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**Reconciling *Kastom* and Modernity
in Contemporary Vanuatu**

A thesis
submitted in fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree
of
Master of Social Sciences
at
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by
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Abstract

Drawing on fieldwork data and relevant anthropological literature, this thesis examines how potential tensions between the categories of modernity and *kastom* are reconciled in contemporary Vanuatu. Following an outline of how the category of *kastom* emerged through colonial encounters, the contemporary ‘mix’ between the indigenous and non-indigenous categories is considered. This research further considers the breakdown of an ‘indigenous/exogenous’, ‘old/new’, or ‘past/present’ dichotomy, and shows how the juxtaposition of these concepts offers a new way of understanding the world - not necessarily in opposition, but not always in agreement.

The analysis is presented in four stages. First is the use of *kastom* in Vanuatu’s governance systems, highlighting its origin in traditional leadership systems, to its repression in the colonial Condominium era, followed by its integration into the new state at independence (Lini, 1980). Second is the investigation of the use of *kastom* today, highlighting the ‘wrong’ and ‘unacceptable’ ‘mixing’ in Port Vila. This leads to the third, involving a demonstration of a sort of ‘mixing’ of indigenous and non-indigenous practices in parliamentary politics. The case study of MP Ralph Regenvanu and his recent land reform package is presented and discussed in terms of ‘indigenous cosmopolitanism’ (Goodale 2006), and as an exemplar of a ‘Janus-faced’ approach to modernity in Vanuatu (Taylor 2010). In the Conclusion, the research is considered in relation to the analysis of *kastom* by White (1993) and Lindstrom (1992) to show the multiple ways in which *kastom* can be tied together with things ‘not-*kastom*’ in contemporary Vanuatu.

Keywords: Vanuatu, *kastom*, modernity, Ralph Regenvanu, Melanesia, politics

Dedication

To my parents, Marinette Kanegai Mahit & late Alain Jimmy Mahit, *mi dedicatem thesis ya long yutufala from ol hadwok yutufala e makem blong mi, Sean, Jorane wetem Clyde. Bisous*

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And finally, to my families in Vanuatu and New Zealand, *thankyu tumas* for the continuous thought-provoking questions about this research which kept me on my toes. I could have not done it without you all.

List of Acronyms

| | |
|--------|--|
| AUSAID | Australian Government Aid Programme |
| GJP | <i>Graon mo Jastis Pati</i> (Land and Justice Party) |
| MANH | Mouvement autonomiste des Nouvelles-Hébrides |
| MOL | Minister of Lands/ Ministry of Lands *depending on the context |
| MP | Member of Parliament |
| MPP | Melanesian Progressive Party |
| NGO | non-governmental organization |
| NHNP | New Hebrides National Party |
| NUP | National United Party |
| PiPP | Pacific Institute of Public Policy |
| PPP | People's Progressive Party |
| SFNH | Société Française des Nouvelles-Hébrides |
| UCNH | Union des Communautés des Nouvelles-Hébrides |
| UMP | Union of Moderate Parties |
| VCC | Vanuatu Cultural Centre |
| VKS | <i>Vanuatu Kaljoral Senta</i> (Bislama term of VCC) |
| VP | <i>Vanua'aku Pati</i> |

***Bislama*¹ Glossary**

| | |
|----------------------------|--|
| <i>aelan</i> | ‘Island’ |
| <i>“ko bak long aelan”</i> | expressing a return to one’s roots or island/ ‘go back to the island |
| <i>taon</i> | ‘town’, mainly referring in this research to the Capital City: Port Vila |
| <i>makas</i> | left-overs |
| <i>Malvatumauri</i> | National Council of Chiefs |
| <i>man ples</i> | a person belonging to that particular location; an assertion of indigenous belonging |
| <i>nakamal</i> | traditional meeting house where <i>kava</i> is drunk or a local governing institution throughout the islands, each with its own dialect/language |
| ni-Vanuatu | Indigenous people of Vanuatu; Vanuatu citizen |
| <i>stamba</i> | foundation |
| <i>waetman</i> | ‘white-man’/European/non-indigenous |

¹ Bislama is known as Vanuatu’s lingua franca, one of the three recognized national languages alongside English and French. It was formed as a ‘broken English’ by Melanesians who were recruited as labourers in sugarcane plantations in Queensland. They used *Bislama* to communicate with the Europeans (Leslie, 2012). It also uses words and grammar from the French language and from dialects in Vanuatu’s many islands (Crowley, 2004). It is used every day, increasingly too in written communication in government and non-government organizations although not in schools and universities (Leslie, 2012).

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Introduction: *Kastom* and ‘mixing’

These days, there are a lot of mixes than before. Mixes of the *whiteman*²’s culture with our ni-Vanuatu³ culture. When there is a mix, there is a totally different outcome of culture altogether...I’m afraid that if we are not careful with how we treat our customs today, this might affect our social interactions in the nearby future (Sasha, focus group, Port Vila, 2014).

The ‘mixing’ of indigenous and non-indigenous ideas and practices in Vanuatu stands out in this quote as a concern, as this hybrid is seen to potentially affect social relationships. This anxiety emerged time and again throughout my fieldwork and thus is the main area that this thesis investigates. How is the use of *kastom* negotiated in contemporary Vanuatu social and political life in order to avoid problematic ‘mixing’?

Research problem

Pacific nations have experienced long processes of historical change since the point of European contact. The effects of such interactions over different periods have unfolded in a variety of ways through the impacts of labour trades, Church missions, and colonization to name a few. Throughout these historical contacts, different influences have emerged and transformed the islands’ environment and people’s livelihoods.

Focusing on Vanuatu in the Pacific’s Melanesian region, this thesis identifies different points of contact which introduce non-indigenous materials and ideologies into the islands. From such interactions, local and European ways began to ‘mix’ as reflected in the opening statement about Vanuatu today. The above extract has

² Bislama term for ‘white man’. It refers to Europeans or ‘non-indigenous’ people in Vanuatu.

³ Indigenous people from Vanuatu.

highlighted my research focus on the ongoing ‘mixing’ of our indigenous culture with non-indigenous ways in Vanuatu as a concern.

Some type of ‘mixing’ though has been done in the political realm through which ni-Vanuatu have reclaimed their identity and way of life through ‘*kastom*’ (Bislama⁴ term for ‘custom’) in opposition to European ways. My study outlines how *kastom* has been used in the country’s struggle for Independence, and I attempt to find its place in the country’s contemporary setting. I combine this with material collected through fieldwork in Port Vila to reflect on how *kastom* is used to differentiate between urban and rural livelihoods, and is incorporated into contemporary identity and social relations. Through the experiences of ‘mixing’, some ni-Vanuatu have begun to reflect on *kastom* and its importance in their contemporary society today, and assert the ‘Pacific way’, or in this research, the ‘Melanesian way’ in their urban lifestyle. I am interested to see how my participants perceive indigenous practices and beliefs of *kastom* in town, and its existence in a non-indigenous setting such as the state.

Purpose of the study⁵

As a ni-Vanuatu with 12 years of schooling experience in New Zealand, I fit myself into different spaces of being ‘indigenous’ and ‘non-indigenous’. During my visits to Vanuatu; I am simultaneously positioned as indigenous based on my physical features, but to those who know my background, they perceive me as a non-indigenous/foreigner - ‘coming from New Zealand’. Vice versa in New Zealand (NZ), I am also considered a local, born in Auckland, and studying through High school and University in both Auckland and Hamilton. However,

⁴ Bislama is Vanuatu’s lingua franca, one of the three national languages alongside French and English.

⁵ FS2013-45: The Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Human Research Ethics Committee granted approval for this research.

because of my Melanesian features, I stand out as a non-indigenous/foreigner. Nonetheless, I have become accustomed to the diverse lifestyles both in NZ and in Vanuatu through moving in these different spaces.

With a particular focus on the ‘mixing’ of cultures in Vanuatu, this research highlights the noticeable impacts of the foreign influences present in NZ unfolding in contemporary Vanuatu. The obvious impacts of modernization and globalization alike are evident in local people’s standard of living in Port Vila where fieldwork was conducted. Much literature on globalization and its effects and interpretations have noted its effect in people’s consumption patterns and livelihoods. As a local researcher who is familiar with foreign influences in a country such as NZ, the opportunity to research my own country provides another layer as an insider anthropologist, aware of the different positioning and lifestyles of NZ and Vanuatu. Despite potential biases, there are strengths to being an indigenous anthropologist studying my own society and recognizing the changes in new ideas and practices from a setting abroad occurring in Vanuatu. These increasing impacts of new ideologies have provoked and resulted in a feeling that Vanuatu has adopted foreign ways - a process also enabled by modernization which has led to many changes in the economic, political, social life and ideas surrounding ni-Vanuatu. This research aims to portray the importance of local *kastom* in our contemporary setting to manage and make the most of both worlds.

Statement of approach

This thesis has taken an anthropological approach using an ethnographic study. I carried out research with people in Port Vila to find out about their thoughts on *kastom* in contemporary Vanuatu, how the political system works, and whether or

not it reflects indigenous values. I chose prominent MP Ralph⁶ Regenvanu and the land reforms process that he has overseen as a case study with which to investigate further these issues. Qualitative data relating to all these areas of interest was collected during fieldwork from January – February 2014, in Port Vila.

