2.1 Appointment process.....	90
	5.2.2 Policies.....	96
	5.2.3 Support systems.....	97
5.3	SOCIAL STRUCTURES .....	98

---

5.3.1 Socialisation into gendered roles.....	98
5.3.2 Women's place in the society .....	102
5.3.3 The wantok system .....	105
5.3.4 Christianity .....	107
5.4 INDIVIDUALS' PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AS LEADERS .....	108
5.4.1 Female Teachers.....	108
5.4.2 Male Teachers .....	109
5.5 LEADERSHIP STYLES .....	110
5.6 HOW MIGHT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP BE DEVELOPED? .....	112
5.7 SUMMARY .....	115
<b>CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION</b> .....	116
6.1 INTRODUCTION .....	116
6.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS .....	116
6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY .....	117
6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH .....	118
6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS .....	118
6.6 CONCLUSION .....	119
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	121
<b>APPENDICES:</b> .....	135

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## **LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Number of Vanuatu Secondary School Principals, Deputy Principals and Assistant Academic Principals 2003- 2008.....	8
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# CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

*We talk as if Women are new-comers to the planet, as if Women are new-arrivals hanging in the wings. Women are mothers of humanity. Women are teachers of Society. As such, Women cannot lay blame on anyone for their nonentity because Women are party to maintenance of an oppressive macho status quo. What needs to occur in the mind consciousness understanding and practice of men and women alike are these prerequisites: To accept women as fellow humans in the human society. To accept and recognize the existence of women in the Human Community and Society. To accept, recognize and respect the Labour of Women and the product of the Labour as a valuable Contribution to the Life Growth, Development Progress Prosperity Perpetuity Posterity of Man the Human Community Human Society and Humankind by accepting adopting accounting for quantifying enumerating remunerating the product of the Labour of Women as a valuable essential and Integral Input by Women into Nation Building National Development, National Life. (Molisa, 1987, pp. 14-15)*

## 1.1 AN OVERVIEW

These opening words by the late Grace Mera Molisa<sup>1</sup> serve well the purpose and nature of my journey in this thesis. True to her words, Grace Mera Molisa's poem reflects a long-standing history of subordination of Vanuatu women by male dominance. Not only do women experience low status within the household walls but also at large in Vanuatu society. For example, the line "*can't tell a man from a woman in this great future*" in the song *Babylon System* by the popular local band 'Naio', stresses the position of Vanuatu women's prescribed roles (Jero, 2001). Although the words of the song may not mean a lot to the local native indigenous Ni-Vanuatu or to a tourist when played aloud in the shopping centres of Port-Vila, in public transports and at music festivals, such as the Fes Napuan Music Festival, they suggest the position of Vanuatu women as being in the domestic sphere rather than the public sphere (G. Jero, personal communication, June 19, 2008). According to Jero (2008) women are beginning to cross gender boundaries and enter the public sphere. For

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<sup>1</sup> Ni-Vanuatu feminist advocate.

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instance, it was a customary practice of some islands in Vanuatu that women were not allowed to drink kava with men, but this has changed. Vanuatu women are increasingly involved in kava drinking, especially in the urban centres.

Another example of a public statement made about women's prescribed roles was when one high-ranking chief stated in the local newspaper that women cannot partake in public decision-making (Donald, Taleo & Strachan, 2002). The political climate while I was conducting this research speaks for itself on the position of women in politics. This is evident in the recent general elections in September, 2008; the number of males contesting the general elections overwhelmingly outnumbered females. Out of 349 contestants, there were 333 male contestants, while only 16 women submitted their names to the electoral office to contest the 2008 general election.

In addition, the Constitution of Vanuatu relating to ownership of land and the creation of the National Council of Chiefs (NCC) consolidates male dominance in Vanuatu society. For example, Article 71 of the Constitution provides that ownership of land in Vanuatu is determined through practices of custom. This means that almost all of the land can only be owned by men, as this is the normal customary practice of Vanuatu's patriarchal inheritance laws. Hence, most of the 12,190 km<sup>2</sup> of land that make up Vanuatu is therefore owned by men, except for a small part where matrilineal land inheritance is practised. These indicators of the position of Vanuatu women are but only a few examples of how Vanuatu women's status is lower in relation to men's in society. This is largely caused by Vanuatu's cultural views on the prescribed roles of both men and women.

For too long Vanuatu women have been silenced about the discrimination they face in society because of their gender. However, times have changed and Vanuatu women are becoming more involved in the public sphere and are starting to speak out about inequalities they experience in

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the public sphere. One such area of concern is the position of women in educational leadership in Vanuatu's secondary schools. As such, I wish to introduce my research topic, which is: *The impact of culture on women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools.*

Prior to selecting my research topic, I was undecided as to what area I should research. Suddenly, the realization hit me that I will eventually go back to my home country (Vanuatu) with a Masters Degree qualification in the area of educational leadership. I asked myself, "and then what?". knowing very well that to be a woman and an educational leader in a very male dominated society like Vanuatu is not easy. Hence the urgency and the need to find out more about ways in which culture in Vanuatu affects women leaders at the secondary school level. With the help of my supervisors, this search became of utmost importance in my learning journey. Next, I present my own experience of the culture.

## **1.2 MY EXPERIENCE**

Growing up as a Ni-Vanuatu woman, I belong to a culture that is very male dominated. I have also been subjected to the discrimination that nearly all Vanuatu women face daily as part of normal cultural practices.

However, in my case, I was fortunate to be born into a well-educated family. I was born and raised on the island of Tanna, the second born and only daughter. My father was a primary school teacher and headmaster of a school. My mother was also a primary school teacher and from Aneityum, the last island in the southern part of Vanuatu. My parents understood the importance of education and ensured that both my two brothers and I went to school. My father's position in the school allowed me access into the school's library after hours. I was able to spend long hours reading there and so at a very early age my mind was already developed, and I was able to be critical of the cultural practices and selective of which ones to adhere to. For example, as part of the cultural

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norm I was expected to marry one of my first cousins when I grew up and was constantly reminded of this by my aunties, my dad's sisters. I hated the idea but pretended to consent to their wishes.

Also in the village, as a girl I was expected to be by my grandmother's and aunties' sides, helping them with the daily domestic chores. When I was not carrying out the expected roles I would be yelled at with the words "Daisy you are just a girl, sit down and learn." However, the inequality in the gendered roles was more evident in the way the village women were treated. My mother, being from another island, would comment "these Tannese women are treated like horses", because everyday, as part of their daily chores, having toiled and laboured in the gardens for almost the whole day planting root crops for the family, they were expected to bring back to the village the meal for the evening. With large baskets of root crops and vegetables, such as bananas, cassava (manioc) or taro strapped to their back with bush ropes, and while also juggling their little ones in their arms, the village women were expected to be home before sunset to prepare "nahunu" for their men. The nahunu meal is central to the kava drinking of Tannese men, and its preparation takes precedence over the preparation of the main meal. When the nahunu meal is not prepared on time the women are abused verbally and sometimes physically.

Kava is a social drink in Vanuatu that is restricted to men only in some islands, particularly Tanna. On the island of Tanna, it is strictly taboo for a woman to partake in kava drinking or enter the "nakamal" site where kava is being consumed or to even show her face while the men are busy drinking kava. However, this practice is not prevalent in the main towns of Port-Vila and Lugainville (Santo) because of modernisation and the changes in lifestyle.

A number of other cultural practices in Tanna also serve to relegate women to subservient and submissive roles. For example, women or girls

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who enter the cycle of menstruation are forbidden to do any cooking at all or come near a man or a boy. At this stage in their life they are regarded as 'dirty'. If one male member of the family comes down with a stomach ache the women in the family will be blamed for not being careful enough when menstruating. During village meetings women's voices are not to be heard; if a woman's input is required during the meetings, she will have to relay her story to a male spokesperson who will then speak on her behalf. On Sundays it is normal to go to church, and when someone misses going to church they are criticized. The seating arrangements in the church exacerbate the patriarchal beliefs of the society. Women sat on one side of the church, with men on the other side and the male leaders occupying the front row and the stage. The elders of the local Presbyterian Church, including the pastor, were all males.

I was selected to attend secondary school in the northern part of Vanuatu. At that stage in my development, the curriculum of the school played a very important part in perpetuating the norms of male dominance. For example, the norms were evident in the way the curriculum was structured, with girls taking courses involved with home economics, such as cooking, sewing and personal cleanliness, while the boys took up courses in wood work, carpentry and electrical works or mechanics. When I passed my Year 10 examinations and was selected to continue on to senior secondary education, my *kaha* (Tannese name for grandfather) did not think it suitable for me as a girl to continue, as I would become a 'bighead', so he decided to remove me from the school. I protested and continued with my senior cycle of education. At the end of my senior secondary education I went straight into teacher's college to complete a two-year diploma programme in secondary teaching. I was posted to teach on another island in the northern part of Vanuatu. However, I applied for further studies after one year of teaching in the field because I felt that I wanted to do further studies. I won a scholarship in 1995 to do a bridging course at the Central Institute of Technology in Wellington, New Zealand, which I completed with distinction, and was lucky enough to be awarded

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another full NZAID (New Zealand Agency for International Development) scholarship to continue with a Bachelor of Science degree at the University of Waikato in Hamilton, New Zealand, in the following year. However, while studying at the University, I still faced a lot of discriminatory remarks from my extended family. For example, comments such as, “what are you still trying to achieve? Come back and settle down” were what I used to hear from my relatives.

My family had already arranged to marry me off to someone in the neighboring village after I had completed my university studies. I decided that the only way to get out of that situation was to get pregnant quickly in New Zealand before going back home, which I did. I met my husband who was studying Law at the same University; he is a lawyer by profession now, and is also from Vanuatu but from another island in the northern part of Vanuatu called Santo. We got married in December 2002 and we now have three boys. For me, the full impact of the cultural practices and male dominance had its effect on me in my marriage. The inequalities and discrimination that a Ni-Vanuatu woman faces are more severe in a marriage relationship. Each island in Vanuatu has its own cultural practices and, as an educated woman coming from another island, I found it very difficult.

Anticipating the outcome of what a bride price would do, my family did not want to accept any bride price payment in the form of cash, as is normal practice on my husband's island. This would mean that once the bride price money had been exchanged, that could be the last time my family saw me as I would belong to my husband and his family, and not be allowed to visit my family. I also did not want my family to ask for any form of payment, because I thought I was worth more than any amount of money or any gold and silver put together in the whole world. More so, I feared being physically assaulted once money was exchanged. Exacerbating that fact is that bride price payment on Santo, and more specifically in my husband's village (Hogharbour), is a collective activity.

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All the male relatives from my husband's family, including my husband, are expected to contribute a small amount of money each, amounting to the set bride price payment of 80,000vt (equivalent to 1000 NZD).

The bride price value is the minimum monetary value set by the National Council of Chiefs (VNCC). As a result of the bride price practice, on my husband's island it would mean that not only would he be responsible for paying me off, but all his other male relatives would be as well, such as his brothers, cousins, uncles and the like. Theoretically speaking, I would be owned by the whole tribe. Thus, there was no bride price exchange in my case.

Christianity also played a very big part in my marriage and still does. I have been taught over and over again that God is an orderly God and that we must practise the order of God here on earth, and that means in the three worldly institutions that the Lord has ordained; that is, in the Government, the Church, and the family there has to be God's order. In the family the head of the family is the father. That means the wives have to submit to their husbands but must be loved by their husbands because they are one in flesh and spirit. As a born-again Christian I believe these words of the Bible but think that some Ni-Vanuatu men have interpreted these words wrongly to justify abuse of their wives.

In describing my experiences, my intention is not to demean my own culture but to provide a background and a greater understanding of the context of the study. I introduce the problem of the under-representation of women in educational leadership in the next section.

### **1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM OF UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

The under-representation of women in educational leadership positions in the secondary schools of Vanuatu is of great concern (Piau-Lynch, 2007;

Strachan, Saunders, Jimmy & Lapi, 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). Table 1 below illustrates the disparity in the representation of women leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools.

Table 1: *Number of Vanuatu Secondary School Principals, Deputy Principals and Assistant Academic Principals 2003- 2008.*

POSITION	2003		2004		2005		2008	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Principal	46	5	42	6	47	6	52	4
Deputy Principal	8	-	7	-	12	-	13	4
Ass. Academic Principal	2	1	1	2	2	5	5	2

(Source: Figures provided during personal communication, Vanuatu Ministry of Education, 2008).

The table reveals a stark contrast in the gap between the number of women leaders and male leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools. Moreover, the figures indicate that while the number of male principals has increased between 2005 and 2008, the number of women principals has declined by two in that period. This figure equates to 3.9%, which is half as many women principals as in 2002, in which there were 8% (Strachan, 2002). The table shows a decrease in women leaders in the principal position but an increase in the number of women deputy principals and assistant academic principals.

The decline in the number of women principals in Vanuatu secondary schools from six in 2005 to four in 2008 raises questions as to why and

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what the causes are. Moreover, the decline in the number of women principals does not give a good image of Vanuatu as one of the first Melanesian nations that ratified the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004) in 1995. In particular, the Government of the Republic of Vanuatu, through the Ministry of Education, took further steps in formulating policies on gender equity after the ratification of the CEDAW in 1995. One of the major goals of the Gender Equity in Education Policy (Ministry of Education, 2005) is to increase the number of female principals in secondary schools as well as in other senior positions in the Ministry of Education.

The Ministry of Education of Vanuatu (MOE) has undertaken other affirmative actions for the implementation and development of this equity policy. These include leadership programmes for women in educational leadership (Strachan et al., 2007) and a gender analysis of education in Vanuatu (Strachan, 2002). Despite measures taken by the Ministry of Education to achieve equal representation of women and men in educational leadership positions, women are still largely under-represented.

Hence, as an aspiring Ni-Vanuatu woman leader, I want to ask the following questions in my research:

- In what ways does culture impact upon women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools?
- In what ways can women's leadership be developed?

## **1.4 CONTEXT OF THE STUDY**

### **1.4.1 Geographic and demographic profile**

Vanuatu is a Melanesian island nation, situated in the South West Pacific

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between New Caledonia and the Solomon Islands. The 83 islands that make up the archipelago of Vanuatu are scattered in the form of the letter 'Y', and amount to a total land surface area of 12,190 km<sup>2</sup>. The islands are further divided into six provinces which are administered by their provincial governments (Piau-Lynch, 2007). With over 100 different languages spoken by the indigenous Ni-Vanuatu, the main national language used is Bislama (the lingua franca), while French and English are the official languages used as the medium of instruction in schools. There are three main urban centres in Vanuatu: the Lugainville municipality located on the island of Santo, the Port-Vila municipality which is currently the main capital city of Vanuatu located on the island of Efate, and the recently declared Lenakel municipality, located on the island of Tanna. The capital city of Port-Vila is where the government is centred. The population of Vanuatu in 1999 was 186,678, of which around 99 percent live in the rural areas as subsistence farmers (Piau-Lynch, 2007). However, according to the Vanuatu National Statistics Office (VNSO) the estimated population of Vanuatu in 2007 has increased to 230,000 (Personal communication, Vanuatu National Statistics Office, 2008).

#### **1.4.2 Cultural context**

Big man leadership (Narokobi, 1983) is the norm in Vanuatu's culture. There are hierarchical structures both at the national and village community level. At the national level, administration of the public sector is virtually a male-only domain. The impenetrable invisible glass ceiling of patriarchy renders it almost impossible for Vanuatu women to be part of the important decision-making, particularly at the government level and specifically in the Parliament. The chiefly systems, endowed in the village communities by long-held practices of custom, enforce the notion of big man leadership. Melanesian big man leaders are self-appointed leaders who have a certain amount of influence over their followers and often possess leadership qualities, such as oratory skills (Narokobi, 1983; Sahlins, 1963). The subordinate followers include the women and the

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children. Thus, women's and men's roles are very much culturally prescribed. For example, in the villages it is rare for a woman to be seen at the 'nakamal'. A nakamal, in Vanuatu culture, is a very important site or shelter where the chiefs and his male subordinates gather to make important decisions regarding the daily issues of the village. Women are expected to be in the kitchen caring for the young and the old or planting root crops in the gardens. Men are the main decision makers in each family.

Land is very valuable to all Ni-Vanuatu and is a source of their identity. Men are the main decision makers on issues relating to land matters and land disputes. Normally, the first-born male of the family is endowed with all the responsibilities of the family, including land matters. The younger brothers submit to the elder brother on any decisions made regarding land or any other matters. When there is disagreement over any decisions made, the matter is then taken to the nakamal to be resolved by chiefs and other big men of the village.

The main religion in Vanuatu is Christianity and this is a very powerful influence. Christianity plays a big part in the way of living and in the lives of Ni-Vanuatu. For example, Christian values such as love, respect, kindness, forgiveness and humility are all embedded in each level in the society. How Vanuatu men, women and children live their lives, make decisions and relate to one another is very much affected by these important Christian values.

Co-existing side by side with Christianity in the society is traditional religion, or *kastom* (bislama for custom/traditional religion). Some parts of *kastom*, for example black magic or sorcery, play a big part in the lives of Ni-Vanuatu. Black magic is a silent but powerful force in Vanuatu that induces fear in the lives of Ni-Vanuatu and is practised extensively in some islands. Vanuatu people are aware of the existence of black magic in their society and take precautions when relating to one another, in particular,

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they avoid offending those originating from islands where black magic is practised pervasively. More importantly, the fear of black magic in society affects the degree of trust in relationships and causes people to be respectful to one another, and at times causes them to refrain from speaking out and to be submissive.

## **1.5 THE EDUCATION SYSTEM**

Vanuatu's education system is administered under the 2001 Education Act No. 21 of the Republic of Vanuatu's constitution. The 2001 Education Act spells out the functions and powers of the Minister, the Director General (DG), the Directors and the Provincial Education Officers (PEO). The Minister's functions and powers, as stipulated in the Act, involve representing the Government in managing the education system of Vanuatu based on the Director General's advice (Education Act, 2001). The Director General assists the Minister in ensuring that the Government's educational objectives are achieved. The Directors are responsible to the Director General in ensuring that the primary and secondary education objectives are achieved, and the Provincial Education Officers are responsible to the Directors in ensuring that primary and secondary education objectives in their provinces are being achieved (Education Act, 2001).

The Teaching Service Commission is responsible for teachers' employment, salaries and the appointment of school principals. The secondary schools of Vanuatu are located within each province of Vanuatu. Most of the secondary schools are state schools fully funded by the government, but some are church schools and are partly subsidized by the government (Whippy, 2004). The number of secondary schools in 2004 was 42 (Whippy, 2004), but this figure has increased in recent years. The secondary schools in Vanuatu can be divided into two types: senior secondary schools and junior secondary schools. There are only a few senior secondary schools which cater for years nine (9) to thirteen (13),

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while the junior secondary schools cater for years seven (7) to ten (10). This chapter has set the scene by providing an overview of the study, followed by the statement of the problem. To contextualize the study, a description of my experience of the culture has been provided, as well as the cultural and geographical context, and a brief outline of the education system of Vanuatu.

Chapter Two presents the reviewed literature on women and educational leadership. The review includes both western literature and a small body of literature from the Melanesian context. Chapter Three outlines the methodology and the approach taken. In Chapter Four I present the findings and in Chapter Five I discuss the findings as they relate to the literature and my own theorizing. Lastly, Chapter Six sums up the findings, identifies implications and limitations of this study, as well as providing some recommendations for future research and the conclusion.

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## **CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter situates the study within the relevant literature on women and educational leadership. It provides the framework for carrying out this study. Firstly, I review the literature on the under-representation of women in educational leadership, focusing on the under-representation of women in different countries. In doing so, I uncover reasons for the persistent unequal representation of women despite positive legislation for women. Secondly, I review literature on the leadership styles needed for effective school development. Thirdly, I focus on the barriers faced by women leaders and those aspiring to educational leadership. Fourthly, I review the literature relating to the leadership development of women in educational leadership, including literature on Melanesian women and educational leadership. Lastly, I review the literature on Vanuatu women and educational leadership, at the end of which I present the research questions underpinning the focus of this study.

### **2.2 UNDER-REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN IN EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

#### **2.2.1 Positive legislation for women but with little effect**

There is widespread concern that despite governments having passed positive legislation for the advancement of women as part of global restructuring and education reform, women are still under-represented in educational leadership (Coleman, 2001; Ertan, 2004; Forster, 2001; Harris, 2003). For example, in the United Kingdom, of the 55.2% of women teachers at the secondary school level, only 32.5 % are principals (Moreau, Osgood, & Halsall, 2007). In Australia, while the Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) policy has been implemented following

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the Anti-discriminatory Act in 1977, women principals are still a minority and represent only 23.5 % of the total, while female teachers at the secondary school level make up 50.8 % of all teachers (Brennan, 2003). In the United States, the under-representation of women leaders is more prevalent at the superintendent level (Tallerico, 2000) than at the secondary school level.

Similarly in New Zealand, figures from the 2006 census on education reveal an unequal representation of women principals to male principals in secondary schools. Of the total number of principals at the secondary school level, women represent only 32%, while women teachers comprise 61% of the total number of teachers (New Zealand Ministry of Education, 2008). This disparity of educational leaders in New Zealand does not seem to comply with the EEO (Equal Employment Opportunities) legislation put in place after the 1989 education reform (Doherty, 2003).

In Turkey, women principals represent only 4%, yet 67% of teachers are women (Celikten, 2005). While there are provisions for gender equality in Turkish law, they are not made specifically to target the under-representation of women in educational leadership (Ozkanli & White, 2008; Sanal, 2008).

The case for the under-representation of women in some developing countries far exceeds those mentioned above. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, women make up 57.3 % of secondary teachers while representing 46 % of women principals at the secondary level (Morris, 1999). Though this figure of women representation at the principal level for Trinidad and Tobago is higher than Turkey, and seems better than the figures for New Zealand, women leaders are still a minority. In South Africa the constitution caters for gender equity, but there are no specific equity policies to target the under-representation of women in educational leadership (Diko, 2007).

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In contrast, in the Solomon Islands, women make up 27.8% of secondary school teachers but only 2.9% are secondary school principals (Akao, 2008). The situation for Vanuatu is similar, and unlike the United Kingdom, United States, Australia and New Zealand, the figures show a sharp decline in the number of women principals in recent years. The figure representing women principals in Vanuatu is 3.9%, compared to a total of 35.9% of female teachers at the secondary school level (Personal communication, Ministry of Education, 2008). The figures show that the number of women principals in Vanuatu has declined when compared to a gender analysis in 2002, when there were 8% female principals and 36% female teachers (Strachan, 2002).

## **2.2.2 Forces that counteract positive legislation**

The literature reviewed suggests that there are several entrenched forces that act against the positive legislation for women's advancement. I discuss two major forces that act against the positive legislation for equal representation of women in educational leadership: the effect of school reforms on the education system, and the cultural and organisational structures.

### **2.2.2.1 The effect of school reforms on the education system**

A substantial body of literature points to the fact that the colonisation of education by school reforms in the more developed nations, such as Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom and the United States, has resulted in changes in school focus (Blackmore, 2004, 2006; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Neidhardt & Carlin, 2003; Thrupp, 2004).