Primary data was gathered through four semi-structured interviews and two focus groups. The recruitment of participants for semi-structured interviews was through a purposive sampling. Participants were approached because of their knowledge and expertise in relation to my research topic, alongside their experiences in the fields of politics and culture in Vanuatu's past and present. The focus groups' recruitment was through a public notice⁷ and announcement. Focus groups were used to gather general opinions on my research topic, from the perspective of middle-class Vila residents. Further details regarding the recruitment of participants and their demographic are provided in Chapter Two. Secondary data was collected through a literature review from a variety of academic sources about Vanuatu and anthropology, and 'grey' literature from newspapers and reports online.

Thesis structure

The thesis is organized into three chapters. Chapter One commences with an overview of Vanuatu's governance structures prior to contact according to each island's *kastom*. It continues on to show how *kastom* was used in the nation's movement towards independence to escape the colonising Condominium⁸ administration. The 'mix' of cultures between ni-Vanuatu and European traders,

⁶ Throughout this research, I have chosen to refer to Hon. Ralph Regenvanu by his first name. Reason being, this is how he was identified by informants and since his election, he has been referred to mainly by his first name or 'MP Ralph', not by his last name as other "old guard politicians" (Rousseau, 2012, p. 114)

⁷ See Focus Group Poster on Appendix 9.

⁸ The joint control of New Hebrides by Britain and France. This is discussed further in Chapter One.

missionaries, settlers and colonists brought about changes to indigenous people's livelihoods. There was a variety of interactions that took place – some peaceful, some mutually beneficial, some destructive, some manipulative explored in Chapter One. These interactions between ni-Vanuatu and European traders, missionaries, and colonial powers impacted indigenous people's lifestyles, but also brought the concept of *kastom* into being, as a category used to denote valued aspects of indigenous beliefs and practices. This raises the question of to what extent people have power to determine how their lives are interwoven with cultural influences.

Chapter Two identifies the research methods and includes a description of participants. It continues on to detail the lifestyle and influences around my participants demographic in Port Vila. In particular, I assess the ways in which *kastom* was discussed during my fieldwork: as a valued aspect of Vila life; as an source of anxiety through potentially problematic 'mixing' with exogenous practices; and as a way to differentiate between people and locations in my participants' imaginings of the ideal nation.

Chapter Three takes up these themes but uses the case study of Regenvanu to show how *kastom* has been brought into recent legislative reforms. This links to Lini's proclamations of *kastom* as a basis of national identity during independence. However, I suggest that Ralph's political journey also offers a contemporary "solution" to concerns around how best to "mix" *kastom* and modernity. In discussing this, I make use of Goodale's concept of "indigenous cosmopolitanism" and compare Ralph's to Taylor's description of "Janus-face" innovators from the past.

The Conclusion considers my research in light of Lindstrom (1982) and White's (1993) analyses of *kastom*. Theorizing the notion of *kastom* through Lindstrom and

White, this final chapter aims to portray *kastom*'s operation in Port Vila and in contemporary Vanuatu politics. Finally, I highlight the impacts of the new influences recognized in contemporary Vanuatu, and suggest how *kastom* can provide continuity within modernity, creating new forms of identity.

Chapter One: *Kastom* in Connection with Vanuatu's Past Governance

Introduction

This chapter looks into *kastom* and its existence in Vanuatu's past political context. With a brief section on the archipelago's various traditional governing systems, I focus on *kastom* as an important local concept, and its connection in the country's early and preceding governance structures. I am interested to explore the use of *kastom* during the country's colonial era in the movement towards Independence, and the differing connotations surrounding this local ideology. Acknowledging *kastom*'s existence in local governing structures, and observing its implementation by nationalist movements points to its use as "a conceptual national tie for ni-Vanuatu⁹, providing an assertion of the possibility of a distinct national identity" (Rousseau, 2008, p. 16). Through exploring the forms of leadership that have come to be referred to as '*kastom*', this chapter reveals *kastom* in connection to past governance structures. The following chapters of this research investigate the use of *kastom* today in Vanuatu, its role in contemporary Vanuatu and how it has been incorporated into recent political reforms projects.

Kastom

The term *kastom* is widely employed to describe ni-Vanuatu traditional knowledge and practices, or indigenous ways of doing things. Taylor describes this with reference to the past as "an index of '*bifo*'", where "*kastom* tends to connote primordial or pre-colonial and locally embedded 'ways' (*fasin*, or 'fashions') - of knowledge, discourse, and practice" (Taylor, 2010, p. 282). In this definition,

⁹ Indigenous people of Vanuatu

kastom stands ‘in opposition’ to something (Jolly, 1992; Lindstrom, 1982; Rousseau, 2004). Jolly observed that:

Increasingly, the restricted notion of *kastom* as a certain owned aspect of local knowledge and ritual creations has expanded to a notion of *kastom* as a way of life, a culture distinctive of a local group, or a generic indigenous culture opposed to the ways of foreigners. (Jolly, 1992, p. 341)

With the above observations of *kastom* confirming the concept as an assertion of a local way of life used in opposition to foreign ways, the existence of *kastom* and its emphasis in becoming a way of governing local communities throughout the islands highlight the concept as strictly Melanesian, in comparison to western forms of governance. This may come to explain why the ‘formidable’ (Keesing, 1982, p. 307) use of *kastom* as a tool for national unity was on display (Tonkinson, 1982; Lindstrom, 1982) by the first ni-Vanuatu politicians such as Walter Lini- who, alongside his education and career as an Anglican Minister, used *kastom* as the country’s ‘rallying cry’ (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 306) for Independence from the colonial powers. A brief section on the European contact and the struggle towards Independence will follow to outline the different modes of governance and its connection with *kastom* with further details consequently.

Brief history

Local leadership Forms

Prior to European contact, ni-Vanuatu had various forms of traditional leadership in different areas of the country. Tonkinson (1982), Bonnemaïson (1996), Lindstrom (1997) and Forsyth (2009) are a few who outline the various leadership systems such as ‘achieved’ and ‘ascribed’ statuses, and noted the different ways in

gaining a title or becoming a ‘chief’ (*jif*)¹⁰, ‘assessor’ and ‘big man’ in a community. With respect to the Pacific in general, Sahlins (1963) characterised ‘big men’ and ‘chiefs’ as “distinctive sociological types”, attaining different powers, privileges, rights, duties and obligations (p. 288). According to Lindstrom, the colonial administration documents from the 1950s in Vanuatu used terms such as ‘assessor’ and ‘big man’ (Lindstrom, 1997; Rousseau, 2004, p. 50) as oppose to ‘chief’ which is widely used today. Forsyth states that traditionally, there are two systems of leadership structures. These are “the graded system in the north and the partly hereditary, partly elective system based on titles in the centre and south[ern]” (Forsyth, 2009, p. 62) parts of the islands. Effectively, ‘big men’ gained authority and prestige through grade-taking ceremonies, while hereditary chiefs held absolute power (Kernot & Sakita, 2008, p. 2; Lindstrom, 1997; MacClancy, 2002; Bolton, 1999). Lindstrom (1997) states that in the southern islands “generally, the possession of a title legitimated a man’s claims to authority” (p. 212). Through this power, those with recognized status attain a highly respected role in their community, ideally gained from enduring certain *kastom* rituals. According to Tonkinson (1982) however, “some areas had neither chiefs nor graded society, with leadership of the ‘big man’ type, while others had both institutions; in some, the graded society prevailed and there were no chiefs” (p. 311).

Nonetheless, the title ‘chief/s’ took form following the solidification of a concept of “*kastom* governance”¹¹ which McDonnell labels as an approach to consider

¹⁰ Rousseau followed Lindstrom’s (1998) use of the Bislama word *jif* instead of ‘chief’ (2004, p. 6).

¹¹ Westoby and Brown (2007) wrote a briefing of their observation on a partnership between the *Malvatumauri* Council of Chiefs, the Australian Centre for Peace and Conflict Studies and AusAID, which emerged to provide a context for customary and other community leaders (Church/Youth/Women) to discuss and work with pressures of change (2007, p. 77). The Customary governance processes embedded in the subsistence economy (*kastom*) looks to overcome a governance challenge which all actors can participate and bring together customary and ‘introduced’ governance process in hybrid forms, to re-thinking community development (2007, p. 80).

ways of strengthening customary institutions in order to better manage community conflicts (McDonnell, 2009, p. 156). This can be in the form of settling disputes within and between communities, to advocating for protection of and access to resources in a community's respective area/s and the order of village life through customary forms of governance. Here, chiefs carry considerable authority (Westoby, & Brown, 2007, p. 79) as indigenous leaders. They have operated primarily in the interests of their communities and represented their communities - acting as a point of contact between them and the government. Despite these roles and responsibilities, there are cases where these community leaders do not commit to this status and act in their self-interests. McDonnell (2009) provides an example about Chiefs in North Efate as 'masters of modernity', who manipulate land sales¹² from "their power associated with place being closely bound to authority" (p. 147).

During contact, missionaries and other Europeans looked for leaders within communities and found influential individuals who could communicate and described them as 'chiefs', which did not always match local conceptions of authority (Bolton, 1999, p. 3; Codrington, 1891). This caused confusion over the recognition of a chief as the British and French authorities during colonial times found it beneficial to work with appointed community contacts (Kernot & Sakita, 2008, p. 3). The role of assessor was a formal part of the colonial administrative structure, providing a local point for the District Agents (Rodman, 1983). These assessors were chosen partly for their ability to speak English or French and although they were not necessarily chiefs, their relationship with the colonial representatives resulted in them being referred to as 'chiefs' (Jolly, 1994; Kernot & Sakita, 2008; Rodman, 1983).

¹² McDonnell confirms that the leasing data indicates that "chiefs play a major role in many of the lease transactions that have occurred in North Efate" (2009, p. 140).