Less attention is paid to student learning and more to markets and managerialism, which enhances the commodification of education (Blackmore, 2004; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Thrupp, 2004). The need for increased funding in schools increases the workload and stress for school principals, because less funding is provided by the government, and school principals are required to look for the extra funding (Blackmore,

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2006; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Court, 2004; Oplatka, 2008). Blackmore and Sachs (2007) add that restructuring entailed changes to educational leadership “creating new demands and requiring new skills” (p. 135).

While the increase in workload and stress affects both male and female principals, women principals find the job more difficult (Blackmore, 2004, 2006; Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Brooking, 2007; Court, 2004; Starr, 2007). Women principals suffer greater stress and burnout from managing the workload while trying to balance their family needs (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Court, 2004). Hence, school leadership has become problematic for educational leadership in Australia and elsewhere, such as in Canada, US and UK, where there is a shortage in the pool of applicants for school principal positions (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004; Spiller & Curtis, 2007; Starr, 2007).

According to Starr (2007), the workload and stress on school principals makes it an undesirable job for female aspirants (Starr, 2007). Some women leaders avoid applying for leadership positions because of the huge workload that may impact on their personal lives (Ertan, 2004; Starr, 2007). Ertan (2004) adds that priority is often given to marriage and rearing children rather than advancing one’s career by opting for leadership positions. The literature suggests that this phenomenon increases the gap in the under-representation of women in educational leadership.

Similarly, Neidhardt and Carlin (2003) suggest that women are hesitant to apply for principal positions because the effect of restructuring schools requires them to lead in ways that are not consistent with their preferred leadership styles. Moreover, there are concerns that the media exacerbates the market driven competition of schools by their representation of the situation, while demoralizing school leaders and leader aspirants (Blackmore & Thomson, 2004; Thomson, Blackmore, Sachs & Tregenza, 2003; Wilkinson & Blackmore, 2008). The literature

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also suggests that there needs to be a redesigning of school leadership, including designing ways in which aspiring women leaders could be attracted into educational leadership positions (Blackmore, 2006; Spiller & Curtis, 2007).

#### **2.2.2.2 Culture and organisational structural forces**

The concern is also raised in the literature that despite significant improvement in the representation of women in some countries, there are still structural and cultural barriers in place that impede women from assuming educational leadership positions (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Brown & Ralph, 1996; Oplatka, 2006; Sanal, 2008), for example, organisational structures and patriarchy (Bonvillain, 1995; Oplatka, 2006; Sanal, 2008).

The literature suggests that in countries where patriarchy is culturally dominant, male dominance seems to be the main force against women's advancement in educational leadership (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Celikten, 2005; Diko, 2007; Oplatka, 2006; Sanal, 2008). For women in South Africa and most Arabic nations, their roles are culturally prescribed in the sense that women are viewed as homemakers and not as educational leaders, thus impeding them from advancing to leadership positions (Celikten, 2005; Kaparau & Bush, 2007; Moorosi, 2007). Brown and Ralph (1996) add that women in Uganda are impeded from occupying educational leadership positions by their socialisation into gendered roles. This is exacerbated by male dominance in society that views women as not capable of leading (Brown & Ralph, 1996). The situation is similar in Turkey. Turkish women are greatly suppressed by the male dominance inherent in Turkish society, in terms of what their expected cultural and traditional roles are, so they are perceived as not suited for school principalship (Celikten, 2005; Sanal, 2008). Turkish women are further impeded from educational administration by factors such as domestic violence and discrimination based on gender, which discourages them from applying for educational leadership positions (Sanal, 2008).

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Consequently, Turkish women tend to be more committed to their culturally expected roles of family and marriage (Ozkanli & White, 2008; Sanal, 2008).

### **2.3 CALL FOR INTEGRATION OF BOTH MEN'S AND WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP STYLES FOR WOMEN'S ADVANCEMENT AND SCHOOL EFFECTIVENESS**

At the beginning of this decade, and prior to that, there was much skepticism about the leadership styles of women compared to men (Coleman, 2000, Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Hall, 2000; Lee, Smith & Cioci, 1993; Pounder & Coleman, 2002; Reay & Ball, 2000). According to Hall (2000), women's leadership styles are associated with their femininity, while male's leadership styles are associated with their masculinity. For example, male's leadership styles equate with characteristics such as being tough, powerful, strong, and having power over others (Court, 1994; Lee et al., 1993). Women on the other hand are considered to be more collective in their decision making, passive, empathetic, nurturing and caring, and having power with others or empowering others (Coleman, 2000; Court, 1994; Lee et al., 1993). Some authors suggest that some female principals show a democratic or participatory leadership style, while some male principals show autocratic or directive leadership styles and tend to dominate others (Coleman, 2000; Court, 1994; Eagly, Karau & Johnson, 1992; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007).

There are differences in the leadership styles of men and women (Court, 1994; Strachan, 1999). The reasons given for these differences in leadership styles have mainly been related to the socialisation of men and women (Pounder & Coleman, 2002); these equate men to leading and managing, and women to teaching (Court, 1994; Wilkinson, 2001) and to being associated with the caring and nurturing roles of being mothers. Thus, in the view of some, women's leadership styles have been seen as not suited for school leadership. This has resulted in what some researchers term the 'feminization' of schools, where women dominate the

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teaching while men manage (Brooking, 2007; Court, 1994; Wilkinson, 2001). There has been a call for more women leaders, as their leadership styles are seen as more effective for school development and student success (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Pounder & Coleman, 2002).

However, an emerging and growing body of literature is illuminating the need for the integration of both feminine and masculine leadership styles (Hall, 2000; Kruger, 2008; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). According to Kruger (2008), the differences between men and women's leadership styles should be acknowledged and merged together for school effectiveness. However, Oplatka (2006) and Reay and Ball (2000) argue that the leadership styles adapted by women depend on the type of situation and the context and culture of the school. For example, women in developing countries demonstrate similar leadership styles to their counterparts in developed countries, but "due to strong cultural scripts that glorify "masculine" ways of leading, they also adopt authoritative leadership styles and formal relations with staff and students" (Oplatka, 2006, p. 616).

More recently the literature has suggested a need for an androgynous leader (Hall, 2000; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). An androgynous leader does not mean a man or a woman in particular but can be either or both: someone who portrays both the transformational and transactional styles of leadership (Eagly, 2007; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Pounder & Coleman, 2002). According to Pounder and Coleman (2002), women demonstrate more of the transformational leadership style because it involves nurturing and empowering, which is traditionally associated with women. Men on the other hand demonstrate more of a transactional leadership style where more attention is on performance and management. Pounder and Coleman (2002) add that an androgynous leader is someone who, regardless of their gender, can demonstrate both feminine and masculine leadership styles for school effectiveness.

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Pounder and Coleman (2002) suggest that given today's organisational pressures of workload and stress, an androgynous leader would be better suited to school leadership. Kruger (2008) suggests that combining women's and men's management styles will give a wider range of strategies for effective school leadership.

I now review the literature on the barriers to women's leadership in schools.

## **2.4 BARRIERS TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN SCHOOLS**

Several barriers exist which impede women from taking on leadership roles in schools. These include sex role stereotyping and socialisation, discrimination, lack of confidence, work-life balance and gender and race. I review the literature on each barrier in the following sections.

### **2.4.1 Sex role stereotyping and socialisation**

The literature on sex role stereotyping is extensive (Chase & Bell, 1990; Coleman, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2007; Court, 1994; Cubillo & Brown, 2003, Ouston, 1993; Pounder, 1990; Skrla, Reyes, & Scheurich, 2000), suggesting that one of the reasons why women are under-represented in school leadership is due to sex role stereotyping and socialisation (Brunner & Grogan, 2007). Women have long been associated with child rearing and household chores, and men with earning money and public administration (Bonvillain, 1995; Neidhardt & Carlin, 2003). Bonvillain (1995) adds that the differences in the socialisation of men and women may have arisen because of their physical sexual characteristics and the allocation of roles due to gender.

The literature suggests that cultural expectations add to the augmentation of sex role stereotyping, so that even though women take up educational leadership positions in schools, they are allocated softer roles or pastoral care as deputy principals (Coleman, 2007; McLay, 2008). For example, Coleman (2007) indicated that women in the position of deputy principal in

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schools in the UK were allocated the roles of pastoral care, as they were seen as incompetent to carry out roles relating to management and finance. The commonly held view was that women were “passive and gentle while men provided a preferable style of stronger and more decisive leadership” (Coleman, 2007, p. 386). This stereotypes women as not being fit to lead. Schmuck (1975) explains sex role stereotyping:

The differing norms surrounding the behavioral roles of men and women in our society translate directly to the occupational world; men are to take jobs requiring initiative, independence, objectivity, leadership and ability; women are to fill roles requiring following directions, passivity, nurturance and the maintenance of favorable interpersonal relationships. Furthermore, these norms and their implications for men and women in occupational positions are visible within the field of education. It is acceptable for a professional woman to take initiative, to be objective and to perform leadership functions with students but generally less acceptable for her to issue directives to adult professionals-especially to men. It is however, quite acceptable and appropriate for men to take initiative, be objective and perform leadership functions with other adult professionals. (p. 50)

Additionally, a large and growing body of literature suggests that sex role stereotyping for women in developing countries is experienced to a greater extent than women in developed nations, due to the cultural expectations of gendered roles (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Celikten, 2005; Diko, 2007; Oplatka, 2006; Sanal, 2008). The difficulty for women in these developing nations in achieving an educational leadership position is exacerbated by the high prevalence of patriarchy, constraining women generally and relegating them to their expected traditional roles within the private sphere (Oplatka, 2006).

#### **2.4.2 Discrimination**

Many studies have cited discrimination as one form of barrier to women’s leadership in schools (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Coleman, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007). Gender discrimination occurs when there is unequal treatment or favouritism based on sex (Coleman, 2002). Women leaders and aspirants experience discrimination based on their gender in different ways.

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Discrimination exists in the attitudes and sexist comments of colleagues and peers (Coleman, 2001, 2003; Skrla et al., 2000), and can occur as covert or overt (Coleman, 2007), male gate-keeping (Tallerico, 2000), and in the hiring and selection processes (Coleman, 2001, 2005).

Women who are already in a leadership position may experience sexist attitudes from male colleagues (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Biklen, 1980; Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Brennan, 2003; Coleman 2001, 2002, 2005; Skrla, 1998;) but control their emotions and remain silent or deny it (Coleman, 2002; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998; Skrla et al., 2000; Skrla, 1998, 1999).

The participants in Biklen's (1980) and Coleman's (2000, 2002, 2005) studies stated that there were discriminatory attitudes shown towards them, based on their gender, in the comments made during the interview process. Some of the participants' comments were in regard to their competence as a woman in running a school. Similarly, discriminatory comments from male governors and interview panels were made relating to a woman principal not being able to handle her job and family responsibilities at the same time, while some of the women heads were told they were hired because of their attractive appearance.

Additionally, those already in leadership positions faced discriminatory behaviour from colleagues, both male and female. Women principals experienced behaviour such as bullying, resentment, and patronizing attitudes. According to Coleman (2000), there was resentment of women's styles of leadership; males opposed the soft approach practised by female principals as they were accustomed to the stronger and more decisive male leadership style.

Discrimination in the appointment of women to educational leadership positions in secondary schools is well documented (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Brooking, 2007; Coleman, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007; Skrla, 1998). The concern raised within the literature is the tendency of selection

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boards, normally made up entirely of males, to select those who look like them (Tallerico, 2000). The procedure for the selection of school principals in each context varies. For example, in New Zealand the hiring and selection of school principals is by the school's Board of Trustees (Brooking, 2007), while in Australia, the local school selection panel is made up of "parent, employer (education authority), union and teacher representation...[and] trained equal opportunity representatives" (Blackmore, Thomson, & Barty, 2006, p. 300). These selection boards are often comprised of male governors and businessmen (Brooking, 2007; Coleman, 2005) who "seem to be bringing in attitudes from the business and the wider world that impact negatively on women in education" (Coleman, 2005, p. 7). The Board of Trustees of New Zealand schools comprising businessmen, in Brooking's (2007) study however, were in favour of appointing women principals because "they saw them as the most competent, experienced and best qualified in the pool of applicants" (Brooking, 2007, p. 5). However, the general consensus in the literature is that there are similar patterns of discriminatory practices in the hiring and selection of principals based on gender in New Zealand and elsewhere. For example, the literature suggests that the preferred gender for principal by the selection panel is usually male (Brooking, 2005, 2007, 2008; Coleman, 2005; Johansson & Davies, 2002).

The literature suggests that the selection panels are the gate-keepers to women's advancement (Blackmore et al., 2006; Chase & Bell, 1990; Coleman, 2001, 2004; Skrla, 1999; Tallerico, 2000) because while they have the authority to promote women into educational leadership positions (Coleman, 2002, 2004), they neglect to do so. Gate-keeping is a term widely used in the literature to refer to how women are impeded from taking up leadership positions by people in authority. These people who are normally males are the gate-keepers. For example, the participants of Strachan et al's (2007) study were discouraged and silenced by males.

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### **2.4.3 Lack of confidence**

Lack of confidence has been identified as another barrier constraining women in aspiring to educational leadership positions in secondary schools (Biklen, 1980; Coleman, 2001, 2002, 2005). It is referred to as an internal barrier, that is, self-imposed or self-constrained due to the fear of success or failure (Biklen, 1980; Cubillo & Brown, 2003) and to the lack of aspiration (Al-Khalifa, 1988). This type of barrier is exacerbated in developing countries by the long-standing cultural history of male dominance, stereotyping of roles, and socialisation (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Celikten, 2005; Coleman, 2004; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Oplatka, 2006). Socialisation of both men and women into believing that male leadership styles are the norm has resulted in a lack of confidence in women about their ability to lead schools (Leech, 2006). Lack of confidence is also seen to be related to lack of aspiration to educational leadership positions. The belief by some women that men's leadership style is superior contributes to their lack of confidence and causes them to postpone their aspirations until later in their career stage, while men aspire to leadership positions earlier (Coleman, 2002).

Culture and tradition have a big impact on women's lack of confidence. It has been noted that women who are used to being subordinated by men play a supportive role and may not include leadership as part of their career (Coleman, 2004). Thus, for women in a male dominated society, lack of confidence is further exacerbated by lack of infrastructures, such as lack of education, and women's status in the society (Oplatka, 2006).

### **2.4.4 Work-life balance**

Work-life balance is widely discussed in the literature (Court, 2004; Leech, 2006; Limerick, 2001; Loder, 2005b; Moorosi, 2007; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). It has become a focus of concern for school principals (Court, 2004), both male and female (Leech, 2006). The concern raised is that given the current context of schooling that is associated with considerable stress and workload, work-life balance has become increasingly

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problematic for school principals (Court, 2004; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). Work-life balance has a negative impact on women principals, as they often spend long hours at work and less time with their family (Lacey, 2004). Additionally, Leech contends that “the reality is that women often shoulder more responsibilities in their home life than men do” (2006. p. 6). Women principals struggle to find balance between their careers and their expected roles as mothers and wives (Coleman, 2001; Court, 2004; Limerick, 2001; Moorosi, 2007; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). For many of them, the feeling of guilt is experienced because they have to put more time into their work than their family (Coleman, 2001; Moorosi, 2007; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998).

According to Sachs and Blackmore (1998) women principals in Australia put up with the workload and stress brought about by the complexities of school reforms by trying to control their emotions. Strategies women principals resort to in order to balance their careers and family include: delaying their leadership aspirations until later on when their children have grown, as is typified by women principals in the UK (Coleman, 2001, 2007); having career breaks as typified by women principals in South Africa (Moorosi, 2007), and/or not having children at all while focusing entirely on their career (Coleman, 2007). For others, the principal position is totally avoided, for family reasons and the demands posed by the role (Burgess, 2004/2005; Ertan, 2004; Starr, 2007).

The point is also raised in the literature that having spousal or relative support is necessary for women leaders' success (Coleman, 2001, 2007; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998). Support offered by a spouse and/or other relative is helpful and aids in lessening workload pressures for women principals (Coleman, 2001; Limerick, 2001). However, the spouse's attitude towards household chores and child care is different in each context, depending greatly on the cultural expectations and traditions (Coleman, 2001, 2007; Moorosi, 2007). Turkish women concentrate more on their family rather than taking up leadership roles, because of male

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dominance and the domestic violence inflicted on them by their culture (Sanal, 2008).

According to Coleman (2001), work-life balance may not be so problematic for women principals in the UK, as household chores may be shared with the spouse and other family relatives. In Turkey, however, women are regarded as unsuited for managerial jobs and so are not supported by their husbands; they are largely relegated to their ascribed traditional roles (Celikten, 2005). Even if they do occupy leadership positions in schools, women principals in other strong patriarchal societies, such as in South Africa, are still expected to carry out their prescribed roles as mothers and wives after work (Moorosi, 2007).

Relocation and geographical mobility can be another contributing factor to family-life balance. Women leaders' tendency to relocate to another place when their husbands transfer or are promoted contributes further disruption to their career, while also indicating the superiority of the husband's job and the husband as the main bread winner in the family (Moreau et al, 2007).

#### **2.4.5 Gender and race**

The literature on gender and race is extensive and much is centred on African American women in educational leadership (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Delany & Rogers, 2004; Doughty, 1980; Karpinski, 2006; Loder, 2005a; Rusch, 2004; Tallerico, 2000), with a small amount based on the racial oppression in the South African context and the challenges for women leaders there (Diko, 2007; Moorosi, 2007; Phendla, 2008). Black feminist theory is used by several researchers as their framework for arguing against the oppression and the under-representation of women of colour (Dixson & Dingus, 2008; Phendla, 2008). For example, Phendla (2008) explored how racial oppression impacted on the lives of six women principals in South Africa. The study used biographical narratives and phenomenological methods for data collecting. Findings indicated that the

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six women principals were marginalized and silenced by racial apartheid.

According to Doughty (1980), black American women face a double bind situation because of their sex and their colour. Being in a double bind situation poses difficulties for African-American women leaders (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003; Tallerico, 2000). They are classed as being at the bottom of the hierarchy despite their leadership capabilities and are subjected to many negative attitudes from white male teachers who do not want to accept their authority, but rather view them in terms of the way they dress (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Doughty, 1980).

There is a growing body of literature that argues for the inclusion of indigenous women's ways of leading, particularly indigenous ethnic minority women in Australia (White, 2007) and New Zealand (Barnes, 2004; Fitzgerald, 2003, 2006). This body of literature raises the concern that gender and ethnicity impact on the lives of these minority women. Just like the African-American women, ethnic indigenous women, for example Maori women in New Zealand, face challenges when aspiring to, and being in, a leadership position (Fitzgerald, 2006). According to Fitzgerald (2006), ethnic indigenous women face a triple bind situation because:

First, they are indigenous women in a predominantly white world and, second, are women in systems that value patriarchal leadership. Third, indigenous women are also subject to the judgments of 'others'; all males, white males and white women. (p. 207)

(Brooking, 2007) reports that there has been a slight increase in the number of Maori principals in New Zealand from 7% in 1998 to 9 % in 2006 across primary and secondary schools, but these figures represent both genders and do not specifically indicate the number of Maori women principals and other ethnicities living in New Zealand. The under-representation of Maori women leaders in New Zealand is still in stark contrast to the growing student population of Maori and other non-European ethnicities in New Zealand schools (Brooking, 2007).

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## **2.5 THE NEED FOR WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

There is an emphasis in the literature on the need for women's leadership development (Colflesh, 2000; Ehrich, 1994; Enomoto, Gardiner & Grogan, 2000; Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Holmes, 2005; Lewis & Fagenson, 1995; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Noe, 1988; Strachan, 1993) to counteract the under-representation of women in educational leadership. The need for women's leadership development is important to their career and for women's advancement in educational leadership (Grogan, 2002). Several existing strategies for empowering women are mentioned in the literature. I will discuss each of these strategies and their relevance for women's leadership development. These include mentoring, networking and leadership programmes.

The literature reviewed suggests that mentoring is a main tool for empowering women (Growe & Montgomery, 2000; Holmes, 2005; Noe, 1988). Leadership programmes specifically designed for women in educational leadership and aspirants have also been found to be helpful (Strachan, 1993; Strachan et al., 2007), as have setting up principals' support networks (Brooking, 2007; Ehrich, 1994).

### **2.5.1 Mentoring**

Mentoring is widely used as an empowering tool for women, not only in educational leadership but in many other organisations (Lewis & Fagenson, 1995). It involves a protégée (mentee) and a mentor (Holloway, 2001; Kilburg, 2007), usually comprising a more experienced colleague and a new principal or an aspirant (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Daresh, 1995). There are other models of mentoring that include coaching (Holmes, 2005; Robertson, 2005). According to Robertson (2005), coaching is a professional "reciprocal relationship" (p.24) between two leaders who help each other to develop their professional skills in leadership. Holmes (2005) suggests that mentoring involves coaching the protégé into developing professional skills. Mentors provide support and professional development

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of skills needed for leadership (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Ehrich, 1994; Playko, 1995), causing both the mentee and mentor to reflect on their own skills and behaviour (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Playko, 1995).

Although mentoring has been traditionally associated with male protégées and male mentors, whereby men get promoted into management positions (Ehrich, 1994), several researchers suggest that mentoring advantages women greatly (Allen, Jacobsen, & Lomotey, 1995; Ehrich, 1994; Grove & Montgomery, 2005; Holmes, 2005; Lewis & Fagenson., 1995; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Noe, 1988). For example, Ehrich (1994), and Grove and Montgomery (2000) both agree that mentoring is one way to counteract the numerous barriers women aspirants and women leaders face in educational leadership. Numerous advantages that mentoring provides for women include greater access to leadership positions, as well as increases in their salary (Ehrich, 1994).

Not only does mentoring benefit the woman leader protégé, but also the institution and the mentor (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Ehrich, 1994). For mentors, the benefits from mentoring a protégé include being able to reflect on one's own leadership skills, lessening the isolation felt by school principals, and recognition and promotion on the part of the mentor (Bush & Coleman, 1995). Institutions, on the other hand, benefit from the constant supply of a pool of women leaders needed by each institution, and their retention (Ehrich, 1994). Women protégés feel that they are being cared for and feel supported in their career (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Ehrich, 1994; Enomoto et al., 2000; Grove & Montgomery, 2000). There is positive professional development growth in their career (Bush & Coleman, 1995).

The availability of sources of mentors for women leader aspirants is also mentioned. Potential mentors include the school principal and other educational administrators, such as school advisors or school inspectors (Ehrich, 1994). However, for mentoring to occur, aspiring women must

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have techniques and skills that would enable them to succeed in their advancement, such as being able to find mentors (Ehrich, 1994; Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Seeking out of mentors by protégés may be problematic however, because “traditionally, mentorship has occurred at the discretion and interest of the mentor, not the protégé” (Ehrich, 1994, p.8) and women aspiring into leadership may lack the confidence to approach the principal/mentor.

### **2.5.2 Networking/professional development programmes**

Networking for women leaders is another supportive mechanism mentioned by the literature to counteract the ‘old boys network’ (Ehrich, 1994; Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Ehrich (1994) reiterates that supportive networks include formal networking, where members are required to pay fees to receive newsletters, and informal networking between members in a community, for example, principals’ associations. The third type of networking is community based. An example of this is church groups.

A case in point is the New Zealand Government’s initiative and strategies taken to improve the professional development of New Zealand school principals. These professional development initiatives, although not specifically targeting the professional development of women, comprise of national programmes that include the first time principal’s induction programme, the Principal’s Development Planning Centre and Lead Space. Lead Space is an electronic network linking all school principals within New Zealand which was assisted by the donation of free laptops from the New Zealand government to each school (Brooking, 2007).