In defining their characteristic, a chief is entitled to exercise powers of social control over other members of his community (Paterson, 2004). Chiefs today represent *kastom* and through this role, they maintain links with their community (place) and with preserving those practices that reinforce national identity (Kernot & Sakita, 2008, p. 3). Chiefs today in Vanuatu have a special role in the country's Constitution which provides for a National Council of Chiefs, and under the Chief's Legislation which began as a project aimed to "examine the chiefly institution in its traditional and cultural context with the view to translate it to accommodate any potential threats to internal peace and stability"¹³ (Garu & Yaken, 2001, p. 9). This form of traditional leadership system continues to be widely recognized throughout Vanuatu but has been altered with the effects of European contact which will be discussed in the following section.

European Contact & Blackbirding Labour Trade

The first European contact was when Pedro Fernandez de Quieros' expedition reached Espiritu Santo in May 1606 (Markham, 1904). It was not until 1774 that Captain James Cook sailed his second voyage and established the group of islands on the map as 'New Hebrides' (Bresnihan & Woodward, 2002). Thereafter, the islands were recognized as Europeans traders, missionaries and explorers arrived and settled, influencing local people's traditional livelihoods, customary knowledge and practices.

Frequent contact by the Europeans did not begin until after the discovery of sandalwood on the island of Tanna and Erromango¹⁴ around the mid-1820s

¹³ Through these, the project further aims to "legalise the roles and functions of chiefs throughout the country, in a way that would be adaptable to contemporary Vanuatu so as to assist, facilitate and generally be conducive to nation building (Garu & Yaken, 2001, p. 9).

¹⁴ According to MacClancy, American sailors discovered the abundances of sandalwood on Erromango but kept the secret to themselves and did not exploit it (1981, p. 38).

(Bresnihan & Woodward, 2002). This initiated trade with the islanders as sandalwood was commoditized and rose to its peak in 1840s and mid-1860s. Woodward argues that this trade probably led to adverse effects of contact, diseases such as smallpox, measles, and whooping cough to which the Melanesians had little or no immunity (Woodward, 2002, p. 17).

Labour trades to the sugarcane plantations in Queensland led to a mass depopulation of New Hebrides. These were known as blackbirding (Forsyth, 2009). The term 'blackbirding' was given to the kidnapping process of 'recruiting' Pacific Islanders¹⁵. Through such indentured labour trades, the development of *Bislama*-Vanuatu's lingua franca -originated from Melanesians who used the broken-English language to communicate with each other and with their European employees (Leslie, 2012, p. xii).

The blackbirding labour trade recruitments involved processes of negotiations with bribery and sometimes kidnaping (Dick, 2015, p. 111). Other natives however, acquired traded goods which made single men less inclined to oppose recruitment (Corris, 1973, p. 55). Scarr (1967) detailed some cases where the trade recruitment operated on a continuum and some islanders were lured with trade goods on board to help with the process of recruitment and retirement:

European goods, and especially a musket or a rifle with which no New Hebridian ... soon felt properly accoutred-were what tempted an islander to engage...[he] could return safely with his wages invested in rifles and ammunition, tools, tobacco, pipes and European clothes (Scarr, 1967, p. 13).

Following high demand and commercialization in 1863 (Bennette & Harewood, 2003), blackbirding further developed in Vanuatu as cheap labour for sugarcane

¹⁵ Some others went to these labour trades on their own will (Philibert, 1981, p. 317). There are different opinions as to whether workers were kidnapped or went voluntarily upon recruitment. Forsyth points out that "the Queensland Government Royal Inquiry in 1869 found that in the majority of cases the 'natives' quite freely volunteered to go" (2009, p. 21).

industries in Fiji and Queensland, nickel mines in New Caledonia and for coconut plantations in Western Samoa. Roberts (2013) highlights the downsides of these continued labour trade recruitments noting the exploitation of the recruited islanders “with minimal concerns for their health, welfare and living conditions” (p. 47). Fortunately, Presbyterian missionaries stepped in claiming that this act was no more than slavery and the practice was banned after the relentless campaigning in Britain and Australia. With help from *White Australia Policy legislation of 1901*- the banning of labour recruitment overseas was secured in Queensland (in 1904), Fiji (in 1911) and Western Samoa (in 1913) (Harewood, 2009, p. 30). Some labourers returned while others did not. MacClancy (1981) noted that some “returned from overseas as Christians, having been converted in Fiji” while “others came back versed in the ways of the white man and obstructed the work of missionaries” (MacClancy, 1981, p. 45). These two views (among others) were addressed differently throughout the islands. Other effects on the social structure included alterations and access to the economic resources necessary to progress through the gradient society¹⁶. As a result, the labour trade had an impact on indigenous governance structures.

Missionaries

Another influence on indigenous social and political organization was the missionaries and their attempts to spread the Gospel. They have impacted not only the native population’s faith, but their lifestyle and their traditional *kastom* beliefs and practices. During the first half of the 19th century and early 20th century the Protestants, Presbyterians, Anglicans, Catholics, the Church of Christ, the Seventh Day Adventist and a number of evangelical/fundamentalists established their missions in Vanuatu (Van Trease, 1995) and had different influences which will

¹⁶ See Bonnemaïson 1996.

be discussed. Upon arrival, their presence and dominance were recognized in different locations throughout the islands (Van Trease, 1995, p. 3). Lindstrom (1997) documents that “by the early years of this (20th) century, missionary and colonial institutional hierarchies had spread to overlay most of the archipelago, reorganizing whatever pre-contact systems once existed” (p. 213). Forsyth confirms that:

Another development profoundly affecting the society during this early period was the establishment of missions throughout the archipelago. This resulted in a demographic move, encouraged by the Church, bringing together people living in smaller hamlets or settlements to establish nucleated villages. (Rawlings, 1999:80). Often the move was from the interior villages to the coast. (Forsyth, 2009, p. 61)

After such movement of locals from interior bushes on to the coast, the attention towards traditional beliefs and ways such as *kastom* was addressed differently by the different missions. Some let locals continue with certain traditional ties to *kastom fasin*¹⁷ (‘fashion’/ways), while others tried to eradicate the ‘great darkness’ side of *kastom* or the notion of *kastom* altogether (Tonkinson, 1982).

For instance, the influence of missionaries in north Efate led to “the destruction of many sacred *kastom* objects” (McDonnell, 2015, p. 142). This stripping away of ‘bad’ from good *kastom* was increasingly a “matter of selective perpetuation from past to present to future, of distinguishing good from bad *kastom* between those practices thought worthy of continuity or revival and those which should be left to expire” (Jolly, 2012, p. 123). My focus group discussions on the topic of *kastom* confirmed how participants were selective in their responses and attitudes around the discussion. Participants shared openly on the use and knowledge of ‘good’

¹⁷ Anglicans let locals keep some aspects on *kastom* such as drinking kava in Pentecost, portraying a Janus like approach which will be discussed later in Chapter Three. See Taylor (2010).

kastom (love, respect, communal bonding/caring) while they spared the details of what was considered sacred/*tabu* or ‘bad’ *kastom*.

Nonetheless, different denominations had their own approaches and attitudes towards Melanesian concepts such as *kastom*. Some missionaries entered with efforts to convert locals to Christianity and stamp out the former ways of living, in particular *kastom* – placing it as a category in opposition to European practices (Bolton, 1993, p. 84). Forsyth discusses this positionality by placing *kastom* dialectically in contrast to ‘*skul*’¹⁸, which the Missionaries brought as a representation of “the new way of life...and was symbolised by the education system they established” (Forsyth, 2009, p. 76).

Also attributed to the missionary’s presence in the late nineteenth century was not only the introduction of foreign materials (tools and clothes) and ideologies (Christianity/education), but also along with the labour trade they were responsible for the introduction of diseases in some parts (Lindstrom, 1997). This loss paralleled with Deacon’s (1934) work in South West Bay in the early 20th century, where he recorded how a loss of enormous amounts of traditional knowledge unfolded, from the passing away of “so many old men, the last men who ‘know’” (Deacon, 1934, p. 61). These developments left leadership structures and community groups ripped apart, as much knowledge was lost and others were separated from their land and formed new communities (Forsyth, 2009, p. 61; Rodman, 2002).

Much later on, many churches encouraged and helped indigenous people in the build up to independence. Lini noted how “Anglicans (15%) and Roman Catholics (15%) have made a notable contribution to the progress of the New Hebrides

¹⁸ Which used to mean ‘Church’.

towards independence” (Lini, 1980, p. 22). In line with this is Mortesen’s (2001) point, that churches have been critical amongst the emergence of Melanesian states, often more important than the civil government - reaching remote areas where government had little presence and limited, or no services (p. 528)¹⁹.

The Condominium Administration and Land Issues

Vanuatu’s historical context would not be complete without the consideration of the British and French Condominium rule, and its influence throughout the islands today. Britain and France jointly administered the islands from 1906 - 1980. The two colonial powers lasted for 74 years with separate administrations as well as a joint administration (Bresnihan & Woodward, 2002). During the colonial era, there were three legal systems: The English, the French and the Condominium (Forsyth, 2009, p. 68), with “two police forces, two resident commissioners, and two local commissioners in each of the four districts” (Lansford, 2014, p. 1579), alongside other matters such as currencies, hospitals, and schools (Rodman, 2001).

During the Condominium, the indigenous were left with no control, or power, or citizenship in their own land (Sope, 1980). Lini (1980) pointed out that the Condominium only reflected the two powers’ “different languages, education systems, cultures, their systems of government, their interests, and their future plans in the condominium’s administration” (p. 39). As Rodman puts it, “the Condominium itself administered to whites interest, not those of the indigenous people” (Rodman, 2001, p. 34). Moreover, land grabs, fraud, and speculations

¹⁹ Locals who excelled in *skul* and were granted the opportunity to educate themselves overseas (through their Churches) and became prominent leaders as the country’s first politicians and members of parliament such as Sathu Regenvanu (Presbyterian) and Walter Lini (Anglican). Both Regenvanu and Lini were brought up under their respective churches, schooled abroad and have returned to aid in the active indigenous movements for Independence and wrote autobiographies of their life experiences from the Condominium through to Independence (Lini, 1980; Regenvanu, 2004).

continued during the of the Condominium period amid the different interests each colonial power had over the islands (Simo, 2010).

Alongside the effects of Christian missions and the labour trade, complex land issues emerged under the Condominium which sparked indigenous movements towards independence (Forsyth, 2009, p. 2). Land alienation unfolded as acres were easily stripped from ni-Vanuatu once foreigners began to claim ownership with the backup of the Condominium courts. Simo clarified that land alienation never occurred prior to Europeans entering Vanuatu, despite the exchanges that were done under customary law and the responsible chief's supervision²⁰. Land could be given for someone to use, but there was no mechanism by which land could be permanently alienated from its custom owners. In the absence of an indigenous process for selling land, land that was purchased during the colonial period was often traded with foreigners for well below its value: "a few yards of cloth, a knife or a gun" (Simo, 2010, p. 41).

Authors such as MacClancy (1981) and Van Trease (1995) have detailed how European interest such as the French Company CCNH (later Société Française des Nouvelles-Hébrides [SFNH]) and the Australian Company Burns Philp were responsible for the alienation of much customary lands across the islands. The questionable dealings around land claims, registrations and interests led to land disputes with ni-Vanuatu. MacClancy (1981) states that settlers attempted to "clear the bush and plant crops on the land acquired by SFNH", which "led to many disputes with ni-Vanuatu who had apparently not understood the terms of the agreements they had entered into" (p. 70). He adds that for the ni-Vanuatu:

²⁰ See reference to Sethy Regenvanu's statement about the relationship between ni-Vanuatu and their land.

Land links past, present and future generations which are all nurtured by its products. It was not owned, so could not be sold and ni-Vanuatu engaged in land deals with Europeans did not think they were selling their land but only the right to use and take its harvest for a certain time (MacClancy, 1981, p. 70).

From the above, it becomes clear that ni-Vanuatu have a strong and close relationship to the land which confirms their ultimate ownership. Van Trease notes this important relationship in Hon. Sathy Regenvanu's words, confirming that:

Land to a ni-Vanuatu is what a mother is to a baby. It is with land that he defines his identity and it is with land that he maintains his spiritual strength. Ni-Vanuatu do allow others the use of their land, but they always retain the right of ownership (Van Trease, 1987, p. xi)

Regenvanu's statement confirms the relationship locals have towards their land, thus the efforts by settlers to claim, register and have ownership to land still considered to be under customary ownership contributed to the growing resentment of the colonial administration.

Eventually, ni-Vanuatu were in "clear opposition to continued European control of alienated land" (Van Trease, 1995, p. 29) as claims increased from both colonisers. The first incidents where ni-Vanuatu demonstrated their opposition to European land ownership consisted of the Nagriamel movement - under the leadership of Jimmy Steven in Santo - over the Luganville property and "thousands of hectares of undeveloped dark bush land extending into the interior of the islands" (Van Trease, 1995, p. 13). Confrontations continued as Nagriamel followers protested that the dark bush areas "had always been native land to which Europeans had never had any claim or right" (Van Trease, 1995, p. 13).

A similar incident took place in Tautu village (Malekula island) in the 1960s where villagers argued that "much of the land on which existing plantations stood had been stolen and cleared in the 1920s, despite their protests" (Van Trease, 1995, p.

14). A French company – *Plantations Reunies des Nouvelles-Hebrides* began to expand its work into the undeveloped bush areas. Another area which had similar confrontations over alienated land was in Port Vila between residents of Ifira Island and European land owners in Malapoa. The 750 hectare section known as the Malapoa Native Reserve was in demand from Ifira Islanders following their growing population. The islanders argued their land “had not been sold but registered by the Joint Court over their protests...subdivided by European owners and re-sold for high profit” (Van Trease, 1995, p. 14). These pressing issues became a founding basis that provoked unrest and stimulated indigenous nationalist movements for Independence (Weisbrot, 1989, p. 70). Sope (1974) pointed out the problem of the alienated land as an issue which could unite the Melanesian people into a strong political force. He states:

The unity of many New Hebrideans is possible if based on a common struggle for the regaining of alienated land...For the New Hebridean land is also a tool that can help to bridge the educated-
uneducated and urban-rural gaps (Sope, 1974, p. 34).

According to Van Trease, Sope’s above point had an effect with the New Hebrides National Party (NHNP) leaders, and was the basis for political movements in the lead up towards Independence. These land debates and issues led to the increasing pressures for Independence, alongside indigenous politicians such as Fr Walter Lini and, the Nagriamel movement led by Jimmy Steven, and Chief Willie and their ideas about Independence to reclaim land rights and ownership. It was in the 1960s and 1970s that land disputes “became a catalyst for the nationalist movement which would ultimately carry the country to independence in July 1980” (Van Trease, 1987, pp. 127-128). More on this struggle towards Independence will be discussed in relation to the use of *kastom* further into this chapter.

I now turn to discuss the lead towards Vanuatu's Independence, following disputes which fuelled indigenous movements away from the Anglo-French Condominium. Through such political rallies, I highlight the use of *kastom* as an assertion towards national unity throughout the country and assert its importance to uphold such Melanesian attributes in a Western-style political system.

Towards Independence

In the 1970s, increased pressure for independence drove New Hebrideans to follow their neighbouring Melanesian countries who at the time recently gained Independence - Fiji (1970), Papua New Guinea (1975), and Solomon Islands (1978) (Larmour, 1984). In 1971, two locals started an association known as the New Hebrides Cultural Association (NHCA) with aims "to promote, to preserve, to revive and to encourage New Hebridean culture [in order] [T]o seek the advancement of the Hebrideans socially, educationally, and politically in relation with New Hebridean culture and Western civilization" (Miles, 1998, p. 69). The NHCA soon transformed into the first indigenous Western-style political party known as the New Hebrides National Party (NHNP).

The party was generally Anglophone in membership, and had close ties with the Anglican Church which Fr Walter Lini was a part of (Rousseau, 2004, p. 59). In 1977, NHNP was renamed as the "*Vanuaaku Pati*" (VP) meaning "My Land" (Lini, 1980, p. 26), reinforcing the struggle in reclaiming land ownership throughout the archipelago. This emphasis of the connection and relationship between ni-Vanuatu and the land following disputes reaffirms the struggle for ownership and the nation's stronghold in its Melanesian identity²¹, in opposition to the colonial

²¹ Which falls under *kastom*.

powers. This approach tied together the issues of land ownership and *kastom*, which forms the basis of political action.

The VP's political platform prior to the November elections in 1979 addressed areas of importance such as people's rights to nationhood with respect to self-determination, and the affirmed place of *kastom* post-independence (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 309). The platform also called for recognition of the vital role of custom and subsistence agriculture, giving the government a responsibility to uphold and preserve *kastoms* in a non-exploitive way to contribute towards new national identity (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 309). In line with this, the party announced to institutionalize ni-Vanuatu *kastom*, cultures and histories through a National Cultural Council and a National Arts Centre, to encourage respect for local cultures and the teaching of indigenous cultural practices and art in schools (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 309).

Tonkinson (1982) confirms that the 'promotion' of *kastom* by the VP was "much more than just a catch-cry" (p. 309). Party leaders who studied elsewhere in the Pacific realized the importance of traditional customs in uniting the population and it "owed nothing to European cultural forms" (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 309). This provided an opportunity towards an assertion of the possibility of a distinct national identity" (Rousseau, 2008, p. 16), in paving a way for *kastom* to operate in the new state's context.

Chiefs were also active in the momentum towards Independence. Their representation in the Representative Assembly to address and act as an advisory body on matters dealing with *kastom* was reached after much discussion (MacClancy, 1981, p. 128). As a result, the *Malvatumauri* National Chiefs Council

was formed and recognized in the Constitution as a ‘special place’ (Bernast, 1980, p. 193) within state law to represent custom law, following the Chief’s Legislation.

Another local movement which takes great deal of *kastom* into consideration under the Condominium rulers is the Nagriamel movement based in Santo. Led by Jimmy Stevens, the movement called for a return to customary ways of life and also, the return of land to locals (Forsyth, 2009, p. 89). Much has been written on the Nagriamel’s political scene pre and post-independence, specifically on the secession attempt or the rebellion as Beasant (1984) and Van Trease (1987) described it. I shall not discuss these political events, however, stress the aims of this movement on the basis of protecting customary land ownership against advancing land alienation (Kolig, 1987, p. 184). Through their emphasis on the right to customary ownership of land, these indigenous political movements confirm the strong relationship ni-Vanuatu have with their land.

While the VP mainly involved Anglophones, Melanesian Francophones²² “embraced the nationalist movement as well [and] they had the opportunity to work together with their Anglophone brothers and sisters to plan for a future independent Vanuatu” (Van Trease, 1995, p. 53). French locals and settlers in Efate formed the Union des Communautés des Nouvelles-Hébrides (UCNH) in 1973 (MacClancy, 1981, p. 125). Thereafter, more Francophones drew political divisions alongside Mouvement Automiste des Nouvelles-Hebrides (MANH) which was formed in Santo. MANH allied with Nagriamel, John Frum²³ and Tabwenassana²⁴, and many thought about them as the ‘Moderates’, heavily supported by the French Government and membership (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 308).