These support networks and professional development programmes mirror those of the Australian Government’s affirmative action initiatives to promote women. These development programmes for women include “mentoring, skills development, networking, and shadowing senior staff” (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007, p. 230). However, the professional

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development programmes and networks initiated by the Australian Government are specifically designed to target the under-representation of women in educational leadership, unlike the New Zealand Government's professional development programmes, which involve both genders. Other small scale studies of leadership programmes specifically for women have also found the programmes to be very successful for women leaders (Sherman, 2005; Strachan, 1993; Strachan et al., 2007).

I review the literature on Melanesian women and educational leadership next.

## **2.6 MELANESIAN WOMEN AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

Perspectives on Melanesian women and educational leadership are sparse, because very little has been written on the experiences of women in this context. When I say Melanesia, I refer to the island nations of Fiji, New Caledonia, Papua New Guinea, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, with inhabitants of indigenous dark-coloured and/ or brown skinned people. For the purposes of this study I have selected literature from Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, for reasons pertaining to the similarity in culture and common spoken lingua franca (pidgin). However, cultural practices in each context vary and are not homogeneous throughout Melanesia.

### **2.6.1 Barriers**

Melanesian women, just like women in other developing countries, face many barriers when accessing leadership, but to a greater extent (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Strachan, 2008). Most of these barriers stem from the traditional and customary beliefs of women's ascribed roles, superimposed with imported Western values (Bush & Oduro, 2006; Douglas, 2002a, 2003, 2005; Huffer & Molisa, 1999; Jolly, 1996). The commonly held view of Melanesian women as homemakers and child bearers makes it difficult

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for women in this context to access leadership (Akao, 2008; Strachan, 2008). Kilavanwa's (2004) study revealed that women in Papua New Guinea are greatly under-represented in educational leadership positions because of the barriers of "sex discrimination, male bias, gender inequity and animosity" (p. 102). Malpo (2002) agrees with Kilavanwa (2004) but adds that Christianity has a large influence on how women principals in Papua New Guinea lead. I elaborate on how Christianity affects Melanesian women's leadership later. Akao's (2008) findings are similar to those of Kilavanwa (2004) and Malpo (2002). The barriers faced by women leaders in the Solomon Islands "include lack of self confidence, difficulties in balancing work and family, discriminatory attitudes and the influence of cultural patriarchal norms on the attitudes towards women in leadership positions" (Akao, 2008, p. ii). The case is similar in Vanuatu (Strachan et al., 2007), where women leaders face barriers such as male gate-keeping. This similarity in the barriers faced by women leaders in each of the three Melanesian countries shows the impact of culture on women's leadership. Next, I discuss the cultural influences that perpetuate these inequalities in Melanesian women's leadership.

## **2.6.2 Cultural influences**

There are cultural influences in the Melanesian society that support the domination of women by men. These stem in part from the cultural practices of custom and culture from pre-European contacts coupled with that of missionisation, colonisation, and the recent trends of modernization. These influences perpetuate the male hegemonies that support male dominance in the Melanesian context.

### **2.6.2.1 Patriarchy/Big man leader**

The notion of the big man leader in Melanesia is mentioned along with big woman leader (Douglas, 1998; Lemonnier, 1991; Narokobi, 1983, 2005; Sahlins, 1963; Strathern, 1987), the latter to a smaller extent and with less prestige (Lepowsky, 1990). This type of Melanesian leadership was in

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widespread practice before the first European contacts (Douglas, 1998) but has dissipated due to missionisation and colonisation (Douglas, 1998; Tepahae, 1997). The big man title in Melanesia applies to someone who has the ability to influence others, not only verbally, but according to his wealth and being able to have power over others (Douglas, 1998; Sahlins, 1963; White, 2006).

The big man leader is referred to as a Chief in some Melanesian countries, for instance in New Caledonia and Vanuatu (Douglas, 1998). The big man leadership system in Melanesia is deemed to be more egalitarian in decision-making compared to the Polynesians' high ranking chiefly systems and hierarchies (Douglas, 1998; White, 2006). However, White (2006) adds that although this sort of traditional leadership system allows for collaborative decision-making, women are still greatly subordinated and do not take part in the decision making. Women's labour, however, is valued and depended on by the big man leader (Douglas, 1998; Sahlins, 1963). Additionally, women are valued for bride price and marital exchange purposes (Douglas, 1988; Lemonnier, 1991; Tarisesei, 2000). This type of big man leadership, while promoting men into power and leadership, greatly disadvantages women by relegating them to the domestic spheres of nurturing and caring (Douglas, 1998).

Centuries of such traditional practices in the Melanesian societies of Papua New Guinea, the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu have largely constructed these societies' gendered roles. Consequently, any Melanesian women practising outside their prescribed roles in attaining and aspiring to educational leadership, and in other leadership positions in the public sphere, are perceived as going against the norm and they often face serious repercussions (Akao, 2008; Kilavanwa, 2004; Strachan et al., 2007), such as domestic violence (Kilavanwa, 2004).

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## **2.6.2.2 Missionisation and Christianity**

### **2.6.2.2.1 Early missionisation**

The impact and effect of missionisation and Christianity on Melanesian women has been widely discussed (Douglas, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Huffer & Molisa, 1999; Jolly, 1996, 2003, 2005; Paina, 2000; Piau-Linch, 2007; Strachan et al., 2007). The literature suggests there are two influencing aspects. On the one hand, missionisation exacerbated further the perpetuation of traditional male hegemonies that were already prevalent, while also imposing western male hegemonies (Bonvillain, 1995; Douglas, 2002a). On the other hand, missionisation provided Melanesian women with a buffer zone from violence and other inequalities (Douglas, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Huffer & Molisa, 1999; Jolly, 1996, 2003, 2005; Piau-Linch, 2007). The missionaries' arrival in Melanesia, and in particular Vanuatu (formerly known as New Hebrides), was premised on the tenet to convert all heathens into Christians (Douglas, 2002a; Miles, 1998), or "from darkness into light" (Miles, 1998, p.88). Women were part of these conversions from darkness to light or from heathen to Christian, as they were seen as "inert objects of male violence and exploitation" (Douglas, 2002a, p. 2). This meant that many customary practices, for example the bartering of women for pigs (Douglas, 2002a; Miles, 1998) were abolished or suppressed and replaced by Christian values. According to Douglas (2002a), one such practice was the exchanging of traditional clothing for Christian clothing. This led on to the domestication of Melanesian women whereby they were subjugated to the missionaries' wives and taught domestic activities, such as cooking and sewing, and to be respectful and subservient. These Christian values of respect and submissiveness largely affect how Melanesian women lead and make decisions in educational leadership (Akao, 2008; Strachan et al., 2007).

### **2.6.2.2.2 Modern day Christianity**

Many aspects of modern day Christianity are mentioned in the literature about women in Melanesia (Barnes, 2000; Douglas, 2002a; Jolly, 1996;

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Miles, 1998; Paina, 2000; Pollard, 2000; Saovana-Sprigs, 2000; Strachan et al., 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). Jolly (1996) adds that modern day Christianity has been indigenized to incorporate both traditional values and western values. The indigenization means that Christianity can act as both a barrier to, and an empowering agent for, women's leadership. On one hand, it can suppress women's opportunities to take up leadership positions by perpetuating the male hegemonies (Piau-Lynch, 2007; Strachan et al., 2007). For example, according to the Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs (2004), the bible verse quoted from "Ephesians: 5:22: wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" (Good News Bible, 2004) has been wrongly interpreted by men to justify their abuse on women (p. 4).

On the other hand, Christianity can also act as an empowerment tool for Melanesian women and in particular Vanuatu women (Strachan et al., 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). For example, Melanesian women take up leadership roles in the church and form women's networks such as women's church groups. These networks assist women by providing an avenue for sharing and socialising (Douglas, 2002a).

#### **2.6.2.2.3 Colonisation**

Colonisation in Melanesia brought the establishment of governments: local government/provincial government and organisational policy structures (Lindstrom, 1990; Miles, 1998) which augmented the gender gap (Miles, 1998) and displaced Melanesian women from participating in the public sphere (Piau-Linch, 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). This was particularly evident in Vanuatu (Piau-Linch, 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). Miles (1998) affirmed that though the early missionaries normalized most atypical customary practices on Vanuatu women, women have still been subordinated largely by customary practices of patriarchy since independence in 1980.

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In addition, the newly formed nations of Melanesia lacked the resources to counteract the rising levels of poverty (Kidu, 2000). This led to an increase in the level of competition amongst individuals and ethnic groups for resources, which erupted in ethnic conflicts and increased violence against Melanesian women (Kidu, 2000; Liloqula, 2000; Macintyre, 2000; Tonissen, 2000). Hence, women in Melanesia often faced difficulties accessing leadership positions because of the level of violence imposed on them by men.

I discuss the under-representation of women in educational leadership in Vanuatu next.

## **2.7 VANUATU WOMEN AND EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

The under-representation of women in educational leadership in Vanuatu is no different to that of the Solomon Islands (Akao, 2008) and Papua New Guinea (Kilavanwa, 2004). Vanuatu women face similar challenges when accessing leadership (Strachan et al., 2007). With limited research into the experiences of women principals in Vanuatu, an understanding of their challenges and how culture impacts on their leadership is scarce. The exception is the work of Strachan (2002, 2008), Strachan et al. (2007) and Lesines (2004), but they do not detail ways in which Vanuatu culture affects women leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools. Most of what has been written on Vanuatu women has focused on the situation of women in politics (Donald et al., 2002; Huffer & Molisa, 1999; Piau-Linch, 2007; Randell, 2003; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). I now outline several of the cultural issues affecting Vanuatu women as identified in the literature.

### **2.7.1 Patriarchy**

Male dominance is the norm in Vanuatu (Miles, 1998; Randell, 2003; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004) because of cultural and Christian practices (Donald et al., 2002; Strachan 2002; Strachan et al.,

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2007; Strachan, 2008). This makes it difficult for Vanuatu women to be accepted as leaders in the public sphere (Randell, 2003; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004) as it places men as the decision makers in the public sphere (Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004) and in families (Randell, 2003). For instance, in the recent general elections of September 2008, the negative attitudes of men and women towards female candidates were evident; only two women were able to secure seats in the parliament (Garae, 2008). Both men and women, though by no means all, seem to have negative attitudes towards women as leaders because of traditional and Christian practices (Donald et al., 2002; Randell, 2003). This poses difficulties for women in educational leadership (Lesines, 2004; Strachan et al., 2007).

### **2.7.2 Sex role stereotyping**

The roles of Vanuatu men and women are culturally prescribed (Randell, 2003; Strachan et al., 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). Traditional views of women's roles as homemakers, "child bearers and carers", disadvantage women greatly in gaining leadership positions (Randell, 2003, p. 5; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004).

Randell (2003) adds that the cultural practices on some islands of Vanuatu do not allow women to take part in decision-making at the community level at all. For example, there are a few documented cases relating specifically to Tannese women where public statements have been made by national leaders and Chiefs about women's proper roles being in the kitchen and not in public decision-making (Donald et al., 2002; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004).

### **2.7.3 Women's status in the society**

Women's low status in Vanuatu is reflected by indicators such as violence against women, the under-representation of women in public decision-making, the low education of girls and the under-representation of women in educational leadership positions (Piau-Linch, 2007; Strachan, 2002;

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Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). There has been slight progress in women's participation in politics (Donald et al., 2002; Garae, 2008; Piau-Lynch, 2007). However, for women in educational leadership, the progress is stagnant. I elaborate on this later.

In fact, the situation of Vanuatu women mirrors what Douglas (2000b) notes as the typical stereotype of Melanesian women. She states that, "Melanesian women are stereotyped as powerless, downtrodden 'beasts of burden' and as the passive victims of indiscriminate male violence" (p. 11). Macintyre (2000) discusses violence in Papua New Guinea:

...in towns such as Port Moresby and Lae, women live in fear of rape and assault...The most common place for assault is inside the home. This violence is largely condoned by men and accepted by women. Men condone it because they believe that they are entitled to physically punish a wife who has, in their eyes, committed some wrong. Women accept it for a variety of reasons: because they are economically dependent on their husbands; because they do not want to break up the family; because they accept the right of a husband to beat them; or because they have nowhere to go to escape. (p. 53)

However, according to Douglas (2000b) the situation is not the same in each Melanesian culture. For example, Vanuatu women do not experience violence nor live in fear for their lives to the same extent as do the women in the Solomon Islands and more pervasively in Papua New Guinea, where warfare, ethnic conflicts and gang or pack rape is rampant (Kidu, 2000; Liloqula, 2000; Macintyre, 2000, 2006; Tonissen, 2000). However, recent statistics show an increase in domestic violence and the sexual assault of Vanuatu women (Jolly, 1996, 2003, 2005; Piau-Lynch, 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004).

#### **2.7.4 Women's networks**

There are national machineries in place for women's advancement in the public sector and in private non-government organisations (Donald et al., 2002; Piau-Lynch, 2007). The existing national women's machinery is the Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs (Donald et al., 2002) which works

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in collaboration with women's NGO organisations, such as the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) and the Vanuatu Women's Centre (VWC), to promote women in Vanuatu, mostly in politics. The strategies include producing gender equity policies (Piau-Linch, 2007). However, there is often infighting and disunity amongst these organisations (Donald et al., 2002; Douglas, 2002a).

There are no formal mentoring programmes for principals apart from annual workshops organised by the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu. However, there have been leadership training workshops for women in educational leadership, but these were only available to a few women (Strachan et al., 2007).

### **2.7.5 Vanuatu women in educational leadership**

Women are under-represented in school leadership positions and other senior positions in education (Strachan, 2002, 2005; Strachan et al., 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004). For example, in 2002, there were only 8% of female principals and 36 % female teachers (Strachan, 2002). The legislation in the constitution of Vanuatu provides for equal employment opportunities based on gender while other measures, such as a Gender Equity Policy for the Ministry of Education, have been developed to counteract the under-representation of women leaders (Strachan, 2002). However, the current figures from the Ministry of Education show a decline in the number of women principals from 8% in 2002 to 3.9% in 2008. The under-representation of Vanuatu women in educational leadership is of serious concern and this has led to the formulation of the research questions of this study.

- In what ways does culture impact upon women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools?
- In what ways can women's leadership be developed?

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## **2.8 SUMMARY**

The literature reviewed reveals an under-representation of women in educational leadership positions worldwide. The literature suggests that despite passing positive legislation for women, barriers still exist to impede women from progressing into educational leadership. The barriers include sex role stereotyping, discrimination, lack of confidence, work-life balance and gender and race. Although these barriers are prevalent in schools, the literature suggests that women's leadership may be developed if mentoring and networking opportunities are provided for women in educational leadership. Furthermore, a small amount of literature reviewed on Melanesian women suggests that Melanesian women, including Vanuatu women, are under-represented to a greater extent than women in developed nations. Their under-representation in leadership positions is augmented by several influencing factors in society, such as the society's cultural views on women's ascribed roles, and Christian beliefs on the role of women.

I outline my research approach to this study in the next chapter of the thesis.

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## **CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH DESIGN METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter describes the approach I undertook to investigate the focus issue of this study. I used a qualitative, feminist lens to approach the issue because the aim of this study is to give “voice to the silent experiences of women” (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004, p. 135) and to emancipate and empower Ni-Vanuatu women.

Firstly, I discuss qualitative research. I then discuss feminist research and its importance in this study. Secondly I discuss the methods used in the study and their limitations. Thirdly, I discuss validity and trustworthiness, including the procedures used for selecting the participants. Fourthly, I discuss ethical considerations. Lastly, I discuss how I conducted my research and collected the data, my role as the researcher, and how I transcribed and analyzed the data.

### **3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

Qualitative research uses the experiences of people in their natural settings to try and make sense of social reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 1998). Denzin and Lincoln (2005, p. 3) add that “qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them”. Additionally, qualitative research takes a holistic approach to interpreting data that involves humans (Kervin, Vialle, Herrington & Okely, 2006; Lichtman, 2006). It involves different ways of doing qualitative research and involves inductive reasoning (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 1998). In this context, this study employs a qualitative approach. Using a qualitative approach is relevant to this study

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as it involves studying the experiences of women leaders. A qualitative approach also enables women's experiences to be studied in their real life settings in their schools and in the Vanuatu context. This also means involving fieldwork (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 1998), as qualitative research involves going out into the field to study the experiences of the participants.

One other important aspect of qualitative study is that the researcher plays a major part in collecting and interpreting data (Lichtman, 2006) and is the instrument for collecting data (Kervin et al., 2006; Merriam, 1998). Data and social phenomena are interpreted through the eyes of the researcher (Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 1998). As such, Morrison (2002) states that "interpretive researchers recognize that they are part of, rather than separate from, the research topics they investigate. Not only does their work impact on research participants but participants impact upon researchers" (p. 18). Thus, my role as a researcher in this study is important. I sought to establish a reciprocal relationship of trust and respect with the women participants in this study in order to gain a deeper understanding of their real life experiences.

I outline feminist research in the following section.

### **3.3 FEMINIST RESEARCH**

Feminist research involves the emancipation and empowerment of women (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Hesse-Biber & Piatelli, 2007; Kirsch, 1999) by exposing hidden inequalities. It is about bringing the silenced voices of women to the forefront (Cohen et al., 2007). Hence, feminist study is characterized by several elements. Firstly, feminist research involves reflexivity (Heser-Biber & Leavy, 2004; Kirsch, 1999). Hesser-Biber and Leavy (2004) state:

Reflexivity is the recognition on the part of the researcher that research is a process that contains a variety of power dimensions. It

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is crucial for researchers to become aware of the positionality- that set of attributes and identities that they bring to the research setting, including their gender, their race/ethnicity, and their class position. These factors entail a certain power dynamic and may impact the research process-from the questions researchers ask to how they interact with those they research and how they interpret and write up their research findings. (pp. 133-134)

Lichtman (2006) adds that reflexivity involves the researchers being critical of their actions and how their conduct throughout the research may have affected the qualitative data.

Secondly, feminist research involves emancipation (Cohen et al., 2007; Morrison, 2002). This involves empowering the women of focus in the study to cause change in their lives (Morrison, 2002). For example, the study by Strachan et al. (2007) into the experiences of nine women leaders in Vanuatu empowered the women greatly in that new leadership skills were acquired. This study is grounded on emancipatory goals as it aims to empower and emancipate Ni-Vanuatu women into educational leadership positions as well as those currently in educational leadership positions in the secondary schools.

Thirdly, collaborative and interactive actions are also important elements in carrying out feminist research (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Kilavanwa, 2004; Kirsch, 1999; Reinhartz, 1992). Kirsch (1999) adds that it is important to work collaboratively with the women of focus in the study in every stage of the research. Working collaboratively with women participants establishes trust and rapport (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Kilavanwa, 2004; Kirsch, 1999; Reinhartz, 1992) and allows women participants to voice their concerns through conversations (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Additionally, when trust and rapport are established in a researcher-participant relationship, the possibility of having any hierarchies in the relationship is greatly reduced (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Furthermore, listening, interacting, sharing and translating are tools useful in setting up trusting relationships (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2007) and for

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“obtaining good quality information” (Kilavanwa, 2004, p. 46). As a woman researcher I had to establish a good trusting relationship with the participants.

To apply the feminist characteristics and principles, qualitative feminists methods are favoured (Hess-Biber & Leavy, 2007; Kirsch, 1999; Reinharz, 1992). However, since I used a feminist lens to approach the issue, I also need to identify my position as the researcher dealing with women's issues. Given the same similarities in Melanesian culture as in the Solomon Islands (Akao, 2008) and in Papua New Guinea (Kilavanwa, 2004), I also “do not have the courage to identify myself as a feminist because I [also] come from a society that snubs anyone who tries to go against the cultural norms” (Akao, 2008, p. 63). Meanwhile, I take the same stance as Akao (2008) and Kilavanwa (2004), as a stringent advocate for women's right to equality and for their emancipation.

I based this study on feminist ontologies of gender inequalities in Vanuatu and sought to uncover such inequalities, using feminist's epistemologies (Morrison, 2002). According to Morrison (2002), “feminists will be drawn towards a set of ideas which provides an explanatory framework for the existence and persistence of male domination in all aspects of society, including education” (p. 13). Thus, it is the aim of this study to seek answers to why women are under-represented in Vanuatu secondary school leadership positions by looking at the cultural barriers to women's leadership. I did this by looking at how culture in Vanuatu perpetuates male dominance contributing to Vanuatu women's inequalities. Hesse-Biber and Leavy (2007) state that “by placing the focus on women and marginalized communities, new questions are raised, silenced voices are brought into public discourse, and social change is facilitated” (p. 145). This study sought to bring forth the silenced voices of Ni-Vanuatu women leaders in educational leadership positions at the secondary school level, and of those aspiring into educational leadership positions.

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### 3.4 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

The most appropriate method to use in this study was the semi-structured interview (Reinharz, 1992; Wragg, 2002). Semi-structured interviewing is favoured by feminist researchers for its “latitude” (Wragg, 2002, p.143) in allowing participants to express themselves more and allowing time for the researcher to take notes and construct meanings of their lived experiences (Reinharz, 1992; Wragg, 2002).

Reinharz (1992) suggests that semi-structured interviewing allows “researchers access to people's ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words rather in the words of the researcher” (p. 19). Furthermore, semi-structured interviewing is favoured by feminists because participants are able to express themselves freely without the researcher controlling the flow of discussion and “developing a sense of connectedness with people” (Reinharz, 1992, p. 20). Using semi-structured interviewing allowed me, as the researcher, to not only obtain good quality information but develop reciprocal relationships. Reinharz (1992) particularly emphasized that when interviewing women as a woman researcher, it is important to establish trust and respect, “a woman listening with care and caution enables another woman to develop ideas, construct meaning, and use words that say what she means” (p. 24).

A set of open-ended guiding questions were used (Appendix D). Using open-ended questions rather than closed questions facilitated the interactions and expressions involved. The perceptions and feelings and beliefs of the participants were captured more effectively (Malasa, 2007; Reinharz, 1992).

Reinharz (1992) however, stressed that the introductory question is very important. The introductory question is the icebreaker question, because it allows the woman participant to feel comfortable in being “acknowledged” (p. 25) and allows the conversation to flow. In this regard, the questions in

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this study were designed and structured to suit this need (Appendix F). Building a good relaxing atmosphere prior to the interviews was important.

### **3.4.1 Limitations of semi-structured interviews**

Kirsch (1999) states that interviews can present a hierarchical relationship between the researcher and the participants. The structuring of the questions allows the interviewer to be in control of what is to be discussed. Thus, in order to minimize this hierarchy it was important to set up trustworthy relationships and to allow the participants to express themselves. Some of the women participants in this study were my old colleagues. I felt this was an advantage as it lessened the hierarchy in the relationship. Wragg (2002) reiterates that while establishing rapport is important during interviews, it is also important that this relationship does not develop to the extent where the participant may only want to please the interviewer.