²² A person who speaks French.

²³ Kapiel (a custom party based in Middle Bush, Tanna) (MacClancy, 1981, p. 125).

²⁴ A francophone-oriented party centred around the Catholic village of Port Olry in Santo (ibid).

Eventually, these francophone parties united in 1981 and became the Union of Moderate Parties (UMP).

Independence

Independence came in 1980, and the country was formally known as The Republic of Vanuatu - a democratic government with a parliamentary democracy founded on a Constitution. The victory of the VP in first elections ensured a role for *kastom* in the formation of the new state. This was implemented through a number of measures. The Constitution dedicates a ‘special chapter’ (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 309) to the National Council of Chiefs who have a “general competence to discuss all matters relating to custom and tradition and may make recommendations for the preservation and promotion of New Hebridean culture and languages” (Bolton, 1999; McLeod, 2008, p. 7). This ‘special place’ (Bernast, 1980, p. 193) within the government system provides a space for those with power in the custom law to be recognized nationally. In line with this, *kastom* also operates in state law when the Constitution “invalidated all freehold titles and returned all formerly alienated land to the original custom owners” (Van Trease, 1995, p. 313) at Independence. This declaration recognizes *kastom* in certain legal settings in the Constitution amongst the Western state laws which past researchers have studied²⁵.

The first ten years of independence saw VP dominate government under the leadership of Fr. Walter Lini. Thereafter, Van Trease (1995) describes Vanuatu’s political picture undergoing a transformation where the two major political parties (Anglophone and Francophone) experience “a degree of fragmentation with the resulting segments exploring the possibility of working with former opponents” (p. 102).

²⁵ See Forsyth (2004; 2009)

Kastom today through the Malvatumauri Council of Chiefs

From national level to provincial level, provincial governments alongside the *Malvatumauri* have been instrumental in their efforts to promote greater Chiefly engagement in governance and conflict management. An example is the *National Council of Chiefs Act 2006* which establishes a structure of Chiefly Councils headed by the *Malvatumauri* such as the ‘Penama system’ in Penama’s Council (Forsyth, 2009, p. 128).

The decision to include four Chiefs in the Representative Assembly “to represent *kastom*” (Woodward, 1978, p. 5) counted towards the increasing pressures for independence on the local level. The *Malvatumauri* National Council of Chiefs formalized chiefs later into a Council as they formed a distinct important category beyond the local level, representing the face of their communities in the new national level context (Bolton, 1999, p. 5). This initiative to include Chiefs in the Assembly in a non-traditionalist context significantly underlines their identification as traditional leaders (Bolton, 1998, p. 185), and brings together local *fasin* in a new context.

The *Malvatumauri* consists of chiefs who are elected every 4 years from regions throughout the country and the Council meets twice a year (National Council of Chiefs (Organisation) Act (Cap 183)). The Council’s functions are limited as they rest upon a general competence to discuss all matters relating to custom and tradition as discussed, especially with respect to land (Bolton, 1999, p. 11). They are also consulted on “recommendations for the preservation and promotion of ni-Vanuatu culture and languages” (Government of Vanuatu, Article 30(1)).

The first Council’s meeting was on February 1977, and was chaired by Chief Willie Bongmatur upon election. Chief Willie’s election to be a representative of

his district had been contested on his own grounds, upon accusations that “he never killed a pig” (Bolton, 1999, p. 6). His rebuttal of this referenced his high ranking great-great grandfather and the labour-trade which halted his grandfather from his ranking career (Bolton, 1999, p. 6). Appointed as a Chief for his own community in North Ambrym, Chief Willie’s nomination was “without reference to his status in the traditional system, and as a community leader initially operated mainly in interaction with the Condominium Government in matters of school classrooms and dispensaries” (Bolton, 1999, pp. 6-7). His election to be the first Chairman of the first *Malvatumauri* meeting proved his leadership skills and work with the Condominium agents despite the fact he had not participated in a pig-killing ceremony. Chief Willie’s work with the Condominium agents however, proved the derived formulations of ‘leaders’ in the colonial process with respect to traditional customary chiefs (his ancestors) and the structure of the independent state after he “began developing ideas about how Independence could be achieved” (Bolton, 1999, p. 5). Here, Chief Willie is seen embodying *kastom* - a form of traditional leadership title through his ancestors - while at the same time, he is recognized through his works with the Condominium agents as a representative of his community in the colonial era. Thus, there are multiple forms of legitimation for leadership available even in pre-independence.

In contemporary Vanuatu, chiefs have continued to claim and maintain their role as keepers of the peace and holders of custom attributing to their ability to adapt in the country’s modern setting (Kernot & Sakita, 2008, p. 3). This is proven by the establishment of the *Malvatumauri*, “who operate alongside the state... [As] politicians rely on chiefs to legitimate state authority and...participate in social control” (Kernot & Sakita, 2008, p. 4). The Chiefs Legislation becomes relevant in this space also as it reinforces chiefly authority by the state. Lindstrom (1998)

provides a discussion for the ways in which the state, politicians and contemporary *jifs* are positioned in Vanuatu's national scale. Through such discussions, he assesses the roles and interplay of state politics on discussions about what constitutes a chief, and the existence of urban chiefs (Lindstrom, 1998).

Conclusion

This chapter has briefly covered the overlapping structures of governance experienced throughout New Hebrides (today Vanuatu) with a focus on their connection to *kastom*. The early leadership structures founded on *kastom* laws through 'chiefs' or 'big man' from achieved or ascribed statuses existed throughout the archipelago prior to European contact. The Condominium rule brought in new ideas and practices with their concept of governance and so did the Christian missions with the Gospel and the labour trade recruitments of *blackbirding*. Nonetheless after 74 years of colonial rule, land alienation became an empirical issue which prompted local nationalist movements. Locals vested symbolism on *kastom* and its laws which through Chiefs, was recognized in a Council and formalised to play an important role in a chapter in the country's Constitution. These different histories and impacts alongside other not mentioned such as the War, have shaped the people and physical setting of the habited islands into its form today. 36 later, my research investigates people's thoughts of *kastom* as a property of contemporary ni-Vanuatu life. Is it empowered much more or less? Where does it exist today? Chapter Two will look into these questions and provide details of my methods of data collection and key findings from fieldwork.

Chapter Two: A ‘Return to my Roots’: Finding *Kastom* in Contemporary Vanuatu

Doing Research

In the months of January – February in 2014, I travelled to Vanuatu to conduct research on the island of Efate, specifically in the Capital City of Port Vila. As a ni-Vanuatu anthropology student from the University of Waikato (New Zealand), I had a particular interest to research on the topic of our Melanesian *kastom*, culture and politics in the country’s contemporary setting.

The choice to conduct research in Port Vila²⁶ was due to its setting as the nation’s Capital City. Vila is seen as a hub for imports of new ideas, practices and beliefs. Therefore, I wanted to study this particular setting to discover how local residents in *taon* perceive *kastom* in the country’s most interactive setting.

Research Setting

Vanuatu’s population is predominantly rural, with around 75 per cent of the population dependent on subsistence agriculture (Asian Development Bank, 2002). The 2009 census indicated Vila had a population of 44,039 (UNdata, 2015). Three-quarters of households in Vila are oriented to wage employment, or are reliant on family income derived from waged employment (Vanuatu National Statistics Office [VNSO], 2012, p. 9).

The island of Efate experienced internal migration during 2004-2009 as “numbers of migrants came from [other provinces such as] Tafea, Malampa and Penama” (VNSO, 2009: p. xi). The internal migration data show that an increase in migration

²⁶ Port-Vila is mostly referred to as ‘Vila’, or in this research, *taon* – the Bislama term for ‘town’.

has been attributed to people seeking resources in town such as education, medical services or the hope to find employment (Leslie, 2013, p. 2).

Historically, migration into the Capital City has occurred over a long period of time with population movements more highly concentrated in the Shefa province signalling urbanization in Port Vila (Department of Strategic, Policy, Planning & Aid Coordination, 2011, p. 29). With this movement of people into Efate, there has been a growth in urban settlements (such as Blacksands and Sea Side) and also in villages not far from Port Vila. People with families who have long lived in villages such as Pango, Mele and Ifira, fall under the demographic of locals born in Port Vila who have lived through the time where areas change from rural existence to its urban state today. Expatriates also live in Port Vila or in the outer slowly developing subdivisions in areas like Teoma and Havannah Harbour - where some Vila residents also have plots for second homes and/or garden land.

Port Vila houses the bulk of administration, business and education capacity and infrastructure in Vanuatu. It is the centre of government, courts and houses other national bodies such as the *Malvatumauri* National Council of Chiefs. NGOs operating in Vanuatu generally have their head offices in Port Vila. The setting is also the main arrival point for tourists. The Bauerfield International Airport was built by American troopers from WWII with labour recruited from Vietnam, who after their contract, moved to Port Vila and Santo (Lal & Fortune 2000, p. 103). Some foreigners arrived as a result of the War, while others migrated later as expatriates operating businesses/shops in town. The main wharf in Port Vila's harbour is also a hub for tourists, with cruise ships arriving on a regular basis.