Bryman and Bell (2007) suggest that qualitative interviewing can be time-consuming, often requiring further interview follow-ups. Transcribing the interviews is time-consuming. Transcribing from Bislama to English took a considerable amount of time. According to Bryman and Bell (2007), when interviewing non-English speakers it is important to transcribe into the language used first, and then translate back to English; however, they caution that some of the words may differ and may distort the data. This distortion of data could have been a shortcoming of this study and was taken into consideration. I made sure that I translated the data accurately and thoroughly from Bislama to English, by evaluating and comparing in detail the words and expressions involved so as to minimize the distortion of data.

## **3.5 FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEWS**

A focus group interview is a group interview (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale,

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2007; Lichtman, 2006). Several advantages pertaining to the use of focus group interviews, as opposed to one-on-one interviews, are presented below (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Madriz, 2003).

Firstly, focus group interviews can bring out many responses in a discussion and allow participants to bring forward their views on a topic (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 2007), enabling the researcher to observe and take notes on the interactions involved (Madriz, 2003; Bryman & Bell, 2007).

Secondly, focus group discussions allow a group to discuss matters they deem to be important (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Lichtman, 2006). For example, Madriz (2003) suggests that “focus group discussions can be an important element in the advancement of an agenda of social justice for women” (p. 364). Madriz cited the example of women of colour who may find group discussion useful in addressing their “oppression” (p.364). In fact, this was the aim of the focus group discussion in this study. The focus group in this study comprised six aspiring women leaders from three secondary schools in Vanuatu, who discussed topics around the challenges they faced in aspiring to educational leadership positions, and how women's leadership might be developed. The agenda is therefore one of social justice (Madriz, 2003).

Thirdly, the focus group discussion allows for a large amount of data to be collected over a short period of time (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Madriz, 2003). Some feminists prefer focus groups for the following reasons. Firstly, focus groups are more aligned with feminists' perspectives of “lived experience” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p. 523). This involves discussions flowing in more realistic or natural environments, which may allow the participants to feel more at ease in expressing themselves. Secondly, focus groups create an environment conducive for discussions to flow. Thirdly, feminists prefer this method because it does not “decontextualize” (Bryman & Bell, 2007, p.523) the individual, as opposed to other methods. Being in a group

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discussion minimizes power relations (Bryman & Bell, 2007).

The size of a focus group is important (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 2007). Having a smaller number in a focus group, around six to ten, is deemed sufficient (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 2007). A smaller sized group elicits more responses than larger sized groups (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In the case of this study, six participants were selected from secondary schools. These were the aspiring women leaders. Thus, in gathering these women in a focus group discussion, a wider and more in-depth range of ideas of views was likely to occur about the topic. The participants of the focus group contributed their views on women's leadership development. The focus group in this study only involved one group of women participants, for reasons of time shortage and difficulties in arranging time so the women could meet together face-to-face. Transportation in Vanuatu is costly and so limited the focus group to only those participants from schools in an urban area.

The role of a researcher is one of moderator (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 2007). A moderator puts forward the topic of discussion but does not take part in the conversation, so as to allow the participants to express their views (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 2007). This is important because the main aim of this sort of discussion is to obtain qualitative data involving the perceptions and interactions of participants; it is best that the researcher should not intrude but only pose one or two questions, then allow discussion to flow freely while observing (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Kvale, 2007). The researcher only contributes when necessary, for example if there is difficulty in getting the discussions going, or when the discussion is not centring on the intended purpose (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this study, I used prompts in directing and facilitating the discussions but let the conversations flow, while observing the meanings and constructs and arguments centred on each topic.

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### **3.5.1 Limitations of the focus group interview**

There are limitations to focus group interviews. Firstly, there is the difficulty of control (Bryman & Bell, 2007; Madriz, 2003). It is more difficult for the researcher to control the discussions in this type of discussion than in the traditional face-to-face interview. Madriz (2003) states that the presence of the researcher may affect the interactions of the focus group participants in conveying and portraying the real information. Thus, the presence of the researcher can affect the authenticity of the data collected. As a researcher I had to make sure that my presence did not have a big impact on the participants. My presence was minimized by not dominating the conversations, but moderating them. I posed one or two questions then withdrew or detached myself from the conversation, while observing and prompting when necessary and at the same time taking down notes of the expressions and or feelings involved in discussing each topic.

Secondly, according to Bryman and Bell (2007), it is difficult to analyze the huge amount of data collected. This is because it is time-consuming and is compounded by the “variations in voice pitch and the need to take account of who says what” (p. 525).

### **3.6 VALIDITY AND TRUSTWORTHINESS**

Validity is whether your research has described the issue of focus or what it was supposed to describe (Burns, 2000; Bush, 2002; Cohen et al., 2007; Lichtman, 2006; Merriam, 1998), and whether your conclusions are valid (Charles, 1995). Validity ensures that all possible biases by both researcher and participants have been acknowledged, in order to minimize invalidity (Cohen et al., 2007) and so that scrutiny by others can be defended (Bush, 2002). Feminists argue that there are more chances for bias to occur in quantitative data (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2004) than in feminist studies, as feminist studies focus on the subjectivity of women. In the case of this study, my position as an insider within the Vanuatu culture reduced any biases to the study “because I am of the culture, the women

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would feel free to share their experiences because they know that I too have similar experiences” (Akao, 2008, p. 63). My position as an insider within my culture enabled trust and rapport to develop more rapidly and minimized any hierarchy in the researcher-participant relationship, thus reducing any biases.

For research to be accepted or trusted it must show that it can be transferred to other contexts. This does not mean that the same results are produced in different contexts but that similar findings would be produced (Merriam, 1998). This study also sought to uncover the similarities that existed with what other research studies have found about cultural barriers to women who aspire to educational leadership positions.

Research must also be able to show that it has credibility, for it to be trusted. This means the findings of the research “must be evaluated from the point of view of the participants” (Lichtman, 2006, p. 194). Therefore, evaluation of the findings of this study was based entirely on the data collected during my field research in Vanuatu, in the month of June, 2008.

### **3.7 RESEARCH PROCESS**

#### **3.7.1 Procedure for the selection of the participants**

The selection of the participants for the interview used the purposeful sampling technique (Cohen et al., 2007; Kervin et al., 2006; Merriam, 1998). A purposeful sampling technique is when the researcher handpicks the participants on the basis of their knowledge and experience, to seek answers to the issue of study (Cohen et al., 2007; Kervin et al., 2006; Merriam, 1998). In the case of this study, the participants were known to me and handpicked based on their experiences and knowledge. They came from different islands and were working in different provinces other than their own, except for one. This gave a broader perspective and representation of the differences in culture on each island and how that

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affected the leadership of each woman principal. Lichtman (2006) states that in qualitative studies, size is not an issue. However, in small studies, a sampling size of less than ten is quite common. For this study, the initial number of participants chosen was five, but later increased to six because another woman wanted to share her experiences.

The study involved two groups of women. The first were the women leaders in each school, whom I interviewed using the semi-structured interview tool. The second was a group of aspiring women leaders who took part in the focus group discussion. The selection of the participants for the focus group discussion used the snowballing technique (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998). The snowballing technique involves using one or two people in the sample to choose other participants who also possess the same trait of interest for the study (Cohen et al., 2007). This was the case in this study; the participants for the interview were used to pick out participants for the focus group discussion that they thought possessed leadership qualities. Two participants were then chosen from each school for the focus group discussion.

### **3.7.2 Ethical procedures**

The ethical procedures that I adopted for this study were strictly in accordance with the Waikato University's Research Code of Ethics (University of Waikato Human Research Ethics, 2007) regulated by the University's Research Ethics Committee. This was so that the research I undertook under the University's auspices was not in breach of the University's code of ethics (Busher, 2002).

There has been much improvement in the development of a code of ethics for research in all disciplines due to past failures in research and major harm done to human participants (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998). These codes of ethics for research must be adhered to by any researcher carrying out research, so as to minimize any potential harm to the

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participants (Busher, 2002; Merriam, 1998), and to respect the participants (Busher, 2002). The nature and context (Busher, 2002) in which educational research is carried out is important and “has an impact on the ways in which researchers engage with other participants” (p. 76). Given this fact, I carried out research and engaged with participants from the Melanesian context. Rombo (2007) contends that when carrying out research in this context, Melanesian ethics need to be taken into consideration as well. Such Melanesian ethics depicted by this author include reciprocity. As part of the culture, Melanesians, and in particular those from Vanuatu, expect to get something in return for what they have given. Malasa (2007) and Akao (2008) both agree that there are traditional protocols set in place that should be respected when carrying out research in the Solomon Islands context. Thus, in light of these Melanesian ethics and with respect to the Waikato University's code of ethics, the following ethical procedures have been adhered to.

### **3.7.3 Access to participants and informed consent.**

In order to avoid doing harm to the participants, permission for participation from the participant was sought, as well as access to the site of study (Cohen et al., 2007; Merriam, 1998) from the education authorities. Obtaining “access and acceptance” (Cohen et al., 2007, p. 55) is deemed important and is the first stage involved in carrying out research. For this study, permission was sought first from the participant by way of a letter (Appendices A & B). The letter informed the participants of the nature of the study, and the possible benefits and harm (Cohen et al., 2007). A separate form of consent to participate was also attached with the letter, seeking the participant's consent (Appendices D & E). Participants were given the choice to consent to participate so that they would not feel they were coerced (Cohen et al., 2007). Additionally, letters were sent to the main education stakeholders at the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu, the Provincial Education Departments, and the principals of each school, seeking their permission for access to the participants

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(Appendix C). Following the letters, telephone calls were made to the participants to confirm their consent to participate. Contact was also made through emails.

#### **3.7.4 The right to privacy through confidentiality and anonymity**

The right to privacy was paramount in this study (Cohen et al., 2007; Kirsch, 1999; Olesen, 2005). Feminist ethics were considered as important as well, and were used as the main framework for the ethical procedure in this study. One of the important feminist ethics adapted for the study was the ethic of care (Olesen, 2005). The women participants that I had chosen were all indigenous Ni-Vanuatu women. I needed to show that not only was I interested in getting their stories but that I also cared about their privacy. Therefore, I had to first of all establish trust between the participants and me as the researcher (Kirsch, 1999; Olesen, 2005). I did that by stating in a letter to my participants that any information collected from them would be used solely for the purposes of my thesis and in any subsequent publications or conference seminars, and that their names and data would be kept confidential by way of pseudonyms (Appendices A & B).

Trust between the researcher and participant is important, so whatever information the participant gives will be protected (Cohen et al., 2007; Kirsch, 1999; Olesen, 2005). To ascertain their understanding and to consolidate the trust that I was beginning to establish with my participants, I reassured them again of my intentions concerning the data collected, and confirmed my respect for their privacy, confidentiality and anonymity, prior to beginning my interviews. I verbally explained again that I would not expose their real names when presenting their information. Most of these women had never participated in any research studies before, thus there were mixed feelings of fear and anxiety over the information that they would provide. I also explained that I had followed the right channels and that I had contacted all the concerned authorities. Once I was certain that

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they understood the issue of their right to privacy and respect and were comfortable about this issue, I then proceeded to interview them.

### **3.7.5 Social and cultural issues**

Vanuatu, like the Solomon Islands (Akao, 2008; Malasa, 2007) and Papua New Guinea (Rombo, 2007), has its own social and cultural issues. For example, the women participants in this study all came from different islands and most of them, except for one, were working in different islands other than their original island. Culture on each island varies (Strachan, 2008) so care was taken not to offend the women. In particular, Vanuatu communities are tightly knit by their social networks, and consequently word gets spread quickly about what is happening in the community. For this reason, I as the researcher had to be careful not to reveal any information to anyone, including my own family. Again, the feminist's ethic of care and respect to keep the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was of the utmost importance.

I needed to develop trust and rapport first with the participants. I took into account the importance of reciprocity, or giving back something to the participant, as it is normal cultural practice in Vanuatu. While still in New Zealand, with the help of my supervisors I collected some University course programmes and pamphlets and other accessories, such as pens, which I was able to give to my participants. Additionally, the International Students Office coordinator assisted by giving me a handful of NZAID Scholarship application forms for post-graduate studies at the University of Waikato, in New Zealand, for the year 2009. The participants were only too happy to receive those gifts and scholarship application forms, as opportunities for further studies are very rare. I felt very satisfied that I had fulfilled part of my cultural obligations and I felt that if they were given the opportunity for further studies then I had given them something in return.

Additionally, respect is one of the main important cultural values. As an

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outsider going into the schools, there are traditional protocols set in place (Malasa, 2007; Rombo, 2007). As part of the Vanuatu culture, I cannot just enter the school and meet with my participants, despite already having contacted them. I had to go through the main authorities. As some of my participants were deputy principals, I had to show my respect by showing up in person to the Education Authorities, and greeting the school principals before I met with the participants.

### **3.7.6 Conducting the interviews**

The interviews were conducted in the schools at a suitable time for the participants. The interviews were conducted based on the interview schedule questions (Appendix F). In all cases, the interview was conducted in either the English language or Bislama, depending on the participant's language preference. There were six interviews altogether, with three principals and three deputy principals. The interviews were recorded and then stored in a safe place. During the interviews I made sure that I administered all the ethical procedures, such as signing the consent form (Appendix D), and applied the feminist ethic of care; for instance, one participant wanted assistance with her NZAID scholarship application form that I had given her, which I did. I saw this as an important part of applying the feminist ethic of care. In another case, one participant was deliberately avoiding questions relating to her family and spouse. She was defending her privacy and her husband's position. I respected this and did not want to pry any further into that area of her life. As a researcher I respected her right to her privacy (Cohen et al., 2007; Kirsch, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (1998) cautions that when interviewing, the type of questions posed by the researcher may act to affect the participant's life, either negatively or positively. In this case, I did not probe any deeper as I felt I would be intruding and would cause harm to her feelings.

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### **3.7.7 CONDUCTING THE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION**

The last part of my research involved conducting the focus group discussion. Establishing the focus group itself had its own difficulty. Organising a suitable time for all participants to meet was problematic for everyone. We managed, with the help of the school principals. We worked collaboratively with all the aspiring women leaders to decide on a time and venue. The focus group discussion was conducted in Bislama, as some teachers were francophones and felt comfortable using Bislama. Before commencing I made sure that everybody understood the nature of my study. The discussion was recorded using a digital recorder. The discussion questions were guided by the main research question: *In what ways can women's leadership be developed?* (Appendix G). I facilitated the discussion, but only contributed when necessary. I organised a little refreshment afterwards to have with the participants, as part of the cultural value of reciprocity. Overall, it was a very rewarding and a challenging experience for me.

### **3.8 MY ROLE AS THE RESEARCHER**

My role as a researcher in the process was important in terms of assuming the ethical values and feminist values of care and respect (Olesen, 2005; Reinharz, 1992). While conducting the research I reflected back on what I had done and on how I could improve my interview skills (Lichtman, 2006). I asked myself questions like "Am I doing the right thing?", and "Is my conduct ethical?". These questions were an important aspect of reflection. Prior to the interviews I asked them what language they preferred to use. I was deliberate in my body posture to show my interest in what they were saying and also by keeping eye contact and body composure, and a smiling face throughout the interviews (Lichtman, 2006; Reinharz, 1992). I deliberately developed rapport prior to the interview by smiling and asking them to talk about themselves first, in order for them to feel relaxed and comfortable before delving into the main part of the interview (Lichtman,

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2006). During the interviewing I made notes and listened attentively (Reinharz, 1992).

### **3.9 DATA TRANSCRIPTION**

Transcription of qualitative data is not an easy task (Bryman & Bell, 2007) and takes a considerable amount of time (Delamont, 1992; Lichtman, 2006). Data is easily distorted when writing it down (Cohen et al., 2007). Thus, not only are the words in the conversation important to note down, but the expressions and feelings of the person involved are also important (Cohen et al., 2007) so that meanings can be constructed from their real life experiences. In the case of this study, most of the transcriptions of the interviews were done while I was still in the field. Because some of the interviews were conducted in Bislama, it took me quite a while to transcribe them and then to carry out the second task of translating them into English (Bryman & Bell, 2007). While translating I had to be careful not to distort the meanings of the data (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Due to the time limit only two of the interviews were conducted whereby the participants were given a copy of their transcripts for verification. The other transcripts were then taken back to New Zealand and posted by mail or sent via email to the other participants for their verification. A date was given by which they had to respond. However, only two of the participants responded and verified their data.

Next, I discuss how I analyzed the data using two types of data analysis strategies. First, I describe the thematic coding analysis, and second I describe the narrative analysis.

### **3.10 DATA ANALYSIS STRATEGIES**

There are many modes of data analysis (Cohen et al., 2007; Kervin et al., 2006; Kvale, 2007; Lichtman, 2006). After data is transcribed, it is organised into a format that is easy to manage and analyse (Kervin et al.,

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2006; Lichtman, 2006) normally as a word processed document (Lichtman, 2006). A word processing format enables the researcher to become familiar with the data and to start allocating themes or codes to the data (Kervin et al., 2006; Lichtman, 2006). The data in this study was organised into a Word document and then later hand coded onto different coloured paper using thematic coding analysis.

### **3.11 THEMATIC CODING ANALYSIS**

The type of data analysis strategy used in this study was thematic coding. Thematic coding is commonly used by qualitative researchers (Burns, 2000; Delamont, 1992; Kervin et al., 2006). It involves familiarization with the data (Delamont, 1992) and allocating themes (Kervin et al., 2006). Kervin et al. (2006) explained that thematic coding involves hand coding the text, organising data into similar categories and applying themes. In this respect, I used different coloured paper to represent different participants. I hand coded the data into themes and then cut out the various categories and organised them into similar themes.

### **3.12 NARRATIVE**

A narrative is a story (Cohen et al., 2007; Kervin et al., 2006; Kvale, 2007). The narrative, or account of the participant's story, may be elicited by the researcher, but may also unfold as the participant tells the story of their experiences during an interview (Kvale, 2007). According to Kvale (2007), the researcher should not interrupt, and should let the story emerge. This was the case in this study. The stories about how culture impacted the leadership experiences of some of the participants emerged from the interviews. The stories of the experiences of two participants have been told in Chapter 4 to preserve the richness of the data. Thus, I have chosen to present narratives of two women leaders, both of whom had different experiences of how culture impacted on their leadership. I present their stories in the next chapter, using pseudonyms to disguise their names.

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Because of the smallness of the community I had to be careful in naming the schools and the communities, or any persons involved (Strachan, 1997).

### **3.13 SUMMARY**

This chapter presented the approach used to undertake the study including the ethical procedures. A feminist qualitative lens was used to explore the issues. The study involved two groups of women who participated in the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interview. The two groups of women involved six women leaders from various secondary schools of Vanuatu and five aspiring women leaders from several secondary schools in Port-Vila. The data collected from the interviews was analyzed using a thematic coding analysis as well as story telling in the form of a narrative.

I present the findings in the next chapter.

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## **CHAPTER 4: THE FINDINGS**

### **4.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is in two sections. The first section presents the findings from the thematic analysis of the qualitative data obtained from the semi-structured interviews and the focus group interview. The second section provides narrative stories of two women leaders. I discuss these findings in Chapter 5.

I have used the pseudonyms: Alice, Flora, Chantal, Christine, Justina and Eva instead of the participants' real names. The names of schools, islands, provinces, communities and individuals who impacted on these women leaders' experiences have also been given pseudonyms.

### **4.2 THEIR BACKGROUNDS**

Alice is currently the deputy principal in a junior secondary school. She is married with three children and is in her mid-thirties. Alice has a bachelor's degree in science; she teaches maths and science as well as holding the position of deputy principal in the school. Flora used to be a principal in several secondary schools in Vanuatu. However, she is no longer a school principal but is employed in a private organisation. Flora is in her mid-forties and is single with a bachelor's degree in education. I present her story later in this chapter to illustrate how culture impacted on her leadership.

Chantal is a secondary school deputy principal. She is married with grown-up children. She has a teaching qualification and is in her late thirties. I also present her story later on in this chapter. Christine used to be a deputy principal but now teaches in a tertiary institution. Like the other participants, Christine is also a well-educated woman who recently completed a bachelor's degree in education. She is married, with no

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children. Justina is currently the principal of a secondary school. She is married, with grown-up children. She has a diploma in secondary teaching.

Eva is older than the other participants. Her children have all grown up and moved on. At the time I sought her informed consent to be involved in the study, she was the school principal in a junior secondary school in Vanuatu. However, at the time of her interview she had left her position to take up a teaching role in another secondary school. I later learnt from her that she had been coerced into leaving her job and position by the school's community, resulting in her relocation to another junior secondary school as a classroom teacher. These women leaders experienced the impact of culture on their leadership roles in different ways. I present the findings based on their experiences later in this chapter.

The five aspiring women leaders who participated in the focus group discussion came from different selected schools in one of the urban centres of Vanuatu. They were Hanna, Katy, Betina, Linda and Valerie. The women are currently secondary school teachers who have leadership potential as identified by their school leaders. They all possess a diploma in secondary teaching from the Vanuatu Teachers' College but none have a university degree. However, they all have long experience in teaching and are in middle management leadership roles in their schools. Hanna and Katy both come from the same school. Betina and Linda also teach in the same school, while Valerie works in another school. The women discussed ways in which women's leadership could be developed. I have integrated the data from the semi-structured interviews from the first group of women leaders with that of the focus group discussion to explore the following research questions:

- In what ways does culture impact upon women's leadership in Vanuatu's secondary schools?
- In what ways could women's leadership be developed?

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I present the findings and recurring themes in the following section.

### **4.3 LACK OF TRANSPARENCY IN THE APPOINTMENT OF PRINCIPALS**

The women leaders in this study were appointed on the recommendation of the school council, the outgoing male principal, or directly by the Ministry of Education. There was no selection panel involved nor any selection criteria. Most of them were appointed based on their record of good performance. There was no advertisement of the positions. Justina was mentored into her position by the former male principal. When asked how she was appointed, Justina replied:

A French principal was appointed. I assisted him during his term and he assisted me. He was searching for a replacement but could not locate a local replacement. Since I was his assistant and he saw my performance, he approached me and suggested if I could take over when he leaves. That was at the end of 2006; he was here just for a period of two years. In 2007 his term as principal ended. Last year I was appointed as training principal. He trained me and I was a trainee principal until end of Term 2. In Term 3 he became my advisor. In 2008, I am principal...my appointment is not yet endorsed by the Ministry of Education as I speak.

Christine was surprised that she was chosen over others:

I was nominated through the principal and then through the school council and then the Teaching Service Commission did the final appointment. I did not even actually go through a selection panel, it was my first year at the school, the deputy principal had left and the principal had so many teachers that were there for so many years who have been working with him and I guess it depends on how you perform and if you are honest people will identify that from you.

Alice was appointed into a leadership position by the school council because of her previous role as the secondary coordinator, and from her experiences working alongside her male principal. In fact, she was called into the office to be informed directly of her appointment by the chairman of the school council. Again, there was no selection panel and no selection procedure based on merit, but rather she was selected based on her past

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experiences in assisting her principal. She commented:

This male principal came in and I worked with him as a secondary coordinator along with another colleague. We both did the coordinator's job for the secondary sector because the school had [a] kindergarten, primary and secondary and we were taking care of the secondary sector...reporting back to him. Anyway, that was 2002 and then 2003 and he left at the end of 2003 school academic year. And then January of 2004, I had a message from the school office to see the chairman of the school council. I walked into the chairman of the school council's office feeling very small because he a [big man]. So then I went in and I was wondering... have I done something wrong or... and he said take a seat and invited me to sit down. So I sat down and he told me they wanted me to be acting principal for 2004.

Chantal said she became a deputy principal by chance:

I think I became a deputy principal by fluke. I didn't apply for the position. When the new principal came in 2007, he had three names on the list and he took the names over to the school council to decide which one would make a good deputy principal and out of the three names there were two members (males) and myself. I was on that list; everyone decided that I would be a better principal than the males on that list so that was how I came to be a deputy principal.

Flora drew attention to the fact the positions were not advertised by the Ministry of Education. She claimed that school principals get to be appointed based on kinship and family ties or on who they know.

An appointment is always done by the Minister. No, with the Ministry of Education, there is no selection panel, it's not a practice! Yes, you get a letter unexpectedly from them stating your promotion. That was in my case. You will be the principal in this particular school. With principalship there is never a principal panel, never! Never. You never apply for that post, they never advertise it! Maybe in private schools they do but it is not the case in government schools. But my teaching staff manual is with me, I have a copy but nearly everything in that document is never implemented. Yes, it is about who you know these days...the principal's appointment in Vanuatu is not transparent, as any Tom, Dick and Harry could become a principal; as long as they make a lot of noise and then they would appoint that person.

What is most revealing about these findings is that the principal of the

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school, along with the school council and sometimes the Ministry of Education, are the predominant figures in the appointment of these women principals. Interestingly, all those occupying these influential decision-making positions are men. However, the selection procedures are not transparent, as it is not known what selection criteria were used besides the women leader's record of good performance. Moreover, the post of principal in the government schools is never advertised; if it were it would allow other aspiring women leaders to apply. This may well add to the low number of women principals, because the vacant position is not made available to other women leaders.

#### **4.4 LACK OF CONFIDENCE**

Not all the women in this study had the confidence to take up a leadership role when initially appointed or approached. Lack of confidence was more obvious in the younger women leaders and, in particular, in the women leaders appointed to the positions of deputy principals and those taking up leadership roles for the first time. For example, Alice relates that she initially turned down the offer to be acting principal:

For me there was no way, so I said no, but they insisted and I guess it must be a recommendation from the previous principal, the principal that left at the end of 2003, because he mentioned something about it in regards to my coordinator's job. Then I said, okay, I'll think about it", I went home I thought "no way, I am not taking this up" also because, rightly, we had a deputy principal then, and she is supposed to take up the job whenever the principal is not available.

Most of the women participants refused to take up the leadership roles when first approached, but later gave up resisting. For example, Christine comments:

He actually approached me so many times, wanting to give me this position and I refused, so many times until the last time he came to see me, I decided to give in and to give it a go.

However, not all of them lacked the confidence, as two of the principals

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stated they had no problem attributing it to their qualifications and background.

Interestingly, the general pattern depicted from these women leaders' experiences indicated that there was lack of confidence at the initial stage of taking up the leadership roles, but this reduced as they gained experience. Being given extra encouragement when first approached seemed to increase the confidence and self-esteem of some of the women leaders. For some, supportive role models, past experiences of leadership, and having a qualification increased their confidence to take up leadership positions.

The lack of confidence was more prevalent amongst the aspiring women leaders and seems to be a major barrier to their advancement. It may be related to their lack of a university qualification, as noted by Betina:

Personally, I think the positions are there. I received a letter appointing me as assistant principal but I refused to take the offer. In French we say "Je suis pas qualifier" which means I am not qualified, even if I have the experience, I am not comfortable. I am still looking into the future.

It can be surmised that Betina lacked the confidence to take up the appointment, therefore turned down the offer. She felt that experience was insufficient and that a qualification was necessary for her to feel confident to take up the position. Unlike the women leaders interviewed, the aspiring women leaders in the focus group were not given any support from their principals but they all came to a similar consensus on the lack of qualification as the main barrier to any future leadership roles. This was noted in the comments made. For example, Katy indicated:

One of the barriers to getting the post is the requirement stated in the advertisements [general]. You've got to meet the requirements not only to be a leader but to get a post. In the past, experience speaks out loud but now it is the qualifications. So we have to prepare to meet those challenges. Qualification is a barrier today.

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Linda elaborates:

For me, qualification counts to develop other skills to assist to get [a] leadership role as the other experience will complement the qualification. I will not get up there unless I have the academic qualification.

In comparing the comments made by the women leaders and those aspiring to leadership positions it is evident that aspiring women leaders have less confidence, and this is compounded by their lack of qualification. A lack of support from the principal and the lack of qualification may prevent aspiring women leaders from taking up leadership positions in the secondary schools.

#### **4.5 DISCRIMINATORY ATTITUDES**

The women participants in this study spoke of encountering discriminatory attitudes. The nature and scope of these attitudes varied. Some women leaders experienced violence in the form of physical assault. Others experienced threats from angry parents but managed to resolve the situation. Two of the women leaders lost their jobs and positions as school principals and were ousted out of their school by their community. One was demoted from her position as a deputy principal. What was also interesting in these findings is that the type of discrimination faced by these women leaders differed in each school, depending on the school's context. For instance, the village community and land owners of schools in the rural and remote areas in the islands of Vanuatu very much controlled the running of the school, making it difficult for women leaders. Most of the women leaders commented that this was probably because of them being women. Eva elaborates:

I don't know why but some people in the community were not happy. They did not want to see a woman progress. They marched inside and demanded for me to leave.

Eva comments that despite her progress in developing the school, there was still unfavourable treatment shown towards her because of her

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gender.

Discriminatory attitudes faced by these women leaders varied and stemmed from different groups in the school community. The groups include parents, teachers, students, the village community and landowners. The types of discriminatory attitudes experienced were resentment, sexism, nepotism and violence.

#### **4.5.1 Resentment**

Recurring incidences of resentment were common in the women's comments. Resentment took the form of the individuals concerned being uncooperative, disrespectful, disobedient and rebellious. It would seem that the women participants in urban schools were treated differently to those in rural island schools. For example, Eva and Flora were both school principals in rural schools in the islands that were largely controlled by the village community. It is worth noting that the traditional and customary practices of gendered roles are practised to a larger extent in the outer islands of Vanuatu. Consequently, in some islands, but not all, women are not accepted as leaders because of the inherent patriarchal practices. For example, in Eva's opinion, the chiefs and the landowners were hindering her from developing the school. She relates:

Mainly those who think they are the landowners, and I found out that there were some chiefs too involved but they hide behind other groups and use them. They [landowners] hide behind so that the projects that my school council and I decided on never succeeded; it is never possible. I have not carried out one yet. I spent millions and millions on blocks, ten to fifteen tonnes of cement and wire and everything. I cannot do anything. They [landowners] are not cooperative and they dispute even when I sought the provincial government's help ... so that they could assist in building the underground well. Who would do it? They do not accept it. They [landowners] made the following comments; "This is our land, we must work for our money", but all along I knew they were just against a female principal.

Flora had similar experiences of resentment:

I was not told of everything but what I heard from the reports of

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some of the people when I arrived there was: “Oh! When we heard of your posting to be our new principal at [name of school], the former principal warned us that “You have to watch out for that woman who was posted here, she is a bad woman, and is mean. She is a bad-mouthed person and you have to be careful of her.”

The other women leaders experienced resentment but from different groups of people. For example, resentment came from male students, some male teachers, and some female teachers. Most of the women participants commented that the males were very supportive of their leadership roles. For example, Alice notes:

The majority of the school council members were males but they were very supportive. I must say, males were very supportive.

#### **4.5.2 Sexism/Patronizing attitudes**

Sexist and patronizing comments were experienced by most of the participants. Most of the participants experienced treatment and /or comments from their school community because of their gender.

For example, Eva commented:

When I arrived there, they were always comparing me with the male principals. Comments like, “you are no good, you don’t pay kava to sell at the nakamal” [site where kava is sold and consumed].

In Alice’s opinion some parents were using their status in the community to patronize her:

Sometimes they think they are somebody in the government, they are somebody, somewhere in one of the NGO [Non-Government Organisations] and they tend to use these ranks to play-up with, as they walk in through the school. Well, some would say “Who are you to tell me to pay up at this time?”

Justina had a similar experience:

I receive a letter from them [some male staff] containing their comments. I called each one into the office and it seemed they find it difficult to accept the fact that a female can be in such a position.

#### **4.5.3 Nepotism**

Nepotism was also common amongst the women leaders’ experiences.

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There were commonalities between those women leaders practising in urban schools. Those in urban schools were accused of favouring teachers from their island. For example, as noted in Justina's comments:

Because I am from [name of island] so they say that I favour teachers from my island but that has never happened...

In some cases participants from the island schools faced challenges with their school communities as to whom they preferred. For example, in Flora's opinion, the chairman of the school council wanted her out so his relative could be in her position:

I am sure he had a grudge against me because I was just a lady, after all those five principals who tried to do changes to school. So he decided that I should be asked to leave. He decided to push me out so that he could bring in his relative, Brian, who used to teach at [name of institution].

For some, male teachers influencing the male principal was common in impacting negatively on them. As is noted in Christine's comments:

It was a male teacher, the current male teacher, who is now the principal because he wanted to be given a position like that, so he was always going into the principal's office and trying to say some negative things about me in order for the principal to put me out and put him in. That was at the end of the year, but there was no fact at all, there was no fact at all, that I haven't done which I did; to be honest I did a good job.

As is noted from the participant comments, it would seem that participants in urban schools were accused of favouring teachers from their island, while those participants in the island schools were not wanted by the school community.

#### **4.5.4 Violence**

All the women leaders but one shared their experiences of violence and threats. For some it came from the parents of the students, while for others it came from the village community and landowners, including the chiefs. What was also revealing was that those women participants in schools near to a village community were treated differently to those in urban

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schools, where there was no influence from the villagers. Two of the participants were physically assaulted by members of the village community. Eva recalls:

An incident that happened that caused me to leave was when I left with the key. I informed the PEO [Provincial Education Office] that I took the key with me to another island. I lied: I took the key and left it with the chief. I got on the plane to the island to spend Christmas. I did not give them the chance to get the fuel because I hid it in another office. I locked it up. They got cross because I locked it up. They went in and emptied out all the fuel drums. So when I came back and started questioning, they wanted to physically harm me. So I asked them, "Who went inside?," because it is the school's property. Anyway, they were not happy, so when I went into the office I found that they had nailed the office with six inches nails and locked it up. They destroyed every property in my house belonging to me and my family. Every property belonging to me and my family was lost.

Chantal commented:

We had a very angry father, who was sort of ready to punch the two of us.

While almost all the participants encountered some forms of violence, one of them did not. Most of the participants encountered verbal violence, except for two of the participants who were physically assaulted.

#### **4.6 LACK OF SUPPORT FROM THE EDUCATION AUTHORITIES**

When asked whether they have been supported in their careers by the education authorities, such as the Ministry of Education, Teaching Service Commission and Provincial Education Officers, the participants' comments varied. Support from the education authorities to schools was not consistent. For example, participants from urban schools spoke of their good relationship with the Ministry of Education and of the large amount of support they get from Ministry of Education.

However, participants from rural and small schools spoke of their frustrations with the lack of support of their leadership from the education

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authorities. It appeared that the Ministry of Education was not always helpful, despite difficult situations between the village community and the participants. This was noted in Eva's comments. She emphasized:

The Minister of Education wrote three letters for me to return to the school but I wrote back and said, "If you write me another letter for me to go back there I will sue you. Because it is an unfavourable environment, I have lost everything, you need to stand with me, you cannot put me back in the same place but move me to another place." Then they called me back. I withdrew everything; in fact I did not work for almost five months. I am still on the salary for doing nothing. The Minister of Education and the Teaching Service Commission must acknowledge their fault in this.

Flora shared experiences similar to Eva's. She stated:

Yes, you are in the teaching service but they cannot deal with it. So it had to continue on and on and on to the extreme. My case went on to the extreme, because the teaching service and the education authorities, including the Provincial Education Officer, Secretary, Director and Minister of Education. When they could not solve the problem which was very easy to solve, I had to take my case to court. I got myself a private lawyer and took the case to court. We fought the case for 10 years.

From these findings it would seem that those in the rural island schools received less support from the Ministry of Education than those in urban and large prestigious schools.

#### **4.7 CHRISTIANITY**

Christianity also played a very big part in the women's leadership experiences. Most of them referred to how being a Christian helped them on a daily basis. Most of the participants in this study referred to Christianity as the main component in their leadership practices. Christian values of respect and honesty were repeatedly mentioned. As is noted in Chantal's comments:

We understand our respect you know. I know how to approach him [principal] so because I have this, it makes it easier to understand where he is coming from and when I need to stop. I can't push him and he knows too with me. We know how to handle each other

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because we understand that one from the question point of view I know that there are certain things I can't. I can tell him most things but there are certain things that because of our Christian belief and because of culture as well we can't go there.

Forgiveness was also another Christian value that was brought up, as is noted in Eva's comments:

...the Ministry of Education asked me to take the matter to court. But after praying for some time my families decided to withdraw and take a low profile. Only God will lift us up in His own time, everything that we lost only God will make a way for us to be reimbursed one day. So I went to Port-Vila and withdrew the court case and got my fees refunded. I went back and called a meeting. I thanked them for what they did and told them that I had forgiven them.

When asked whether black magic affects how they make decisions in schools, most of them replied that although it exists and is part of the culture, it does not affect them. Their faith in God for protection helps them and gives them the courage to make decisions without fear of black magic. Flora affirms:

Black magic is powerful but only works on people who believe in it. I don't believe in black magic. I only believe in one person and that is the power of God. God and the Holy Spirit I don't believe in black magic but I believe that if they tried it would not work on me.

Flora does not believe that black magic could work on her, because of her faith in God. Flora's comments were similar to Eva's:

I don't have any problems with that, my father is the Lord, so even when they threatened me with black magic and tell me that they were going to tie me up with the magic charm, I said "Curse go with you. I don't care about that."

For most of these women prayer is a main part of their daily leadership practices. Prayer was mentioned by the participants in this study as very helpful in lessening their stress and giving them strength, and they relied on prayer for God's guidance. This is exemplified in Chantal's comments:

...sometimes I don't understand how I can handle this; it's only because I have this little group of women that I always go to and we always pray for each other and I think that helps me with my

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decision-making because when I find that I have a lot of work or I know that I am stressing out I go to them and tell them and they put it on their prayer list and they pray for me and I pray for myself and the next day I am fine again. So I can handle this only because of that. [prayer]

#### **4.8 WORK-LIFE BALANCE**

Most of the women leaders in this study commented that the workload was stressful. The age of their children and whether or not they had the support of their husbands impacted their work-life balance and the traditional roles around household chores. It appears that the participants find it problematic balancing their career with family because of the traditionally ascribed roles expected of them by their family, and especially their spouse. In some cases, although the participants commented on the spouse's support with the domestic chores, still the majority of the domestic chores at home needed to be done and carried out by the participants. This places more stress and affects their work-life balance.

Justina comments:

He [husband] assisted me, but due to his work commitment, he is always busy. My children are all grown up. The first is 11 years old. There is no problem in relation to help. If I do not have many issues at hand I can go home early. It depends. If I have much to deal with, I can be late home.

A few of the participants regretted spending more time on work than with family. For example, Alice finds that being in a leadership role takes up much of the time that should be spent with her family. She comments:

I'd say imbalance like I spend so much time especially in 2006 when I was acting principal, I spent most time with school business than in my home.

#### **4.9 LEADERSHIP STYLES**

All the participants in this study appeared to have similar leadership styles, which included the ethic of care. The recurring themes in their leadership styles include caring and nurturing. Their leadership style was oriented

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towards students' learning, focused on school development, and incorporated collaborative-decision making. For instance Eva described her leadership style:

...my heart goes out to the children [students] and I give them a lot of opportunities, even those who face financial problems, to pay for their fees, I spend more time with them. I told them, bring me a bundle of banana or bring some taro or cassava, or if you have a cow or a goat or pig you can bring it to me. So I tried to implement that so the students could see that we are trying our best too and even while doing that I found out that we were never short of food.

Christine spoke of how she performed her duties to increase the students' performance:

When I went on to become the deputy, I controlled the teachers' absences and then within that year the report was really good about teachers attending classes faithfully and students were happy with their work. I mean they were doing well in school and in the end their exam results were good. And parents were really happy about that.

It would seem that all the participants showed similar patterns of caring, nurturing, orientation towards student performance and school development, as is consistent with the ethic of care.

In the following section, I present my findings from the focus group discussion pertaining to ways in which women's leadership could be developed.

#### **4.10 WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT**

The aspiring women leaders in the focus group discussion all expressed their need for further training. They particularly pointed out that though there were leadership positions available, they could not apply for them. They referred to their lack of qualification for the roles by stating that the positions of principal and deputy principal require accounting skills, management skills, and confidence. As already mentioned, they did not have a degree and they perceived that their current qualification was not

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enough for them to hold the positions of a principal or deputy principal. This impeded them from applying for the positions. The women made a number of suggestions and raised issues regarding their leadership, as Katy comments:

To get the post of Principal or Deputy Principal, a teacher must have the academic qualification and teacher training, and if I am appointed, I would like to know those areas, like writing promotion letters. I cannot take that post as I do not know the job, like supervising teachers in class. I may not be able to know whether they are performing well or not or whether the language skills are good or not. I cannot evaluate them. So, personally, I think that I would not get the post unless I am qualified. It is not easy.

Nevertheless, a number of suggestions were made regarding their leadership development as can be noted in Valerie's comments:

Firstly, is the opportunity to go for further studies to be able to be qualified for the post. Some people talk about experience but do not consider the opportunities that are available to women. There is less opportunity for women, no funds available, no budget to send females overseas for training.

Valerie feels that women should be given opportunities for further study. She also suggests that there are other ways to get further training.

There are other ways that leaders can act to assist. There is no need to go overseas to get qualification because you have a job to do especially in the education sector, the opportunities, leaders should assist us to get the opportunities. The leaders should identify the potential of the women and assist them to qualify. These are the barriers I see.

The aspiring women leaders agreed that it is the responsibility of the school principal to take the first step towards developing women leaders.

Betina indicated this in her comments:

I think the principal should observe and assess teachers, and then approach the Ministry of Education Scholarships Office to identify the scholarships available to train teachers to become leaders. After the evaluation, if you are performing, you can be upgraded.

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Linda added:

One option is for the Principal to go around evaluating staff and writing reports and include some incentive for training where necessary. By that, the teacher can realize her potential, so she will be motivated to work harder to achieve the best. When the food is delicious more people will be coming to share the food. Give them the incentive to push forward together to achieve the best and look ahead and work extra hard to achieve. The principals must be active uplifting the skills of the teachers

When asked what they thought of mentoring, most of them commented that they needed someone to encourage and push them up to the next level. This was referred to in the following comments:

Yes, I think it is part of our culture to have a mentor. It is our nature or behaviour that we need someone to drive you to do things and this helps with the feeling of working together and that will encourage us. Sometimes we sort of do not favour men. We need someone to assist us, not only the husband but someone who works as the Head of Department to encourage you with your challenges with a clear knowledge of what is expected. A mentor is needed and a good idea that corresponds to our culture. We need a mentor. (Betina)

Having mentors is clearly important to the aspiring women leaders. They felt that it is part of the culture to have someone there to encourage them and that it should be someone in a middle management position, such as a head of department.

#### **4.11 THE STORIES**

In this section I present the stories of two of the women leaders, Flora and Chantal. These two women experienced the impact of culture on their leadership in totally different ways. I have specifically chosen Flora's story because of her extreme experiences. She wanted her story told. Chantal's story was chosen as a positive example of what can happen when there is a good principal and a positive working relationship with the teachers and

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the community. My intention is to illustrate how Vanuatu culture can impact positively and negatively on women leaders. People and places have been given pseudonyms.

#### **4.11.1 Flora's story**

Flora faced great adversities in her leadership practices, some of which were very painful for her and took many years of court proceedings to resolve. These incidents have left her demoralized and resulted in a change of career. When asked whether she was interested in further studies, she shook her head and responded: "I would still come back and face the same situation, it is not worth it." Her words reflected someone who was painfully hurt and let down by her superiors. She no longer has faith in the education authorities and wishes to remain anonymous.

Flora is the third youngest in a family of eight. She comes from an island in the southern part of Vanuatu. She began her career as a primary teacher for five years and then proceeded on for further studies at an overseas university where she attained a Bachelor of Education degree. Upon her return from her studies she resumed her teaching career at the secondary school level, taking up some middle management roles as well. In total, she spent 23 years in the teaching service, of which 18 years were spent teaching at the secondary school level and five years at the primary school level. Her career as an educational leader ended in 2003 when she requested early retirement.

Her challenges began when she was posted to take up her first principal's position in another part of Vanuatu. This subsequently resulted in her demotion and the matter being taken to court:

I was at Toman. Maybe I started being a principal when they [MOE] posted me to Toman High School on [name of island] in 1994 and then after that year in 1994, I faced problems with that post. As a result, although I was no longer a principal after 1994, I took my case to court and court declared that I was still to be the principal from 1994 to 1999 when I won my court case.

It took several years for the court case to reach its verdict because her

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opponents pleaded not guilty, continuously dragging the court hearings to their final stage when the judgment was finally made in her favour. She claims that those who were involved were jealous of her leadership. Flora detailed the actual account of what had happened leading to her current status. She stated that before her arrival at Toman High School, there were already jealous attitudes and malicious rumours made about her by the previous male principal.

Upon receiving news of Flora's appointment at Toman High School, the former male principal started influencing the other community members, including the staff and the school council, to have negative thoughts about Flora. Flora claims this to be jealousy on the part of the former male principal, as he was posted to another school and did not like the idea of a female taking over the work he had done at that school. On her arrival, she found that the negative influence had already infiltrated the minds of the staff, including women staff and the school council, causing them to be skeptical and watchful of her. This resentful attitude was seen in some of the male school council members who openly indicated their resentment towards her leadership by deliberately not speaking to her and not briefing her on matters relating to the school. As well as the negative influence from the former principal, having a woman leader was seen as going against the cultural norm, and according to Flora resulted in increased resentment.

One month after she had moved to Toman High School there was a national teachers' strike. The strike, which involved all teachers and schools in Vanuatu, was coordinated by the Vanuatu Teachers' Union (VTU) in Port-Vila. All school teachers at Toman, apart from Flora, took part in the strike. It was during that strike that her problems increased. One female teacher, who was part of the executive committee of the Vanuatu Teachers' Union at Toman High School, liaised with the Vanuatu Teachers' Union head office in Port-Vila and with teachers around the whole of [name of island] Island who were on strike, including the primary

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schools. Flora said:

... it was normal for her to have contact with the national executives in Port-Vila while the strike was on. The executives in Vila were contacting her as is normal because she was sort of their liaison.

Apparently, it was clear to Flora that while the teachers' strike was on, there was also a secret plot going on to oust her out of her position. Flora believed that there was communication between the handyman of the school, the female Vanuatu Teachers' Union executive, and the school bursar. What is interesting is that all these mentioned people, including the female teacher, were from the same island, but not, however, the same island that the school is situated on but another nearby island. Flora, however, was from a different island.

Their plan to remove Flora clearly involved several strategies. Flora was adamant that the handyman of the school and the school bursar, having been influenced by the negative comments of the former principal, deliberately avoided her by flying to Port-Vila when she arrived. The men, while in Vila, tried to influence the Ministry of Education in their decision on her posting to Toman High School.