Living in Port Vila and establishing myself among locals helped me notice the different lifestyles present throughout the setting. Housing statistics show that 45 per cent of locals live in permanent houses, and 18 per cent live in traditional

houses- with permanent material (VNSO, 2012, p. 9) or a 'mix house' (Rousseau 2015, p.24; VNSO, 2012). These different housing architectures show some form of inequality amongst urban locals and I will return to this issue later in the chapter.

Research Design

In order to understand how participants perceive contemporary Vanuatu and position themselves, I conducted research based on qualitative methods in my fieldwork. Focus groups, semi-structured interviews, field notes, observations and personal communications all contributed towards this ethnographic study. The two focus groups comprised of: a business woman, a builder, a journalist, an office manager, an archaeologist, a radio announcer, and a young adult, a fieldworker, a government department official, a Church Elder, and a cleaner. The focus group comprised of 4 females and 6 males which range in age from 25 – 65.

This diverse group of participants engaged in a wide-ranging informal discussion about experiences of both the past and present. Such exchange provided an opportunity for the young people to be listeners and learners of the history of Vanuatu from the older informants who have knowledge of the condominium days. I wanted to gather the young people's knowledge as well as they seem more familiar with the changing world and present day technologies compared to the older generation. Despite their differences in experience and knowledge, there was a sincere respect shown between the different participants who spoke and contributed to the discussions. No tensions arose as the concept of respect, ideologically central to Vanuatu *kastom*, was strongly evident. This was shown in the way the young informants interacted with a church Elder, and older participants who they referred to as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'.

This group of locals embody a lifestyle which is distinct from that of locals and livelihoods in rural areas. It was evident that the participants represented middle-

class and urban viewpoints which reflected on how they positioned themselves against outer islanders and their use of *kastom*. This will be examined further on in this chapter.

Focus groups

Focus groups have gained popularity in cross cultural and development research (Liamputton, 2011). As a research method, it is used to host informal discussions, bringing together different views to be shared on a common topic. My interest in using focus groups was to study the interplay between the ‘local’ and ‘global’, and their mutual implementation in Vanuatu’s progress the “the Melanesian Way” (Lini, 1980, p. 63). When recruiting participants, I opened focus group participation to gather a group with different backgrounds and occupations to capture a variety of knowledge across the different generations. The idea behind this type of technique was to have a variety of knowledge and expertise from the public on general questions around contemporary culture and politics (Wilkinson, 2004). In this way, I sought the ‘collective nature’ (Liamputton, 2011, p. 2) of the public’s opinion on questions related to my research interests.

Semi-structured interviews

Interviews were conducted separately with Ralph at the Ministry of Lands (MOL) office, Howard Van Trease at Emalus Campus, and finally with two VCC employees. All three interviews lasted over an hour, and ran formally with some flexibility to set the scene and more importantly, provide a comfortable space to gather detailed information on a specific subject. As noted, interviewees were invited because of their knowledge and expertise in relation to my research topic and experiences in both politics and culture in Vanuatu. Semi-structured interviews include a combination of more and less structured questions (Merriam, 2002),

where structured questions were used to gather specific information from the participants and the less structured questions allowed for further exploration of the topics raised (Appendix 3).

Recruitment

The participants in my research were recruited in a variety of ways: the participants in the semi-structured interviews were approached by formal letters requesting an interview while the focus group interviews were open to the public. Invitations for the public's participation were advertised via Facebook, a poster (Appendix 9) plastered on supermarkets, and announcements on BUZZ FM. A softcopy file of the poster was uploaded on Vanuatu's largest Facebook forum - *Yumi Toktok Stret*²⁷. All relevant interview documents were presented in English and also translated into *Bislama*, Vanuatu's lingua franca. Conducting research in *Bislama* provided an easy communication from the recruitment process through to interview sessions as participants understood and responded coherently.

The methods of recruitment used may have imposed some restrictions on the variety of participants in my research, shaping it in a particular way and excluding certain other viewpoints. The Buzz FM local radio station announcement for example, broadcast from Port Vila targeted an audience of middle-class Port Vila residents, including expats, who would tune in to enjoy a mixture of Jazz, Rock and some old school music. Although no expats volunteered to participate in my focus groups, this demographic of the Vila population could have contributed additional viewpoints on the mixing of local and global cultures. The inclusion of the group might be considered in future research.

²⁷ *Yumi Toktok Stret* is a public Facebook page with more than 25,000 members, devoted mainly to discussion of topical issues relevant to Port Vila life and Vanuatu politics.

It was clear though that the focus group participants had a different lifestyle from those living in the *aelan* (outer ‘islands’/rural areas). Most of my informants have been brought up and educated in town, currently holding a stable paid job in town. These Vila residents do not necessarily have access to land or a small piece of garden such as those in the *aelan*. Instead, they purchase fresh produce and local market and the stores for imported goods (rice, canned food, noodles). The lifestyle of the urban locals epitomizes the middle-class living standard in Vila as participants have immersed themselves in the urban setting. This results in their differing views to those in the *aelan* which will become clear through the discussion of themes below that emerged from the focus group discussions.

Demographic

All the informants were Vila residents who continued to identify with islands throughout the archipelago (Banks, Ambae, Ambrym, Paama, Efate, Malekula and Tanna). It is common for locals to affiliate themselves with their island of origin when they are questioned about their family background, however it is important to note here that these informants are Vila residents, who live and work in town. Most of these participants had reached secondary level in education, with a few holding tertiary degrees²⁸.

The fact that my participants were predominantly middle-class Vila residents readily shapes the findings of this research. Their perceptions and engagements with modernity in Vila alters the way they take part in *kastom* compared to those in the *aelan*. Therefore, the demographic make-up of my participants shape their ideas about the proper role of *kastom*, its relationship to place in Vanuatu and how that

²⁸ Compared to the overall average education levels for the population

links to their ideas about the ‘ideal nation’. This points towards some of the themes that will be explored in the following section.

Emergent Themes

While my research design and methods influence my findings, this section will outline some themes from my data and, in relation to broader anthropological ideas. The links with anthropology as a discipline will help to ground ideas which are addressed further in Chapters Three and Four of how *kastom*, modernity, politics and identity are ‘mixed’ in *taon* and how its effects are faced by participants.

In anthropology, the relationship between people and their culture is a crucial area of study. As culture is not fixed (Edberg, 2012) nor is it static, the cultural adaptations people make due to outside influences become of interest to researchers. The discussions with my participants explored topics relating to the shifts in traditional ways of implementing certain global influences. The central themes were ‘hybridity’, ‘cultural appropriation’, ‘loss of culture’, ‘resistance’, and ‘class issues’.

Hybridity

In fostering *kastom* alongside modernity, a mix of the two constitutes Rosaldo’s notion of ‘hybridity’. He defines ‘hybridity’ as “the ongoing condition of all human cultures, which contain no zones of purity because they undergo continuous processes of transculturation (two way borrowing and lending between cultures)” (1995, p. ix). Rosaldo (1995) continued to describe this cultural contact as a process of “interaction and counter-interaction” between dominant and traditional cultures, emphasizing assimilation into the dominant culture (p. 5). Rosaldo’s description of ‘interactions and counter-interactions’ leading traditional cultures to assimilate into the dominant culture resembles a concern about the ‘mixing’ of *kastom* and non-indigenous practices in ceremonies which was mentioned in a focus group.

This involved the ‘mixing’ of ni-Vanuatu customary practices of bride price exchanges with cash payments. A journalist shared the following example:

A perfect example of Vanuatu’s contemporary culture mixing with the *Whiteman’s* is an article on the newspaper about a newly wedded couple from Pentecost. The groom had paid a bridal price of 600,000VT and 10 pigs. In my understanding, back in the days we never included monetary gifts in bridal price payments, but we do so with cultural payments of shell money, crops, and pigs depending on each *kastom*. These days however, a recent article showed the bride’s family demanded the groom and his family to present 600,000VT and 10 pigs... We should not mix these cultures together because they do not resemble the authentic culture our ancestors had. Otherwise, people will only focus and base future *kastom* exchanges on money and eventually drift from our local ways. (Journalist, focus group, Port Vila 2014)

The influence of ‘paper money’ (bank notes) was also brought up by Junior, a young government employee. He saw the use of cash with *kastom* “unacceptable”, as it dilutes the cultural integrity of traditional practices and reflects western values rather than the ‘pure’ ni-Vanuatu. The concern about this trend has resulted in the National Council of Chiefs intervening and trying eliminate²⁹ the use of cash (Fairbairn-Dunlop, 2009, p. 20).

Revitalization

It became clear that participants saw the practice of *kastom* bride price ceremonies integrating cash payments as a ‘problem’. The recognition of a hybrid of traditional practices with non-indigenous influences was seen as “unacceptable” as it did not reflect ‘pure’ *kastom* as practiced in the past. From this hybrid example, clear repetitions of ‘*ko bak long aelan*’ (‘go back to the island’) stood out as participants suggested that others who do ‘mix’ *kastom* and cash should ‘return’ to the *aelan* to acquire ‘real’ *kastom* which does not include non-indigenous practices and values.

²⁹ See Cullwick’s article in the *Vanuatu Daily Post* on June 25, 2014: “*Chief: VT80, 000 bride price no longer obligatory*” for more information on the Council’s decision to impede the use of cash as obligatory in bride price ceremonies.