According to Flora, the two men deliberately lied about her organising and encouraging the teachers' strike on [name of island] so that she would be accountable for her teachers' action. She claims their intention was to influence the Ministry of Education to remove her from the school. She also stated that they even went as far as denigrating her reputation publicly on the radio.

Flora commented that her protests against the false allegations were ignored by the Ministry of Education staff. They would not listen to her explanations. In fact, in her opinion, the staff at the Ministry of Education accused her of organising the strike because they had already been influenced to do so. Flora exclaimed, illustrating her ethic of care for the students:

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I tried telling them [Ministry of Education staff] that I did not take part in the strike as I was the only teacher that time who tried to make sure the students needs were met. They had food because I was the Principal so I had to play my part. I was the only teacher, the rest of the teachers relaxed because they knew that the other teachers as well were on strike, but I could not relax. I was concerned with the students who were already in school. It was a boarding school and the students all came from different islands. They have already arrived at the school and what would have happened if we'd all gone on strike? So I was the only one who tried to get the school going although there were not any classes. I could not teach so many students because I was the only one. Every other teacher was on strike.

The staff at the Ministry of Education did not believe that she had been at the school to look after the students. Instead, they believed the false allegations. Consequently, the Ministry of Education suspended her from her position and brought in someone who had no qualification in education to replace her as school principal.

The staff at the Ministry of Education told her to leave the school. On her return to collect her belongings from the school she faced resentment. The office key was with the Chairman of the School Council, who instructed the office secretary not to let her in. She claims she was treated like a criminal, the way she was locked out from the school office.

Flora felt very upset that while she was going through such difficulties no one at the Ministry of Education or the Teaching Service Commission supported her. She felt that she was employed by the Teaching Service Commission, and they and the Ministry of Education were responsible for her welfare and should support her in her leadership. She commented:

I do not need to stay in that job if the Ministry of Education cannot support me. There is no support at all from the Ministry of Education.

In trying to show her innocence and to prove that her demotion was illegal and did not follow procedures, she took the case to court and sued the government. She won her court case and was reimbursed a substantial

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amount of money for her salary and was asked by the court to be reinstated into her position. When asked why she had been treated in that way by the community, she said it was not because she was a woman, but because the community of that school wanted someone from their own island. Clearly, nepotism played a big part in her experiences. The local community resented her because they wanted a principal who came from their own island.

For some time, Flora was the principal of a private school. However, later, she was appointed as principal of a secondary school on another island. When she arrived in that school, the same thing that had happened to her at Toman High School occurred at her new school. It was a former male principal again who tarnished her reputation even before her arrival:

He spread negative rumours to rubbish my name; when I arrived, I was already branded negatively. (Flora)

This time the rivalry was between her and members of the village community, called the 'Nohok community'. One of the members of the Nohok community, Henry, was chairman of the school council and a chief in their community. Flora described the condition of the school when she first arrived as resembling a jail. Apparently, there had been very little work done by the former principals of the school. She identified the community's attitudes towards school principals as the main reason for the underdevelopment of the school. According to Flora, the previous principals left without developing the school because of the community's opposition. One of the former principals died of a stroke, and in Flora's opinion this was because of the amount of hostility he received from the community.

It seemed at first that she had overcome some opposition by her developments to the school:

Inside the buildings, the chairs, the tables, were all on the floor maybe one or two still standing. They were all damaged. The school was down, so with my skills I converted it back into a secondary school, within just one year. I am saying this because with every

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open window I bought new louvers with the small budget that I had. The classrooms were repaired so that it finally looked like a school and the students were happy. The environment was nice and they were learning in a place that looked no longer like a prison ah!

However, she stated the school chairman was not happy about the achievements. In her opinion, the school chairman's resentment of her was because he could not accept the fact that a woman could have developed the school after the failed efforts of the previous principals.

The Chairman of the School Council, seeing all the new changes, started having a negative attitude towards Flora and decided to bring his cousin in to replace her. Meanwhile, Flora continued on for a year. Her school scored well in the National Year 10 Leaving Examinations and most of her students were selected to go on to senior secondary school at Malapoa College, in Port Vila.

The tension between her and the Nohok community worsened. This was heightened by the announcement on the radio that she was to be transferred. However, on arrival in Port-Vila, she was advised by the Ministry of Education to return, as her transfer was not confirmed. It was during that period that the situation erupted. While she was in Port-Vila negotiating her transfer, the relative of the Chairman of the School Council, who the Nohok community wanted to be principal, was already there with all his belongings before being formally appointed by the Ministry of Education in Port-Vila. He had resigned as a teacher at the [name of institution] and moved to Flora's school.

Unbeknown to Flora there were plans by the Nohok community to attack her:

The tension became stronger. Anyway we started school. We went on with school until the May two weeks holiday. At the school we went ahead but the jealous people were making plans to come up stronger, to come and beat me up at school. They became stronger; they planned the attack as if they were going to attack a platoon. Yeah, honestly! I did not know anything. I was doing the normal

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things.

They planned the attack very well and knew of her departure dates. The assault took place on the night before her departure. In the dark she was hit from behind with a piece of wood, while her nephew was inside. They threw away the piece of wood and ran. She fell, unconscious for a few minutes, but regained her consciousness before her nephew arrived. The next morning while Flora and her nephew were at the bank getting ready to leave, the Nohok community, with Henry as their leader, went into her house and threw all her belongings outside through the window. They went back to the bank to meet her. Flora felt angered by what they did:

They were like cowards (angry). Henry threw my things through the louvers outside. They came and started bothering me at the bank. They asked for the key. I said, "What key? key to what...? !" "Your house key," was the reply; they started shouting insults at me.

She was confused and could not think straight afterwards:

I was confused but because my belongings were already thrown out of school. I was being bothered in the village. When we came back up to the school, they forced me and pulled me and dragged me up the road to the school. I saw my things all lying outside. The driver of the school, who was also related to Brian and Henry, took the school truck and transported my belongings and went and dumped them on the beach, carelessly, and not caring whether my belongings were damaged or not.

However, the wife of a prominent politician sheltered and protected them till the next day. She put them on the plane the next day, but meanwhile, when boarding the plane to leave, the Nohok community with Henry as their leader surrounded the plane, trying to stop her from leaving. The pilot, who had been informed of the situation by the Ministry of Education, insisted they board the plane, which they did. Flora is no longer a school principal because of what happened, and wishes to add that it is about time the Vanuatu Ministry of Education follows the appointment procedures as stated in the Teaching Service Commission policies.

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#### **4.11.2 Chantal's story**

Chantal comes from a family of five. She is the oldest in the family. She has a bachelor's degree and a post-graduate diploma. She is married to a well-educated husband and has three children. She used to be in other leadership positions prior to taking up her current leadership role.

Chantal is a deputy principal in a large boarding school in the southern part of Vanuatu. She is from a different island, in the [name of province] of Vanuatu. The school is located outside the main town and comprises many hectares of land that is used for school farming purposes. Chantal's school, unlike Flora's school, is situated well away from any village community and does not have any direct outside influences from the village communities.

When asked how she was appointed, she stated she was appointed by chance. She did not apply for the position, but rather it was given to her. She was appointed by the new principal. The principal, with the school council, decided that she would be a better deputy principal than her male opponents and she was therefore appointed.

When asked what gave her the confidence and motivation in her leadership role, she mentioned her husband and her other colleagues of long standing. These mentors gave her the confidence by mentoring her in what to do. She found it worthwhile having the senior teachers' opinions, because from their comments she could compare the past and current situation at the school to know whether the standard of the school had improved.

She enjoys helping the people in her school community and loves making changes in their lives. Her relationship with her teachers and other members of the school community is very good. There is trust and respect between her and her teachers. The teachers trust her enough to confide in her and she helps them.

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Chantal finds just helping her friends to solve their problems motivating and tries to be approachable to all her friends. Chantal also demonstrates the ethic of care in her leadership style. She is empathetic and cares for her school community. She does this by listening to her teachers and community and tries to help meet their needs. She outlined how she helped her school community to solve one of their problems:

...one of our problems here is we don't have a primary school or kindergarten within the [name of institution] community so most of the students or our children are primary school age who have to travel to town every morning. They leave at 6 o'clock in the morning returning at 4.30pm in the afternoon, so that's very late for the little ones, especially the ones that are kindergarten-age. Our main problem is transport, so some of the mothers suggested if we could start up the kindergarten. I initiated the meeting. I don't have kindergarten-age children, but decided to proceed with the idea, to the delight of the mothers. We allocated the month of June for fundraising so we could run the kindergarten, have a room, and raise money to buy stationery and other stuff for the kindergarten teachers.

Her main role is looking after the welfare of the students. She is concerned about the safety of the students and that the school provides a safe environment for the students to study in, and that all the teachers are carrying out their roles.

Chantal is clearly concerned that the students are provided with a place conducive to learning. When asked to describe her relationship with her principal, she commented that she has a great relationship with her principal. She finds him approachable and easy to work with compared to the previous male principal. They have a good working relationship because they respect and trust each other and have a good understanding of one another.

She elaborated:

I think if I compare him with the one from last year, I did not find the one last year very easy to approach. I could feel that there were a lot of barriers that prevented communication at all levels, like I did not feel free whatsoever to go and see him about anything. That was last year's principal. Because you could just sense that there

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was a barrier and you could sense that he did not want me to go close to him or too close to him. With this one, I am close to him in the sense that he knows me already before because he was my teacher so I know him so we knew him from that way that makes it easier, communication-wise, at this level.

She spoke of having no communication barriers between this principal compared to the previous principal. She thinks that his being her former teacher bridges the communication barrier, as he already knew her as his student.

Prayer is part of Chantal's daily life. It helps in her decision-making and lessens her stress. She commented that there is a small group of women teachers in her school who often gather for prayer. Whenever she feels that she cannot handle the workload and the stress and finds it hard to make any difficult decisions, they pray about it. She felt prayer had helped in dispelling black magic, which was a feature of that part of the country:

You could sense that there was black magic activity. There was heaviness about the area and the community, but the thing went away after we started encouraging teachers and students to pray. But at the start of this year, it just disappeared, that heaviness wasn't around anymore, everybody felt free, people were a lot happier.

Chantal did not encounter major challenges like Flora did, but said that her one challenge was the treatment she received from some of her male students. She had stones thrown at her by some males, who, in her opinion, did not want to accept her authority because she was a female.

She perceived there were no major problems with her teachers working with her as a female leader, but thinks some of the male teachers do rebel silently in front of her, particularly male teachers who drink kava while they are on night duties. However, she recalled a case where they had angry parents wanting to meet with the principal because of some decisions on transfer issues. The parents were not happy that their applications to transfer their children from another school to Chantal's school were not

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accepted. The principal, knowing the aggressive attitudes of people from the island, refused to attend, which meant Chantal had to go alone. The meeting was scheduled to be in town. Chantal decided to bring someone from the same community as the parents to calm things down, so she was accompanied by the assistant academic principal, who was also a woman. They strategised how they were going to solve the situation with the angry parents.

On their arrival things looked bad; the parents were angry, but after much talking and explanations with the help of the assistant principal, everyone came to an understanding about the issue of transfer of students from other schools into their school.

Chantal does find balancing work and family a problem. She finds it is unbalanced, that more time is spent on her work than on her family. She had to train her children to do chores at home, while explaining to them how busy she is. When asked how supportive her husband is, she commented that her husband is always busy. Interestingly, Chantal finds housework to be her sole responsibility. She commented:

When it comes to the house, I go down to my normal mum role and wifely role and I look at him as the leader of the house.

When asked whether or not she had been supported by the Ministry of Education, she indicated that overall she has had very good support from them and everybody else. She protested when initially approached by the Director of Secondary Education about taking the position. The Director of Secondary Education informed her that being a deputy principal was similar to doing house work, but on a larger scale. She eventually accepted the position, and believes that she has been supported very well by all her staff members and most students except for a few who threw stones at her. In particular, she has been given a lot of respect by the male staff at her school.

Chantal advises aspiring women leaders that being in a deputy principal

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role is similar to running your own household as a mother, except that you practise it in the school context. She advises aspirants not to feel intimidated but to believe in themselves and to have confidence.

#### **4.12 SUMMARY**

This chapter has presented the findings of this study. How culture affected the participants' leadership in schools included the lack of transparency in the appointment of school principals, the lack of confidence when first appointed, discriminatory attitudes experienced by the participants, and a lack of support of the participants' leadership. Christianity and work-life balance also impacted on their leadership. The findings also indicated that the leadership style of the participants was related to the ethic of care. Additionally, the findings indicated that there was a need for women's leadership development. The two stories presented illustrated how two of the women leaders experienced their leadership, and varied greatly.

In the next chapter I discuss the findings, linking them to the literature reviewed in Chapter Two.

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## **CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION**

### **5.1 INTRODUCTION**

The findings in this study indicate that there was lack of transparency in appointment processes, lack of confidence, discrimination and lack of support by education authorities. Christianity and work-life balance also impacted on the leadership experiences of the participants. The findings indicate that there was a major need for women's leadership development.

The education system, the social structures, and the people with whom the participants in this study interacted and worked, were all integral parts of Vanuatu's culture. Each of these three cultural components had a significant impact on the leadership experiences of the participants in this study. Drawing on the findings of this research and the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, I now discuss how each of these affected the leadership practices of the participants in this study.

### **5.2 SYSTEMS**

The education system of Vanuatu, it seems, had a big impact on the experiences of the participants. Several structures and processes in the education system serve to act as major barriers to the participants' leadership. These include the appointment processes, policies, and support structures.

#### **5.2.1 Appointment process**

The findings relating to the appointment process in this study do not agree with the literature on the appointment processes of women leaders in other countries (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Coleman, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007; Skrla, 1998). The findings in this study indicate that the system of the appointment of school principals in Vanuatu is not transparent. It seems that the appointment of the participants in this study to positions of leadership was at times made on the preference of individual stakeholders

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in the education system. These stakeholders include school principals, the school council, the Ministry of Education (MOE) and the Teaching Service Commission (TSC). As is noted in Flora's story, individuals, such as the Chairman of the School Council, had significant impact on her appointment process, resulting in her demotion.

Furthermore, there seems to be an inconsistency in the clarity of roles regarding who has the overall authority to appoint school principals, resulting in participants being appointed by different people in different areas of authority. In some cases, it was the school council and the principal who made recommendations, and in other cases appointments came directly from the Ministry of Education. This inconsistency in the appointment process highlights that the Teaching Service Commission has little influence over the decision-making of the appointment of school principals. The process is not transparent and is contrary to the Education Act of 2001, which clearly states that the Teaching Service Commission is the main authority in the appointment of school principals in Vanuatu secondary schools. However, what is most revealing in this finding is that other education stakeholders, such as the Director of Secondary Education and the school council, decide and make the recommendations to the Teaching Service Commission, which then formally makes the appointment. This finding might have had a significant impact on the participants and raises several questions and significant issues for the participants and other aspiring women leaders.

Firstly, was there bias, favouritism, nepotism or 'wantokism' in the participants' appointment? Such practices are common in the Melanesian context and especially so in Vanuatu (Malasa, 2007; Sanga & Walker, 2005; Strachan, 2008). If so, these may be seen as an impediment to other aspiring women leaders. For the reader's understanding, the 'wantok' system is an inherent feature of Melanesian culture, whereby jobs are allocated to family and relatives rather than on merit. I elaborate on this type of system in the next section of this chapter.

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Secondly, were the women principals in this study deliberately appointed to difficult schools and in rural areas where male principals refused to be posted? It seems, that despite being aware of the difficulties of previous school principals with the surrounding village communities of rural schools, two of the participants were posted by the Ministry of Education to difficult schools. It is possible that the authorities at the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission were unsympathetic towards the participants because of their gender.

Recruiting women to rural and difficult schools supports Young (2005), who argues that women leaders in the US context face discrimination in their hiring and recruitment in the sense that they are “relegated to less desirable districts that are either small and rural or urban and troubled” (p. 36). Clearly, this can be seen in the context of this study. The participants were recruited into difficult and troubled schools. This may suggest that the participants were discriminated against in their postings based on their gender. This could be one way the government is seen to meet the CEDAW obligations without giving the best jobs to women.

Thirdly, were the women deputy principals appointed not only on their good record, but also on the “stereotyping of women into caring roles” (Coleman, 2002, p. 24), as is commonly associated with the role of deputy principal? According to Coleman (2002):

The identification of women with particular attributes such as ‘caring’ links them with the emotional and irrational implicitly inferior status of such ‘female’ work. This work also tends to be operational rather than strategic compared with the rational, more esoteric and implicitly superior status of ‘male’ work in areas like curriculum and finance. (p. 24)

This may mean that gender role stereotyping of the deputy principal’s role may only further perpetuate the male hegemonies and the Christian and traditional beliefs of Vanuatu women’s ascribed roles.

This leads to further speculation on whether the Christian and traditional

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beliefs of women's roles in Vanuatu had a big impact on the decisions made regarding the appointment of these women leaders, as has been noted in earlier studies on Vanuatu women leaders. For example, Strachan et al. (2007) and Strachan (2008) pointed out that Melanesian women's leadership is characterized by servant leadership; Christian and customary values of respect, humility, submissiveness and service to the needs of males, are inherent in that style of leadership. This may mean that the appointment of these women leaders was premised on the belief that women would still be subjugated to men, and not seen as a threat by them (Strachan et al., 2007). Shakeshaft (1987) argues on similar grounds that:

When a woman or minority person is hired, it is often noted the less competent woman or minority applicant is chosen, an action that may make white males feel more comfortable while at the same time providing evidence that women and minorities can't cut it .(p. 98)

The appointment of the participants without any specific selection criteria, their appointment into difficult rural schools, and gender role stereotyping of the deputy principal position suggest that the organisation of Vanuatu's education system privileges males. The issue of the processes of appointing principals without any specific selection criteria suggests the need for further research to determine what exact criteria were used by the authorities to appoint school principals.

Another area illustrated in the findings addresses the access of women to positions of leadership. This study found that despite the lack of transparency in the appointment process the participants had no difficulty in gaining leadership positions. This finding does not reflect predominant themes in current western literature that emphasize the difficulties women face in accessing leadership and power in secondary schools (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Blackmore et al., 2006; Brooking, 2005, 2007, 2008; Coleman, 2002, 2005). While the women participants in Al-Khalifa's (1988), Coleman's (2002) and Brooking's (2005, 2007) studies faced overt and covert discrimination (Shakeshaft, 1987) based on gender during the hiring

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and selection processes, the participants in this study did not. They had no difficulty in gaining their leadership roles and had not gone through a selection panel. However, although the participants had no difficulty in accessing leadership, most Vanuatu women do not find it easy to access leadership, as attested by the low percentage of women principals.

Conversely, a substantial body of literature points to the fact that the difficulties for women gaining access to leadership is exacerbated by the predominantly male selection board panels (Blackmore et al., 2006; Brooking 2005, 2007, 2008; Coleman, 2002, 2005; Tallerico, 2000) who seem to have an innate preference for males as leaders (Brooking, 2008; Coleman, 2005) and select those who look like them (Blackmore et al., 2006; Shakeshaft, 1987). This was not the case in this study. While the male selection panels in previous studies have been seen as the gatekeepers to women's leadership advancement, in this study the males were involved in the appointment of these women leaders. Males appointing women leaders is in agreement with Brooking (2005) on the appointment of women leaders by the predominantly male school boards of New Zealand schools, but differed in the sense that women principals in New Zealand go through a selection panel. In contrast, the participants in this study did not go through a selection panel but were given leadership roles anyway.

This finding supports that of Akao (2008) and Malasa (2007) on the selection of women principals in the Melanesian context of the Solomon Islands. The women participants in Akao's (2008) study, and likewise Malasa's (2007), had easy access to leadership positions and were appointed by males. The similarities of the findings may be related to the similarity in the cultural contexts of Melanesia. It would seem that the same attitude of males promoting women in the two Melanesian cultural milieus is similar but slightly different due to context. While there are formal policies in place for the appointment of school principals in the Solomon Islands context (Akao, 2008), there appear to be none in

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Vanuatu (personal communication with John Niroa, former Director of Secondary Education, Vanuatu, 6 October, 2008). The women in this study were appointed based on their record of good performance by either their principal or school council, or the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission, a characteristic of principal appointment noted as well in the Melanesian context of Solomon Island secondary schools (Akao, 2008; Malasa, 2007).

Another important feature of this finding relates to the unpredictable nature of career development and the leadership pathway for the participants of this study. The positions were not advertised. The participants had not planned their career, a similar career pattern seen in women principals in the UK (Coleman, 2002; McLay, 2008) and in the Solomon Islands, where the women participants had not anticipated their promotion into leadership positions (Akao, 2008).

While it seems that this lack of transparency may be a “blessing in disguise” (Akao, 2008, p. 107) for these women leaders, it can also be seen as a barrier for other aspiring women leaders. In the absence of formal selection policies for school principals, it is not known what exact selection criteria were used other than their good performance. Shakeshaft (1987) pinpointed a lack of specific criteria in the appointment processes of women leaders in the US during the 1980s. She argued that “because of lack of particular criteria, it becomes easy for a hiring committee to choose a white male without ever questioning on what basis this choice was made” (p. 98). Shakeshaft’s argument for the need for clarity in appointment processes relates well to the appointment processes in the context of this study.

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## 5.2.2 Policies

The lack of specific policies and selection criteria for school principals in Vanuatu significantly impacted upon the appointment processes of the participants. This finding does not support the themes in the literature on the hiring and selection of women leaders in the more developed nations (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Coleman, 2000, 2001, 2002, 2005, 2007; Skrla, 1998). Nevertheless, the finding of the lack of specific appointment policies and selection criteria of the school principals of Vanuatu highlights a very important issue that needs immediate attention by the Vanuatu education authorities. There have been numerous affirmative actions taken by the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu to increase the representation of women in educational leadership, such as a gender analysis for the education sector, leadership development programmes for Vanuatu women in educational leadership, and the development of specific gender equity in education policy (Strachan, 2002; Strachan et al., 2007), however, the key mechanisms, such as appointment policies and specific selection criteria, are still lacking. This may slow down the progress of women's advancement, as Strachan (2002) emphasizes:

In theory, the Government of Vanuatu is committed to eliminating gender disparities in education. This is evidenced by the social equity reforms with the Comprehensive Reform Programme, ratification of Convention on the Rights of the Child, The Pacific Islands Forum Basic Education Plan, and the equity provisions in the Constitution. In practice however, progress has been slow. (p. 7)

The lack of formal selection policies for school principals in Vanuatu is problematic, and raises questions as to how the Vanuatu Government, through the Ministry of Education, intends to achieve its objectives on gender equity enshrined in its constitution and in the gender equity in educational policy. For there to be an increase in the representation of women in leadership in the secondary schools, education officers in the Teaching Service Commission and the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu must develop and implement formal selection policies which enable transparency in the appointment of principals. Additionally, these policies must allow for the educational leadership positions to be advertised so that

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other aspiring women leaders may have equal access to educational leadership and power.

Therefore, I suggest that to bridge the huge gap in the under-representation of women in educational leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools, formal policies must be developed which make provisions for all secondary schools in Vanuatu to have both genders in the leadership positions in schools. This would mean that should the school principal be a male, then the deputy principal should be a female, or vice versa, and also apply in schools where there are more than two leadership positions. This strategy is supported in literature (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Kruger, 2008; Pounder & Coleman, 2002), which suggests that combining together the leadership styles of both genders leads to effective school development and women's advancement. More specifically, integrating women's leadership styles (Coleman, 2000; Court, 1994; Eagly et al., 1992; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007) together with men's leadership styles (Court, 1994; Lee et al., 1993) significantly contributes to school development (Kruger, 2008).

### **5.2.3 Support systems**

The participants in this study had mixed experiences of support for their leadership from the main education stakeholders, such as the Provincial Education Office, the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission. This finding is not in agreement with the international literature on the support of women's leadership. For example, there are supportive structures in place for women in educational leadership in Australia, such as mentoring and networking (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007), and similarly in New Zealand (Brooking, 2007).

The findings indicate that some participants received more support in their leadership roles and others less, as noted in Eva and Alice's example. Participants in the rural island schools received little support from the

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Ministry of Education. This might have been because of the difficulties of access to the schools and the type of support needed. This finding of the lack of support for some of the participants agrees with Strachan et al. (2007) who stated that change in Vanuatu would be hard because there are no “systems and organisational practises that support women in those leadership positions” (p. 18).

Additionally, this lack of support from the education authorities may have been one of the causes for the decline of the number of women in educational leadership. According to Sanal (2008), lack of support of women’s leadership is a major barrier to women’s advancement in Turkey, hence, “women who seek leadership positions face barriers and often give up because they become overwhelmed in dealing with obvious barriers” (p. 385). Sanal’s explanation relates well to the participants. The participants who changed their career might have given up because of the lack of support from the education authorities.

On the other hand, it might have been that the staff at the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission may not have had the necessary resources to meet the needs of the participants. In this regard, it is suggested from this finding that the necessary supportive structures, such as mentoring and principal’s networks, be set in place to assist and support women leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools.

### **5.3 SOCIAL STRUCTURES**

#### **5.3.1 Socialisation into gendered roles**

The findings in this study indicate that socialisation into gendered roles greatly impacted on the participants’ confidence. Lack of confidence is well documented (Biklen, 1980; Coleman, 2001, 2002, 2005; Cubillo & Brown, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1987). This finding is similar to previous research on women in developing countries (Akao, 2008; Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Celikten, 2005). Their lack of confidence at the initial stage of appointment

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may in fact relate to what Cubillo and Brown (2003) termed as the fear of success or failure. The fear of success or failure is an internal barrier (Biklen, 1980; Cubillo & Brown, 2003) that may be due to socialisation and sex role stereotyping (Shakeshaft, 1987).

In the context of this study, several reasons other than their fear of success or failure may well justify their lack of confidence. Shakeshaft (1987) pinpointed that women should not be blamed for their lack of confidence, but “rather the social structure of society that is the root cause of inequities” (p. 83). Shakeshaft’s suggestion may well be true for these participants. The socialisation of these women into stereotyped gender roles in the private sphere, (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Shakeshaft, 1987) compounded by the dominant male patriarchal society (Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005 ; Celikten, 2005; Oplatka, 2006) and the impact of Christianity and traditional beliefs on these women (Akao, 2008; Donald et al., 2002; Kilavanwa, 2004; Oplatka, 2006; Strachan et al., 2007; Strachan, 2002, 2005, 2008) may contribute to augment their lack of confidence.

Moreover, women’s place in the society has not exposed them to the public sphere where they can acquire administration and management skills (Akao, 2008; Aladejana & Aladejana, 2005; Celikten, 2005; Eagly, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1987), which may contribute to their passiveness (Celikten, 2005). Consequently, their passiveness may have led them to believe that male leadership is the norm (Celikten, 2005; Eagly, 2007; Shakeshaft, 1987) contributing to their lack of confidence. More importantly, their lack of confidence may be seen as the cultural norm of big man leadership, because this type of leadership relegates women to the roles of the domestic sphere and to be subservient to the big man (Douglas, 1998; Sahlins, 1963). Additionally, their lack of confidence might be related to their assumptions that taking up leadership roles would mean tapping into the male domains of the public sphere, and might be perceived by these women leaders as stepping out of their culturally prescribed roles (Strachan et al., 2007).

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Most participants in this study expressed their lack of confidence at the initial stage of their appointment as leaders. Two women principals however, were very confident and indicated that they had no problems with their self esteem. Previous research has shown that women leaders from a patriarchal society tend to lead and behave like men, in order to assert their authority (Celikten, 2005; Eagly & Johannesen-Schmidt, 2001; Kilavanwa, 2004; Oplatka, 2006) and for them to be accepted as leaders (Eagly, 2007; Kilavanwa, 2004). Kilavanwa's (2004) explanation of women's position in Papua New Guinea might relate to the women in this study. She notes that:

Women's marginalization in the home and the big man society manipulates women and so when women have a chance of being above a man, they will not want to be seen as weak, emotional and irrational as is expected of women, but rather as strong as men. (p. 75)

There was a variation in the lack of confidence between those already in leadership positions, and the aspiring women leaders. That is, the lack of confidence was portrayed to a greater degree in the aspiring women leaders and particularly related to their lack of a qualification and leadership training. The lack of qualifications impacting on women's confidence has been noted in previous research (Coleman, 2002; Oplatka, 2006). Shakeshaft (1993) noted that women have a lower-self esteem than men when applying for leadership positions. They only apply when they are highly qualified compared to men. Thus, males get hired whether or not they are qualified because of the lack of applicants (Shakeshaft, 1993).

Another explanation for the aspiring women leaders' greater lack of confidence could be related to their lack of aspiration. Shakeshaft (1987) discusses that, "women aspire but organisational and societal barriers prevent women from acknowledging or acting up" (p. 86). Oplatka (2006) adds that cultural barriers and low education for women in developing countries further impede women's advancement. This might be true for these aspiring women leaders. Their aspirations to leadership positions

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could have been impeded by their lack of a tertiary qualification, leading to a greater lack of confidence than those already in leadership positions.

Therefore, to enhance leadership opportunities for women, this study recommends that the government considers providing more leadership training for women leader aspirants. The school principals, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, could provide ways, for example internship programmes, in which women aspirants in schools could be exposed to school administration. More importantly, the Education Authorities and the scholarship board could set aside a certain number of scholarships for women leader aspirants in educational leadership to provide them with the opportunity for further studies.

Work-life balance is another factor that impacts on the participants. The age of their own children and whether or not they had the support of their spouse affected their work-life balance. The participants in this study found balancing their family and career difficult. This finding is in agreement with the literature on work-life balance (Court, 2004; Leech, 2006; Limerick, 2001; Loder, 2005b; McLay, 2008; Moorosi, 2007; Sachs & Blackmore, 1998).

Nevertheless, women in dominant patriarchal societies, such as Vanuatu, may perceive their roles as a cultural obligation which they have to perform (Celikten, 2005; Coleman, 2002; McLay, 2008; Moorosi, 2007; Oplatka, 2006; Sanal, 2008). For instance, a majority of the participants indicated that they still had to play their role in doing housework after work. This supports other Melanesian literature on work-life balance (Akao, 2008; Kilavanwa, 2004). For example, Akao (2008) states:

...women are still expected to carry on their traditional roles ... This may impact on their ability to lead in schools because when there is a crisis at home, it is taken for granted that women leave what they are doing to solve the matter. (p. 111)

This might not be problematic for women in western countries, as chores

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may be shared equally between spouses (Coleman, 2002). In contrast, for women in dominant patriarchal societies, cultural expectations of women's prescribed roles inevitably eliminate any choices in the sharing of roles in the domestic spheres (Brown & Ralph, 1996; Celikten, 2005; Sanal, 2008). Hence, the participants in this study may have been socialised to think that they were culturally obliged to carry out most of the domestic chores, despite their workload. They have been socialised to "view the running of the home as part of their self-identities, whereas this has not been the case for males" (Sanal, 2008, p. 386). This explanation may well explain the participants' difficulties in balancing work and family. More importantly, the participants' Christian socialisation that women should be submissive to men as heads of the home by doing domestic chores, may have reinforced their work-life balance difficulties.

Participants' perception of their husbands as head of the family, and of the wife's appropriate roles, may be very hard to change because these perceptions have already been deeply rooted and embedded in the participants' lives as part of their socialisation (Donald et al., 2002; Moorosi, 2007; Sanal, 2008). Hence, work-life balance may be found to be more problematic for the participants of this study compared to that of other women leaders in developed nations.

### **5.3.2 Women's place in the society**

There was overt discrimination towards women as leaders that may be due to the cultural and traditional attitudes of both men and women in society. The forms of discrimination occurred as resentment, sexism/patronizing attitudes, nepotism and violence. This finding indicated that the discrimination faced by the participants varied according to the school context. The findings from this study reflect the prevalence of patriarchy in the Vanuatu culture and its impact on the participants' leadership experiences.

Resentment experienced by the participants might be because of their

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gender. This finding is in agreement with the literature (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007; Coleman, 2002; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993). However, the resentment experienced by the participants in this study seemed to occur to a greater extent than that experienced by western women. For example, one woman had stones thrown at her by male students, while another could not carry out any developments at her school as she was continuously discouraged by the chiefs and landowners. In addition, most women leaders faced rebellious attitudes from both male and female teachers. There were several aspects to the participants' discrimination.

Firstly, the type of resentment these women leaders experienced varied according to the school context. As already mentioned in Chapter Four, those women leaders in schools situated in urban areas of the main city did not face resentful attitudes to the same extent as those in the rural island schools. One explanation may be that cultural practices vary in each island (Strachan, 2008). In the urban schools these cultural practices and beliefs about women's prescribed roles may have changed over the years due to modernization and western influences, while in the rural areas, in particular the rural islands, patriarchy is still dominant and compounded by the influence of the chiefs on the community. This finding is different to Akao's (2008) on the discrimination faced by Solomon Islands women leaders. The women leaders in Akao's study did not face such adverse discrimination as the women leaders in this study. This may suggest that Vanuatu women's status in society is still very low and that women are largely subordinated by the patriarchal structure inherent in the culture. Much still needs to be done to change the attitudes and mind-sets of men and women towards women in leadership positions.

Secondly, the discrimination faced by the participants in this study suggests that Vanuatu women are less valued (Neidhardt & Carlin, 2003; Shakeshaft, 1987, 1993) than men, in leadership positions. This may be due to the way "power and authority are defined and exercised" (Neidhardt

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& Carlin, 2003, para. 23). More importantly, the cultural constructs of gender on how different roles are ascribed to both men and women in Vanuatu's society may have created what Shakeshaft (1987) terms the "ideology of patriarchy" (p. 94), or androcentrism. She elaborates:

Androcentrism is the practice of viewing the world and shaping reality from a male perspective. It is the elevation of the masculine to the level of the universal and the ideal and the honoring of men and the male principle above women and the female. This perception creates a belief in male superiority and a masculine value system in which female values, experiences, and behaviours are viewed as inferior. (p. 95)

Thus, the resentment faced by the participants may have been due to the perceptions and views of men, women and some male students who felt that the participants were not in their appropriate roles. Because Vanuatu's society is "an androcentric world, there is a woman's place and that place is less valued, less honored, less reinforced than man's place" (Shakeshaft, 1987, p. 95).

This study revealed that Vanuatu women leaders are sometimes prevented from taking up and continuing in leadership roles because of the violence imposed on them by the school community. This was particularly evident in the rural island schools. As already mentioned, two of the women principals in the rural schools were physically assaulted by the big men leaders in the school community, and had left their profession. This may account for the decline in the number of women principals from 2002, which was 8% (Strachan, 2002), to the current 3.9%.

The two participants from rural schools had similar experiences, in the sense that it was some members of the village community, in particular the big men of the community, who physically caused them harm (Kilavanwa, 2004; Narokobi, 1983). It might be assumed from this finding that there was a clash in the level of power sharing in decision-making between these women leaders and the big men leaders of the community. As such, there was resistance by the big men leaders in these village communities,

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as they feared losing control of their power in the community because of the fear of being managed by a woman (Blackmore & Sachs, 2007).

Additionally, the big men leaders may have felt threatened by a female trespassing into their domains. Violence against women leaders suggests that there was prejudice against these women leaders, in particular the two women principals in the rural island schools, Flora and Eva. As noted in their comments, the women who were physically assaulted had done much to develop the school in terms of student learning and school improvement. This may have caused the members of the community to resent them because “in a bigman society... men will not accept instructions from a woman” (Kilavanwa, 2004, p. 71).

While there has been documented evidence of violence affecting women in educational leadership in other developing countries, it was covert, such as domestic violence (Celikten, 2005). This finding exposes the harsh realities of women in educational leadership positions in the secondary schools of Vanuatu. This may suggest that women who aspire to educational leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools do so with much courage when taking up leadership roles because of the strong opposition they might get from the big men leaders in Vanuatu society. There needs to be more training and more awareness by the Vanuatu Department of Women’s Affairs and the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) in the rural areas of Vanuatu on the importance of having women participate in decision-making, both at the national and at the school level.

### **5.3.3 The wantok system**

The wantok system is an intricate network of cultural values of kinship and relationships within the community (Sanga & Walker, 2005; Tivinarlik & Wanat, 2006) that is common to Melanesia, in particular, the Solomon Islands, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. This has long been a cultural practice in Melanesia, prior to colonisation and missionisation, whereby

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communal reciprocal values of sharing are central in relationships (Tivinarlik & Wanat, 2006). Thus, according to Tivinarlik and Wanat (2006), the wantok system affects the way principals in secondary schools of Papua New Guinea lead. The authors reasoned that on the one hand, school leaders benefit from the support of relative wantoks. On the other hand, the wantok system may negatively influence the appointment processes of teachers in the sense that nepotism may influence decision-making. The findings of this study are very similar to Tivinarlik and Wanat's (2006) findings. While the wantok system is seen to have impacted negatively on the appointment processes of the teachers in Tivinarlik and Wanat's (2006) study, its impact on these participants seemed positive. The wantok system may have contributed positively to the appointment of the participants in this study, as a gateway to occupying leadership roles. Given that the wantok system is such a powerful influence in Melanesian leadership (Sanga & Walker, 2005) it is not surprising that influences of wantokism may have impacted on the decision-making of the appointment of the participants to leadership roles.

Secondly, the findings of this study also indicated that because of the wantok system the participants faced discrimination. There was discrimination noted against participants in urban schools, in which they were accused of favouring teachers from the same island. The participants did not get any support from their relative wantoks in this case, compared to the findings of Tivinarlik and Wanat (2006); rather, there seems to be an issue of inter-island rivalry. The same pattern of nepotism in the form of inter-island rivalry was observed by participants in rural schools, but to a greater extent, and ultimately resulting in physical assault. Not only was inter-island rivalry observed by participants from rural schools, but so was tribal rivalry.

Nepotism, in the form of inter-island and tribal rivalry as a result of the Melanesian wantok system, illuminates a very important aspect that might have been the underlying causal factor in their discrimination. Jealousy

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may arise as a result of competition for resources such as power and wealth. The phenomenon of competition for resources is highlighted in the Melanesian literature (Kidu, 2000; Liloqula, 2000; Macintyre, 2000; Tonissen, 2000). The competition for resources increases the competition between groups of individuals, resulting in ethnic conflicts, such as the ethnic crisis in the Solomon Islands (Liloqula, 2000) and the increase in the crime rate in Papua New Guinea (Macintyre, 2000; Tonissen, 2000). Hence, the participants may have been discriminated against as a result of the wantok system, because of the competition for resources such as power and wealth. This affected their ability to lead in schools.

#### **5.3.4 Christianity**

Christianity is found to be a very powerful influence on the participants' leadership practices, impacting in various ways. This finding is in agreement with the literature on Melanesian women and Christianity (Barnes, 2000; Douglas, 2002a; Jolly, 1996; Miles, 1998; Paina, 2000; Pollard, 2000; Saovana-Sprigs, 2000; Strachan et al., 2007; Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, 2004) that describes the influence of Christianity on Melanesian women due to colonisation and missionisation (Douglas, 1998, 2002a, 2002b, 2003; Huffer & Molisa, 1999; Jolly, 1996, 2003, 2005; Lindstrom, 1990; Miles, 1998; Molisa, 1999; Paina, 2000; Piau-Linch, 2007; Strachan et al., 2007). The findings in this study regarding the influence of Christianity are twofold. Firstly, that Christianity influences the participants to be forgiving, honest and submissive in their leadership practices. This poses challenges. It exacerbates the male hegemonies leading further to the subjugation of Ni-Vanuatu women. This supports Miles (1998) who stated that despite having abandoned much of the inequitable treatment of women after missionisation, "subordination, serviceability, and inequality remain the faith of most Ni-Vanuatu women" (p. 170).

Secondly, the participants perceived that Christianity supported their

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leadership. As noted in the comments, prayer was the main component in harnessing strength, protection from black magic, and guidance from God. This finding was not obvious in the international body of literature on women in educational leadership. However, an interesting aspect to this finding may be that use of prayer as a lever and an empowerment tool by the participants in this study shows a pattern similar to women in educational leadership elsewhere, particularly women in African-American minority groups (Al-Khalifa, 1988; Doughty, 1980). Consequently, the findings from this study suggest that Christianity may be an empowerment mechanism for women in educational leadership in Vanuatu, because it helps to “build solidarity, confidence and leadership or managerial skills that can help loosen hegemonic controls over their bodies and thinking” (Douglas, 2002a, p. 12).

#### **5.4 INDIVIDUALS’ PERCEPTIONS OF WOMEN AS LEADERS**

The individuals in the school community played a major role in transmitting to the participants of this study the norms and beliefs of how Vanuatu culture views women in leadership roles. The findings in this study showed that the impact of the various individuals in the school community on the participants differed for each participant. Individuals who impacted on the leadership experiences of the participants involved female teachers, male teachers, chiefs and big men, such as landowners in the rural communities, and some male students.

##### **5.4.1 Female Teachers**

The findings of this study indicated that one major obstacle to women leaders of Vanuatu is the attitude of some women. The participants indicated that they encountered difficulties with other women teachers. It would seem to be from the findings that when a woman takes up a leadership role in the school, other women tend to develop negative attitudes towards her leadership. This phenomenon of women opposing

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other women is nothing new, as it has been noted in other studies (Celikten, 2005). However, the rhetoric of disunity amongst women in Vanuatu has been used by Ni-Vanuatu men to belittle Ni-Vanuatu women, to dismiss them as incompetent (Douglas, 2002). Blackmore (2002, p. 60) argues that “criticisms of women in leadership, by other women, is viewed as disloyal and subversive of the feminist principle of valuing women”. In this regard, there is a danger in women opposing other women, as it might slow down the advancement of women in Vanuatu society and may lead further to their suppression and subjugation by men. This finding suggests that for there to be progress in the advancement of women in educational leadership, it is imperative for women in the school community to participate and work collaboratively with other women who are in positions of authority, because supporting women leaders is not about promoting one individual woman but rather Vanuatu women as a whole.

#### **5.4.2 Male Teachers**

The findings indicated that many male teachers, with some exceptions, were very supportive of the participants’ leadership. This finding does not agree with the international literature on male teachers not supporting women leaders (Coleman, 2001, 2003; Skrla et al., 2000). For example, there was strong resentment of female leadership by male colleagues in Coleman’s (2000) study. This was not the case in this study. This is interesting, because given the patriarchal nature of society in Vanuatu one would not expect such a degree of support coming from male teachers. Presumably, due to the traditional beliefs of women’s prescribed roles in society, it should have been the other way round, with women supporting women as leaders and of male teachers opposing women leaders. It is also worth mentioning that male teachers may be becoming aware of the issues of gender equality, and may seem to be changing their perceptions in accepting women as leaders. If this speculation is correct, then that would indeed be the beginning of a new era in the advancement of Vanuatu women in educational leadership.

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The finding of male teachers supporting female leadership is also not supported in the literature from other Melanesian contexts, such as the Solomon Islands and Papua New Guinea (Akao, 2008; Kilavanwa, 2004). It would seem that Vanuatu male teachers, more than the male teachers in the Solomon Islands (personal communication, John Sisiolo, February 5, 2009) and Papua New Guinea, are supportive of women leading schools. This might be noted as an interesting difference between the cultural attitudes and beliefs of men in the three Melanesian contexts.

Conversely, another category of Vanuatu males does not seem to be consistent with the attitudes of the male teachers as mentioned. Some male teachers, some chiefs, landowners and some male students resented female authority. An explanation for their resentment could be that they view women leaders as going against the norm of big man leadership culture (Douglas, 1998; Jolly, 1991; White, 2006). According to Douglas (1998) this type of leadership acknowledges only men as leaders. Therefore, their resentment might have been because they “place the big man as the dominant culture and women as the subordinate group” (Kilavanwa, 2004, p. 22).

## **5.5 LEADERSHIP STYLES**

The findings indicated that the commonly recurring themes in the participants' comments seemed to be caring, nurturing, building relations, serving, participative decision-making, organisational development and orientation towards student learning. These descriptors of their leadership styles are popularized in the literature as women's ways of leading (Coleman, 2000; Court, 1994; Eagly et al., 1992; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007). In particular, most of them seem to show a collaborative leadership style that involves others in decision-making.

These descriptions of women's ways of leading are important to school development (Blackmore, 2002; Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007). While

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these leadership styles are very pertinent to the development of Vanuatu's education system, there is also the contention that the participants might have portrayed such leadership styles because of their socialisation (Normore & Jean-Marie, 2007). The literature on women's ways of leading in Melanesia highlighted this fact, suggesting that Melanesian women's ways of leading are more characteristic of servant leadership (Akao, 2008; Strachan et al., 2007). Because of the cultural values of kinship and reciprocity as part of the wantok system, the leadership styles portrayed by Melanesian leaders tend to be more closely related with servant leadership (Sanga & Walker, 2005). Building relationships is central in Melanesian communities because people are the main resources (Sanga & Walker, 2005), implying that the participants' leadership styles might have been based on building relationships, which in a broader sense involves serving and putting the needs of others first (Sanga & Walker, 2005; Strachan et al., 2007). Thus, the participants' leadership styles might be seen as suited to the context, because women's ways of leading often involve using language that encompasses building up relationships with members of the community, including the students and parents, thus providing a caring and conducive environment for learning (Shakeshaft, 1987). Women's ways of leading a school are associated with the ethic of care (Reinharz, 1992).

Moreover, the impact of Christianity and traditional beliefs of women's prescribed roles in society might have influenced the participants' ways of leading. Although servant leadership may be an advantage in the Melanesian communities, as it involves building up relationships, it might work to disadvantage women leaders in Vanuatu. In particular, servant leadership may imply that the inequalities that women face, and which are inherent in the systems and social structures, are still not addressed or challenged, leading further to the subordination of Vanuatu women.

This finding suggests that in order to advance the status of women in Vanuatu society, deconstructing male hegemonic inequalities is of great

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significance. In this regard, women who are in positions of authority in secondary schools require more awareness of how their leadership styles could aid in achieving parity.

## **5.6 HOW MIGHT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP BE DEVELOPED?**

The findings indicated a need for the development of women's educational leadership skills. As already mentioned, the socialisation of the participants in the study, and the lack of exposure of aspirants and women leaders to the administration and management of schools, resulted in their lack of confidence. Furthermore, the findings indicated that the participants were thrown into the deep end with little leadership experience. The literature suggests that mentoring might be one way forward to develop women's leadership (Allen et al., 1995; Ehrich, 1994; Grove & Montgomery, 2005; Holmes, 2005; Lewis & Fagenson, 1995; Mendez-Morse, 2004; Noe, 1988), in Vanuatu secondary schools in particular.