For many Vila residents, dependence on the cash economy and familiarity with the urban lifestyle would preclude a return to the *aelan*. For my participants, a solution appeared to be the promotion of *kastom* in town, reviving the ‘pure’ local *kastom* knowledge and practices to continue cultural traditions in Vila for the future generation. Participants stressed the need for urban dwellers to change their consumption practices to rely less on imports and consume more local produce. This choice of revitalizing culture through *aelan kaikai* (traditional dishes) might be akin to the ‘local food’ movement adopted by the middleclass in many western countries. This change in consumption patterns was marked by Ham Lini’s declaration of *Year of the Traditional Economy* in 2007. This aimed at boosting local’s subsistence farming and local produce in contemporary Vanuatu, portraying alterations in social position and cultural values.

Another suggestion to revitalize *kastom* teachings in town was through ‘community centres’ or *nakamals* as local institutions in Vila. An informant from the VCC shared that following:

We could have a *nakamal* or centre for each province in town. This would benefit us a lot as experts of *kastom* share traditional art like sand drawings, custom stories, songs, bamboo flute, myths and legends to revive it in town. For the locals in the provinces, they would have a base, a custom school- so those with no familiar knowledge can visit and learn about their identity or their neighbours’. (Hanna, *semi structured interview*, Port Vila 2014).

This above contribution expands on the notion of *taon* and *aelan* as two separate ideologies and attempts to bring one to the other. Participants envisaged this as a solution, a way to revitalize *kastom* and culture alongside existing institutions such as the VCC protecting *kastom* knowledge and practices for the future.

Loss and resistance

In addition to the above statements, participants expressed anxiety about a possible loss of culture or *kastom*, and this was connected by them to changes both pre and post-independence. As one participant describes the situation:

Our contemporary culture today has been influenced by a lot of factors; like the media, and how laws are made, how our education system is set up, how foreigners attempt to and eventually divert our way of thinking and perspectives towards modernity. Those are the great impacts taking place in our lives today (Maddy, focus group, Port Vila, 2014).

Maddy's statement about modernity influencing local livelihoods is seen limiting people's enactment of *kastom* resulting to such loss. From the above account, participants assembled discussions on to the loss of *kastom* in town especially.

Another agreed and shared the following:

Our contemporary culture in Vanuatu does not follow or match with what our ancestors had as proper culture. Today a mixture of western influences such as cash has become dominant bride price exchanges for example. We should not mix these cultures together because they do not resemble the authentic culture our ancestors. If we continue to mix our customary practices, people will only focus and base on cash and lose out on our local cultures. (Sasha, focus group, Port Vila, 2014)

From such fears of cultural loss, further ideas of 'resistance' can be seen in attempts to unite the nation as a whole. Examples of such are evident when *kastom* was being revitalized towards independence for the nation (see Chapter One) and are discussed in participant's suggestion to enhance local institutions in town and the provinces.

People's fears of homogenisation or 'a loss in identity' follow, as a participant compared Vanuatu's size and setting in contrast to the rest of the world. A young radio announcer shared:

The main thing it all comes down to is our identity. We need to stand out and be significant and unique as ni-Vanuatu. In our own

setting, this identity is rooted, but when we travel abroad, we need to stand out- by keeping our ways which is important...it's very important that we stand up for our identity (Matt, focus group, Port Vila 2014).

Matt's comment reveals that in his view, ni-Vanuatu identity needs to be at the forefront of people's commitment. In cherishing who they are, people's engagements will always require *kastom* and will flourish with traditional ways and knowledge from the islands into town and abroad - making a mark globally. This shows the idea of *kastom* as Vanuatu's distinctive source of identity is still 'alive'. It also establishes an awareness that *kastom* can be adapted and changed to fit in with new circumstance and it can be relevant to new contexts – as it could be globally relevant. This will be further referred to in Chapter Three to show how there is a recognition that 'mixing' is not always seen negatively but can be enacted through the interconnections of *kastom* and modernity.

Class

Views gathered in focus group discussions portrayed the so-called grassroots in the *aelan* as the holders of ni-Vanuatu *kastom* and culture. This separation of locals in the *aelan* as holders and practitioners of *kastom* and culture portrays class difference and resembles Gewertz and Errington's (1999) argument about the affluent middle class in Wewak (Papua New Guinea). In their study, Gewertz and Errington identify an emerging middle class in the region who make up a new elite group through their broader institution affiliations (Gold clubs, Rotary clubs, and SWIT projects) and their relationships to the wider society. While the grassroots are labelled as people on low levels, who live in rural areas and mostly exercise traditional lifestyles, the locals in Wewak who are a part of an emerging class form new inequalities and define the nature of sociality by using the established connections in their affiliated

organizations. In line with Gewertz and Errington's argument the establishment of class separating grassroots and the affluent locals in PNG show similar divisions between locals in contemporary Vanuatu that can be seen with some seeming to experience modernity more successfully than others. It is their success in *taon* that makes them stand out from those in the *aelan* and those who they think should '*ko bak long aelan*'. Yet they base these distinctions on culture rather than economics. Those who do not succeed in the mixed setting of Port Vila should return to the *aelan* and remain a source of pure kastom for the nation. This suggestion portrays clear class differences as those who do not fit in *taon* are suggested to return to their roots and engage in 'culture' rather than 'modernity'. Here, a clear establishment of class and its reinforcement through a particular way of life and behaviour is portrayed as participants portrayed an expected and certain demeanour in Vila.

Conclusion: The Problem of 'mixing'

From such perspectives on the 'mixing' referred to above, participants repeated a common phrase '*ko bak long aelan*' which directly translates from the Bislama vernacular as mentioned, imposing statement for one to 'go back to the island'. *Aelan* can be substituted here to 'roots', 'island home', 'community' or 'village' which 'pure' *kastom* knowledge, beliefs and practices dominate.

This notion of stating the obvious for one to return to his/her homeland demonstrates broader points about class, identity and ideas about the nation in Melanesia. Gewertz and Errington (1999) study the Papua New Guinean community in Goroka and discovered an emerging class where locals engage in a middle-class lifestyle join the Rotary club, excel into international markets as entrepreneurs and thus occupy a slightly higher standard of living in contemporary engagements in contrast to the poor.

This leads on to look more into the notion of ‘mixing’ within the scope of applying *kastom* further into the nation level in political reforms. The next Chapter features a case study of Ralph whose political actions, I will argue, have resembled that of Vanuatu’s first few Ministers in ‘promoting’ *kastom* in Parliament. Through his reform projects addressing land issues from the VCC and into government, these political actions have enabled and provided another perspective on the notion of ‘mixing’ to be enacted in a less problematic way in the realm of politics.

Chapter Three: Ralph Regenvanu - *Kastom* and Reform in Contemporary Vanuatu

Introduction

The early forms of contact with Europeans mentioned in Chapter One, and the concerns raised about *kastom* ‘mixing’ by urban locals identified in Chapter Two, have demonstrated ways in which contemporary *kastom* and local livelihoods have been affected by historical changes and relationships. Following the notion of ‘mixing’ in the previous chapter, this third chapter looks at a different sort of ‘mixing’ in relation to parliamentary politics - particularly how *kastom* has been addressed in state legislation. This resembles Goodale’s (2006) idea of indigenous cosmopolitanism as a way of understanding the emergence of new forms of indigeneity through political and social action, and this will be explored in the case study of Hon. Ralph Regenvanu. In this case study³⁰, Ralph and his networks incorporated *kastom* into their political reform projects during his time in government, and I relate this discussion to Taylor’s (2010) analysis of the embodiment of local *kastom* (past) combined with Christian values (present) in a single figure. Taylor describes this incorporation of epistemologies as a ‘Janus face’ approach, the ability to look both backwards and forwards at the same time. Focusing on the use of *kastom* in recent reforms of land laws in Vanuatu, the case study illustrates how indigenous ways have been implemented into policy, empowering local forms of governing through the country’s Constitution and legislation. I argue that this provides a way for *kastom* to exist through openings in state legislation. In conclusion, an analysis of the case study provides another dimension of embodying a Janus-like approach. This dimension looks at the

³⁰ Contributing to this case study is a brief timeline with some main details of his career. See Appendix 11.

challenges of occupying a Janus-like approach, such as those Ralph faced when ‘mixing’ *kastom* and things ‘not-*kastom*’ (Rousseau, 2004) in parliament.

Indigenous cosmopolitanism

The introduction of non-indigenous beliefs and practices from past encounters has influenced locals as they create new forms of identity in Port Vila’s contemporary setting. As witnessed, participants in Chapter Two exhibit a middle-class urban lifestyle, engaging in modernity as they look for a positive way to ‘mix’ indigenous and exogenous (ideas originating from outside their culture) practices. Goodale (2006) presents the idea of ‘reclaiming modernity’ where indigenous practices tie with exogenous ideas of inclusion, forming an ‘indigenous cosmopolitanism’³¹ (Goodale, 2006, p. 645). Studying Bolivia, Goodale (2006) has argued that practices which combine indigeneity with global forms of rap music through frameworks of inclusion, produce a new world view which he describes as “indigenous cosmopolitanism”. His focus on the El Alto region’s Wayna Rap movement examined some of the cultural and social expressions of indigenous cosmopolitanism. The movement is made up of *campesino*³² adolescents who speak Quecha, Aymara, Spanish and idiosyncratic Hispano-Americandian hybrids. In their movement, these youth are “constructing new forms of cosmopolitanism that combine an emergent indigeneity with other, more global forms of inclusion...reclaiming the meanings and possibilities of Bolivia’s modernity” (Goodale, 2006, p. 634), through rap music. Altogether, these local rappers are seen creating more than music, forming “new discursive categories through which

³¹ This will be further applied in my case study as a way to explain the process that participants are engaged in.

³² A traditional category of Bolivian identity (Goodale, 2006, p. 635).

political-economic problems in Bolivia can be understood and more importantly, repositioned” (Goodale, 2006, p. 635).