There is widespread evidence of mentoring being used as a lever to advance women (Daresh, 1995). Firstly, mentoring can provide access for women into educational leadership positions in schools, as well as professional growth (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Daresh, 1995; Ehrich, 1994). This might build the confidence of women leaders and aspirants as indicated in this study. Because mentoring involves a more experienced person (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Daresh, 1995), the question remains as to who might be suitable to provide encouragement, guidance and offer new skills to new principals and aspiring women leaders (Bush & Coleman, 1995), especially within the Vanuatu context, where women in leadership positions in education are few. School principals, therefore, may be a source of mentors for aspiring women leaders (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Ehrich, 1994). Because of their experiences and their authority in the schools, school principals play a major role in ensuring the success of mentorship programmes (Bush & Coleman, 1995).

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Secondly, mentoring provides support and care (Bush & Coleman, 1995; Ehrich, 1994; Enomoto et al., 2000; Growe & Montgomery, 2000) to women. The findings of this study indicated a significant lack of support by the education system of Vanuatu for women leaders. Some of the participants in the study indicated their frustrations at the lack of support by the education authorities. Therefore, it is suggested from this study that formal mentoring programmes be provided and implemented in the secondary schools of Vanuatu, to advance women leaders and women leader aspirants. The school principals and deputy principals in Vanuatu secondary schools must provide access for women into leadership roles and make themselves available as mentors to aspiring women leaders. This is because “failure to identify and utilize talented women reduces effectiveness, and it may result in the organisation not being able to meet equal employment opportunity or affirmative action goals” (Noe, 1988, p. 65).

The aspiring women leaders were concerned about their lack of qualifications. Shakeshaft (1987) suggests several strategies for the professional development of women. Firstly, women should be recruited into certified administration programmes. Providing such programmes for Vanuatu women leaders and aspiring women leaders is very necessary and would greatly assist in addressing the under-representation of women in educational leadership. Provisions should be made by the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu for the recruitment of women into short-term administrative training, with leave from work and on a regular stipend or allowances. This is consistent with the Gender in Equity Education policy that was developed in 2005. It is suggested from this study that the Government of Vanuatu, through the Ministry of Education, makes available such short-term leadership training for women by integrating educational leadership programmes for women into the existing structures, such as the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE).

Secondly, as noted by Shakeshaft (1987), women should be provided with

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internship opportunities. Internship opportunities involve short-term training experiences where aspiring leaders are given the opportunity to train as leaders in schools. Internship opportunities may be another strategy to tackle the fear of failure or success, as indicated by the participants in the findings.

Thirdly, women's networking as a means of support for women leaders and aspirants is vital for women leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools. This agrees with the literature in advancing women (Ehrich, 1994; Growe & Montgomery, 2000). Currently, there is no evidence of such support networks for women leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools. Although support networks created by the Vanuatu National Council of Women (VNCW) and the Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs exist for women leaders in politics, it is important that such networks also be available for women in educational leadership positions. Networking allows women leaders in schools to share their experiences and difficulties with other school leaders, in order to find solutions (Shakeshaft, 1987).

More importantly, changing some attitudes of Vanuatu people may play a pivotal role in changing the attitudes of individuals in society towards women leaders. According to Shakeshaft (1987), change begins at the school level:

First, teachers and administrators must be made aware of sexist attitudes, teaching materials, and teaching strategies that limit female students; next, students must be allowed to learn and grow in an educational environment that is nonsexist. (pp. 139-140)

The findings of this study illustrate the barriers faced by the participants, and demonstrate how Vanuatu society is structured. These attitudes and beliefs towards gendered roles are hard to change; however, if the Vanuatu government is committed to ensuring that equality is achieved, as enshrined in its constitution, then change is necessary at the school level. The school curriculum should be reviewed and changed to remove any sexist materials or language. Gender awareness must be promoted in

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schools by having in place policies that disallow sexist practices towards female teachers, female students, and women leaders in schools, by, for example, abolishing the use of sexist comments.

## **5.7 SUMMARY**

This chapter has discussed the findings from the study, juxtaposing the findings of this study with the literature. The findings indicated that the leadership experiences of the participants, both the women leaders and the aspiring women leaders, varied depending on the context of the school and the type of individuals with whom they interacted and worked with in their schools. More importantly, the study has highlighted some of the cultural barriers to women's advancement in educational leadership. Such cultural barriers exist in the education systems, the social structures in society, and at the individual level.

In the next chapter I present the conclusions and implications of the study and areas for further research.

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## **CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION**

### **6.1 INTRODUCTION**

This chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study.

Recommendations for women's advancement and the need for further research are mentioned, followed by the limitations of the study and the conclusion.

### **6.2 SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS**

This study has added new knowledge to the international body of literature on Melanesian women's leadership experiences. The study has shown that Melanesian women, in particular Vanuatu women, although sharing some similarities to western women in their experiences in educational leadership, their experiences are unique due to culture. It is found from this study, that culture had a significant impact on the leadership experiences of the participants. More importantly, powerful forces in Vanuatu society such as patriarchy and Christianity influence greatly how Vanuatu women lead in the secondary schools.

This study shows that Vanuatu women leaders are impeded and often give up their leadership roles because of the barriers inherent in the education system, such as lack of transparency in appointments, lack of selection policies and lack of support from the education authorities. Because of the big man culture, Vanuatu women experience discrimination such as resentment, nepotism and violence. Exacerbating that is the influence of Christianity that causes women to lead differently compared to the women in the western context. This study found that Christianity causes women leaders to adopt a more servant leadership style, which causes them to become more subservient in their roles as leaders. The big man culture also causes work-life balance to be problematic for the participants. This study has shown that women leaders in Vanuatu find it difficult to balance their career with their family. This is because the participants were

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socialized into gendered roles. That is, they felt obliged to carry out their dual roles in the domestic sphere and work. More importantly, the attitude of each individual in society impacted on the participants. The study showed a great need for the support of women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools. It is recommended from this study that mentoring and leadership programmes be made available to women.

### **6.3 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

Several limitations to the study were noted while carrying out the study. Firstly, the geographical distribution and isolation of the secondary schools of Vanuatu caused access difficulties and so restricted the range and number of participants. Collecting data from women leaders in other schools would have given a more accurate representation of the diversity of culture in each island of Vanuatu and how that affects women leaders. Nevertheless, the current study shows a fair representation of Vanuatu culture and its impact on women's leadership in secondary schools.

Secondly, data on the statistics of women leaders in Vanuatu secondary schools was not readily available and difficult to acquire. Moreover, the statistics presented in this study on the number of women leaders in schools may not be a true representation of the number of women leaders, because the figures fluctuate and may not be stable, due to unforeseen changes in schools.

Thirdly, it was difficult and expensive to organise the focus group discussion. A suitable time had to be organised, which unfortunately had to be after hours, in order to include all participants. Having focus group discussions at this time was not suitable as the participants were exhausted from their workload at the end of the day and consequently found it difficult to contribute effectively to the discussion.

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## **6.4 FURTHER RESEARCH**

Firstly, further research could be done on the same topic but on a larger scale, to include all women in Vanuatu secondary schools.

Secondly, further research could be done to look at what selection criteria were used to appoint existing school principals.

Thirdly, further research could be carried out on the same topic but looking at the experiences of women leaders in private schools.

## **6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS**

A number of recommendations are suggested from the findings of this study. Firstly, that appropriate policies be formulated by the Ministry of Education and the Teaching Service Commission, for the selection and appointment of school principals of Vanuatu.

Secondly, formal policies which make provisions for gender equity in educational leadership positions in secondary schools should be formulated and implemented. This would mean that there should be both genders in leadership positions in the secondary schools of Vanuatu.

Thirdly, support networks for women leaders in secondary schools could be set in place for their assistance. This could involve, for example, a women leaders' newsletter, or using the existing gender officer at the Ministry of Education to be the support person for women leaders in secondary schools.

Fourthly, formal mentoring programmes for aspiring women leaders and first time school principals could be set in place at the school level. For this to eventuate, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu formulate policies and implement such programmes for women in schools.

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Lastly, it is recommended that the Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the Vanuatu Institute of Teacher Education (VITE), integrate educational leadership programmes that would assist aspiring women leaders in attaining the necessary qualifications to be able to take up leadership roles in the secondary schools of Vanuatu.

## **6.6 CONCLUSION**

The study, one of the first of its kind on women in educational leadership in the secondary schools of Vanuatu, has revealed and exposed much of what is happening behind the scenes in the lives of women in educational leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools.

This study is very significant for the furthering of Vanuatu's educational development because "within the Vanuatu context, the knowledge of education is often that of consultants, foreign experts, and advisors" (Sanga & Niroa, 2004, p. 14). Foreign knowledge of education from consultants and foreign experts does not seem to be impacting positively in the development of Vanuatu's education system (Sanga & Niroa, 2004). If local and contextualized knowledge of Vanuatu's education is shared through research, future policy can be informed, based on this knowledge. Since this study shares the experiences and contextualized knowledge of women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools, the findings will be significant for the development of future educational policies. This study will be of assistance in informing both the formal and non-formal education sectors in policy development, in particular, the Ministry of Education of Vanuatu, the Teaching Service Commission (TSC), the Department of Youth and Sports, the Vanuatu Rural Training Centres Association (VRDTCA) and other non-governmental organisations.

More importantly, this study aims to empower Vanuatu women through research. It aims to bring out the voices of Vanuatu women leaders in secondary schools on how their leadership has been affected by Vanuatu's

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culture and of ways in which the leadership of Vanuatu women could be developed. In light of this, the study may contribute significantly towards the development of gender policies and perspectives in the government departments of Vanuatu. Organisations such as the Vanuatu Department of Women's Affairs, VNCW, the DWC, and international bilateral aid donors such as the UN, Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and NZAID may also benefit from the findings of this study.

Additionally, this study will contribute to the literature on women and educational leadership in Melanesia and, ultimately, the international body of literature relating to women's leadership in developing countries and the advancement of Melanesian women. It has been noted while carrying out this study that there is a lack of literature on women and educational leadership in Melanesia.

It is hoped that what has been learned about the experiences of these participants will result in changes that help achieve parity for women in educational leadership. It is also hoped that this study will contribute not only to the development of women in educational leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools, but also to the position of women in politics and the government public sectors. Although the study has focused on women in educational leadership, the same challenges are experienced by women leaders in the public milieu. As Grace Mera Molisa expressed:

The sooner national leaders, who are men, realize that our women are our most valuable asset and therefore should be educated and treated right, the sooner we can begin to move in the direction of creating the kind of Vanuatu society that future generations can look back on and thank us for. (as cited in Randell, 2003, p. 39)

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## **APPENDICES:**

### **Appendix A: Letter to the interview participants**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Re: Invitation to participate in the research project**

My name is Daisy Warsal, a Ni-Vanuatu woman. I have been given permission by the Ministry of Education to undertake this research. I am currently on leave from teaching and studying towards my Master of Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. As part of this study, I am writing a four-paper thesis which seeks to determine the impact of culture on women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools.

You have been selected as one of the participants in this research project, and as such I wish to invite you to participate in this research project. The research will involve one face to face interview at your school in May 2008. The interview will be conducted in English and Bislama and will be tape recorded and transcribed soon after. The interview is expected to last up to one and a half hours. A copy of the transcript will be sent to you so that you will have the opportunity to confirm its accuracy and to add any details you deem relevant. I will also be conducting a focus group interview with five to six aspiring women leaders at your school.

The rationale for this research is that women are very much under represented in educational leadership positions in Vanuatu secondary schools. While the Vanuatu government has ratified the CEDAW conventions and has as one of its policies to ensure gender equity in educational leadership positions, there is still a large disparity. Culture is

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believed to be a major factor in this gender inequality. This study seeks to describe the experiences of the women in educational leadership positions in Vanuatu secondary schools and to look at how culture impacts on their leadership and on those women aspiring to gain leadership positions in secondary schools.

The research will adhere strictly to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations (2005). Should you agree to participate, you are able to withdraw from the project at any stage up to the point that you confirm the accuracy of your interview transcript. Withdrawal from the project after that point would be highly problematic as data from your responses will have been used and will have already influenced my thinking.

Your right to anonymity and confidentiality will be respected during the research process. Any information shared will be solely used for academic purposes, unless your permission is obtained for other uses.

I am also aware of how busy you are and apologize for any inconveniences I may cause during the research. However, I do hope you will consider being part of it. The research is being supervised by Dr Jane Strachan (Associate Professor PHD), Department of Professional Studies in Education, School of Education, University of Waikato and Michele Morrison, Senior Lecturer in Education, Department of Professional Studies, School of Education, University of Waikato. If you are willing to participate, please indicate this by signing the consent form below and sending it back to me by 20 March 2008.

I will contact you upon the receipt of this letter to discuss my research further. In the meantime I can be contacted by email: or you can also contact my supervisors Dr Jane Strachan at [jane@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jane@waikato.ac.nz) and Michele Morrison at [mmorris@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mmorris@waikato.ac.nz)

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

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Yours faithfully,

Daisy Warsal.

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## **Appendix B: Letter to focus group participant**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_

### **Re: Invitation to participate in the research project**

My name is Daisy Warsal, a Ni-Vanuatu woman. I have been given permission by the Ministry of Education to undertake this research. I am currently on leave from teaching and studying towards my Master of Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. As part of this study, I am writing a four-paper thesis which seeks to determine the impact of culture on women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools.

You have been selected as one of the participants in this research project, and as such I wish to invite you to participate in this research project. You will be participating in a focus group discussion along with five other aspiring women leaders from other schools. This will take place in May after the school holidays. The discussion will be conducted in English and Bislama and will base on several discussion topics prescribed by the researcher. This will require you and other aspiring women leaders to discuss ways in which you think women's leadership could be developed in the Vanuatu secondary schools. You will then record these discussions on the sheets of papers provided. The discussion is expected to last up to one and a half hours. A copy of the summarized group discussions will be sent to you so that you will have the opportunity to confirm its accuracy and to add any details you deem relevant.

The rationale for this research is that women are very much under represented in educational leadership positions in Vanuatu secondary schools. While the Vanuatu government has ratified the CEDAW conventions and has as one of its policies to ensure gender equity in

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educational leadership positions, there is still a large disparity. Culture is believed to be a major factor in this gender inequality. This study seeks to describe the experiences of the women in educational leadership positions in Vanuatu secondary schools and to look at how culture impacts on their leadership and on those women aspiring to gain leadership positions in secondary schools.

The research will adhere strictly to the University of Waikato Human Research Ethics Regulations (2005). Should you agree to participate, you are able to withdraw from the project at any stage up to the point that you confirm the accuracy of your interview transcript. Withdrawal from the project after that point would be highly problematic as data from your responses will have been used and will have already influenced my thinking.

Your right to anonymity and confidentiality will be respected during the research process. Any information shared will be solely used for academic purposes, unless your permission is obtained for other uses.

I am also aware of how busy you are and apologize for any inconveniences I may cause during the research. However, I do hope you will consider being part of it. The research is being supervised by Dr Jane Strachan (Associate Professor PHD), Department of Professional Studies in Education, School of Education, University of Waikato and Michele Morrison, Senior Lecturer in Education, Department of Professional Studies, School of Education, University of Waikato. If you are willing to participate, please indicate this by signing the consent form below and sending it back to me by 20 March 2008.

I will contact you upon the receipt of this letter to discuss my research further. In the meantime I can be contacted by email: [dw9@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dw9@waikato.ac.nz) or you can also contact my supervisors Dr Jane Strachan at [jane@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:jane@waikato.ac.nz) and Michele Morrison at [mmorris@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mmorris@waikato.ac.nz)

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Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours faithfully,

Daisy Warsal.

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**Appendix C: Letter to the Director Secondary Education, Vanuatu.**

The Director Secondary Education  
Ministry of Education,  
Port-Vila,  
Vanuatu.

Dear Sir,

**Re: Permission to carry out research in the Secondary Schools.**

My name is Daisy Warsal, a Ni-Vanuatu woman. I am currently on leave from teaching and studying towards my Master of Educational Leadership at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. As part of this study, I am writing a four-paper thesis which seeks to determine the impact of culture on women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary schools.

As such I wish to seek your permission to allow me as a researcher to have access to the secondary schools of Vanuatu. I wish to interview the women in educational leadership positions in these respective schools. I am also intending to have focus group interviews with aspiring women leaders in schools in Port-Vila.

The rationale for this research is that women are very much under represented in educational leadership positions in Vanuatu secondary schools. While the Vanuatu government has ratified the CEDAW conventions and has as one of its policies to ensure gender equity in educational leadership positions there is still a large disparity. Culture is believed to be a major factor to this gender inequality. The study seeks to describe the experiences of the women in educational leadership positions in the secondary schools and how culture impacts on their leadership and on those aspiring women leaders into gaining leadership positions in secondary schools.

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I intend to spend up to one and a half hours with each participant and an additional hour with the focus group participants. I will take careful considerations so as not to interfere with the participant's normal teaching timetable. The interviews will be conducted during their free hours or after school at a suitable venue.

Data collected during the interviews will be kept confidential and participation is voluntary. Consent may be withdrawn at any time during the research until the accuracy of transcripts has been confirmed. Pseudonyms will be used to disguise the identity of participants and the schools will not be identified in the research findings.

Research findings will inform my thesis and one copy of my thesis will be submitted to your department. However, the participants will have full ownership and copy right of the interview tapes and transcripts. It is my hope that the research will be of benefit to the development of women in educational leadership positions in Vanuatu secondary schools.

The research is being supervised by Dr Jane Strachan (Associate Professor PHD), Department of Professional Studies, School of Education, University of Waikato and Michele Morrison, Senior Lecturer in Education, Department of Professional Studies in Education, School of Education, University of Waikato. I will commence my data gathering in May and conclude in June 2008.

I will contact you upon the receipt of this letter to discuss further on my research .In the meantime I can be contacted by email: [dw9@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:dw9@waikato.ac.nz)

Thank you for your consideration of this matter.

Yours faithfully,

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Daisy Warsal.

CC: Director General of Education.

CC: PEO SHEFA

CC: PEO SANMA

CC: PEO TAFEA

CC: School Principals

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## Appendix D: Written Consent Form for Interview

I, the undersigned..... (full name)  
**agree to/do not agree to (circle your choice)** consent to participate in the above study. I have been fully informed of the nature of the study and of its potential benefits and harm. I fully understand that I will be involved in one face to face interview with the researcher where I will be answering a series of open-ended questions. The duration of the face to face interview will be one and a half hours long and this will be audio-taped and transcribed. Thereafter, I will be provided with a copy of the transcripts for review and any additional comment that I deem relevant. I will have full ownership of the raw data and any changes made to the transcripts will have to be authorized by me. Raw data will be archived and used by the researcher in the writing of her Masters thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications, for example in conferences presentations and articles.

I understand that I may withdraw at any time up to the point of confirming the accuracy of the transcript. I may also decline to answer any questions asked during the interview.

I also understand that my confidentiality and privacy will be respected and that pseudonyms for my name and school will be used so that neither I nor the school will be identified. I understand that five years after the conclusion of this research, the researcher will destroy any personal details which enable my identification.

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I also understand that at any time during the research, I have the right to make any formal complaint to the researcher and/or her supervisors. If these are not resolved to my satisfaction, I may withdraw from the study and make formal complaint to the Chairperson of the Department of Research Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato.

Signed.....

Date.....

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**Appendix E: Written Consent Form for Focus Group discussion.**

I, the undersigned..... (full name)

**agree to/do not agree to (circle your choice)** consent to participate in the above study. I have been fully informed of the nature of the study and of its potential benefits and harm. I fully understand that I will be involved in a focus group discussion with the researcher where I will be brainstorming and/or discussing a series of questions on the aspect of leadership development for women in the schools. The duration of the focus group discussion will be one and a half hours long and this will be audio-taped and transcribed. Thereafter, I will be provided with a copy of the transcripts for review and any additional comment that I deem relevant. I will have full ownership of the raw data and any changes made to the transcripts will have to be authorized by me. Raw data will be archived and used by the researcher in the writing of her Masters thesis and any subsequent scholarly publications, for example in conferences presentations or articles.

I understand that I may withdraw at any time up to the point of confirming the accuracy of the transcript. I may also decline to answer any questions asked during the interview.

I also understand that my confidentiality and privacy will be respected and that pseudonyms for my name and school will be used so that neither I nor the school will be identified. I understand that five years after the

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conclusion of this research, the researcher will destroy any personal details which enable my identification.

I also understand that at any time during the research, I have the right to make any formal complaint to the researcher and/or her supervisors. If my complaints are not resolved to my satisfaction. I may withdraw from the study and make formal complaint to the Chairperson of the Department of Research Ethics Committee of the University of Waikato.

Signed.....

Date.....

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## **Appendix F: INTERVIEW SCHEDULE**

### **1. Tell me about yourself and how you became a principal?**

- What do you enjoy about being a principal?
- What leadership positions have you held in your teaching career?
- How long have you been in your current position?
- Is this your first principalship?

### **2. What motivated you and gave you the confidence to become a leader?**

- Role models- family/colleagues
- Leadership opportunities – successful practise in educational and other context
- Has anybody encouraged you or who has encouraged you along the way?
- Are they men or women?

### **3. What is important to you in your leadership?**

- What are your priorities?
- How do you like to work with people?
- Christianity?
- Black magic?

### **4. What have been some of the challenges for you in your journey to principalship?**

- Appointment processes?
- Male attitudes ? partner/
- Your island ?– Tanna –Ambrym conflicts
- Balancing family and career?
- Violence

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**5. What are some of the challenges that you face in your daily leadership- in your school? As a Vanuatu Principal?**

- Work overload
- Isolation
- How male members of staff perceive authority
- Sex-stereotyping
- Ranking of schools where do women principals come in?

**6. How do you believe you have been supported in your career?**

- Family?
- Professional colleagues?
- MOE?
- Women? Men? Or both?

**7. In what ways might women's leadership be developed?**

4. How have you supported women colleagues to develop their leadership?
5. What advice would you give to aspiring women principals?

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## **Appendix G: Focus Group Interview Schedule**

1. Can you tell me about yourself and your schools?
2. What are some of the barriers that stop you from getting into a leadership position at your schools?
3. What are some of the skills that you feel that you lack or are important for you to become a leader?
4. What are some of the ways which you think women's leadership could be develop.

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## Appendix H: Interview Statement

Greeting,

My name is Daisy Warsal. I am from Tanna but married to Santo with 3 children. I used to be a secondary school teacher at Malapoa College and then got an NZAID scholarship to study overseas. I am studying towards a Masters of Educational Leadership degree at the University of Waikato in New Zealand. I am undertaking this research study to find out ways in which culture affects women's leadership in Vanuatu secondary school and make recommendations for the support of women's leadership in Vanuatu.

Before we begin I would like to inform you again, that I will be recording any information on tape. If you feel that you do not want to answer any of the questions ask, please tell me and I will move on to the next question. However, I want to know if you feel that you:

- Understand the purpose and nature of this research?
- Understand the potential harm and benefits of your participation to the study?
- Have any questions pertaining to the study before we start
- Are ready to start the interview process?