This provides a way of understanding the emergence of new forms of political and social action in Bolivia by the marginalized youth. Goodale (2006) connects this new Bolivian form of hip hop music to indigenous cosmopolitanism through three processes. Firstly, he points out how music brings “the moral together with the political” (p. 644). This is followed by the second process in which Bolivians “are anchored in emerging understandings of indigeneity” through self-associated involvements with the youth demographic, “that both encompass Bolivia and extend beyond it” (Goodale, 2006, p. 644). Lastly, in creating this new form or understanding indigeneity, “these variations...complicate orthodox understandings of cosmopolitanism and shows the process of envisioning new universes of meaning in these ways to be more radical and potentially transformative” (Goodale, 2006, p. 644). Such movements allow Bolivia’s indigenous peoples to demand and reclaim a new status-quo in their country. Similar to this idea of indigenous cosmopolitanism, the recent land reforms in Vanuatu have evolved social and political movements that bring both indigenous and exogenous ideas and structures together to address issues arising from recent land alienation.

Janus face

This ability to revive and push an indigenous focus through political and social grounds evoking new forms of identity relates to Taylor’s (2010) ‘Janus-face’ approach. In his study, Taylor describes the term ‘Janus like’ figure as he relates it to a local man from North Pentecost (Vanuatu) - Lolo- who strongly embodied both his present (religion) and his past (*kastom*) through ringing “the church bell with one hand while drinking kava with the other. Just like Janus, the Roman God of

beginnings and endings, Lolo embodies transition and seems to possess the gift to see both past and future” (Taylor, 2010, p. 284).

In his analysis, Taylor (2010) explains that with the missionary’s aim to convert ‘a time of darkness to a time of light’, Christianity stood as an exogenous idea, in opposition over *kastom*. He adds that these contrasting ‘light’ and ‘dark’ times might be understood to represent branches of the same tree, occasionally positioned in opposition, yet mutually supporting and intimate as relations of a man and woman, day and night, rain and sun, war and peace (Taylor, 2010, p. 284). The possibility of placing the two contrasting epistemologies side by side confirms that, rather than seeing the two as exclusionary, Lolo proved that the categories *can* complement each other despite their complexities. In this way, *kastom* tells not of its revival or retention from the past, but as Taylor (2010) clarifies, “it is positively envisaged in a productive pairing with the exogenous other” (p. 284).

An early attempt of a Janus-like approach was noted in the forefront of movements towards independence in the years leading up to 1980. Politicians such as Fr. Walter Lini were seen promoting *kastom* (Tonkinson 1982, p. 59) to unite the nation against the colonial British and French powers as discussed in Chapter One. Through their use of *kastom*, Lini and the VP leaders formulated a vision of a future independent country based on Christianity and particular ideas of *kastom* (Taylor, 2008, p. 24). In a speech, Lini (1980) noted that “God and custom must be the sail and steering paddle of the canoe” (Lini, 1980, p. 62). This juxtaposition of the indigenous and exogenous epistemologies place the two as categories alongside each other, a combination positively working together to steer a nation founded on Christian faith and Melanesian values despite their differences. Like Lolo’s speech in Taylor (2010), Lini’s statements of holding on to the ‘old’ and ‘new’ to move forward illustrates new forms of identity empowering ni-Vanuatu as in Goodale’s

indigenous cosmopolitanism concept - towards ‘mixing’ indigenous ideas with exogenous ideas through political action. My case study now explores this idea of ‘mixing’ within the system of state governance – fitting *kastom* into the state law, with reference to Goodale and Taylor.

Case study-Ralph Regenvanu

In 2014, a type of ‘mixing’ took place through the land reform package put together by Ralph and his cohort to address speculative land dealings. As the first ni-Vanuatu with a degree in Anthropology, and former Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (VCC) for eleven years, Ralph had already demonstrated an ability to bring together both *kastom* and non-indigenous approaches to dealing with social issues³³. After leaving the VCC, Ralph gained his law degree, and was elected as Member of Parliament in 2008. He went on to found and lead the *Graon mo Jastis Pati*³⁴ (GJP) (Land and Justice Party) and later attained Ministerial rank, first as Minister of Justice then as Minister of Lands.

This case study begins by identifying areas where Ralph has been part of working around Vanuatu’s cultural agendas with reference to Goodale’s ‘indigenous cosmopolitanism’ and Taylor’s ‘Janus face’ approach. It then describes Ralph and his colleagues’ efforts at the VCC towards the ‘National Land Summit’ and his political career, implementing land reforms and amending the country’s Constitution. The conclusion explores some of the challenges he has faced in engaging with local practices in the spaces of a parliamentary state system.

³³ Examples of projects at the time as Director of VCC was the Young people’s projects, Juvenile Justice Projects, *kastom* economy initiatives as discussed below.

³⁴ For more information on the party, visit their website: www.graonmojastis.org.

Networks: Supporting Cultural agendas

Ralph brought together people with a range of expertise to work alongside him on the land reform package as well as gaining support for his political enterprises from pre-established networks. They included John Salong (former head of VANWODS), Hannington Alatoa (a former Ombudsman), and Anthea Toka (previously Head of VANGO and later Ralph's political advisor), as well as organizations such as the Vanuatu's National Women's Council (VNWC), the *Malvatumauri* National Chiefs Council, and the Vanuatu Council of Churches (VNCC). In addition, his connections with the First Napuan music festival organising committee, has provided him with ongoing strong links with young people in Port Vila³⁵. The VCC's network of fieldworkers also provided points of contact across the nation.

His Legal Advisor; Siobhan McDonnell was the principal drafter for the land legislation (McDonnell, 2015). McDonnell previously worked with the Aboriginal Central Land Council, and combined legal expertise with knowledge on indigenous approaches to dealing with land issues. This notion of selecting someone with knowledge from abroad who has also lived and conducted research in Vanuatu reinforces the interplay of the global and local in Ralph's approach to reform. Using a variety of networks in this way, Ralph resembles Lolo's ability to maintain and acquire expertise from indigenous and non-indigenous sources to combat corruption and address vital political issues. This relationship of the local and non-local ideologies reinforces the interplay of the 'modern' and 'traditional' in contemporary Vanuatu.

³⁵ See Rousseau (2012) for more on Ralph's work towards helping the youth in Vanuatu and the support he gained from this particular demographic.

Addressing the Land Issues

Land disputes arose in Vanuatu as investors “engag[ed] in land speculation by purchasing rural, customary land then subdividing it and reselling it as residential housing...at substantially inflated prices” (McDonnell, 2013, p. 5).

Former Lands Minister Steven Kalsakau has been identified out as the ‘worst offender’ in promoting these practices. He is said to have heavily discounted leases to Land Department staff, family and friends, including business and political associates, with the ‘leases’ representing “a loss of around US\$7.8 million in revenue to the Vanuatu government” (McDonnell, 2015, p. 2). In an interview, Ralph claimed that Kalsakau “has not taken national interest into account, or that of the public or land owners as he is required to do by the Constitution” (Dailyvanuatu, 2012, p. 1). Yet there has been widespread recognition of the significant problems with the existing legal and administrative regimes governing land dealings and the recent land reforms are part of a longer process that has been ongoing since the VCC, the *Malvatumauri* and individuals within the Ministry of Lands convened the National Land Summit in 2006 (Huffman, 2011).

The National Land Summit 2006

The National Land Summit was held at the Chiefs’ *Nakamal* in Port Vila on September 25 – 29, 2006. It highlighted serious concerns that ni-Vanuatu were becoming dislocated from their land, with the continuing practice of leasing in place. At the Summit, the then Director of Lands, Russel Nari (2006) stated that “[O]ne of the greatest gaps in awareness is around the fact that in 75 years, leased land will not be returned unless the cost of development to the land are paid in full” (Oxfam, 2006, p. 2). The report continued on noting that, “most ni-Vanuatu would be

unlikely to be able to cover the cost even of a small hotel let alone a luxury resort established on their land” (Oxfam, 2006, p. 2).

As discussed in Chapter One, land is of great importance to ni-Vanuatu. Simo describes the following:

Land to the ni-Vanuatu is everything they have, it embodies their link to their past, their present and their future. It contains everything they do in life, that is, their daily interactions and their beliefs. ... Not only is it sacred, but it totally contradicts the imported notion of ‘ownership’ of land. Land is for the people and it is in custody for future generations. (Simo, 2005, p. IV)

However, some claim this view has changed for some ni-Vanuatu who do not regard land the as provider or main source of food and shelter, rather, as “an attractive way to earn what is perceived as big money” (Nari, 2006; Oxfam, 2006, p. 3).

The Land Summit convened with three main themes which were: Sustainable land management; Fair dealings in land; and Progress with equity and stability. The last day of the Summit was dedicated to the development of resolutions to form the basis of a Government national land policy. However, it was evident between the 500 – 600 attendees at the Summit that people still had a range of perceptions which confirmed the diversity of opinions concerning land ownership by ni-Vanuatu (Oxfam, 2006, p. 3). There was also concern about the lack of political will that could impede the Summit’s 20 resolutions being transformed into meaningful policy and effective legislation (‘No political will to enforce Land Summit recommendations’, 2006).

A highlight from the convened Land Summit was the announcement by former Prime Minister Ham Lini that, 2007 and 2008 would be the ‘Year of the *Kastom* Economy’ (Rousseau, 2012). However, the lack of government recognition around

land issues and implementing any of the Summit's suggested policy directions formed the basis of Ralph's decision to stand for Parliament (Rousseau, 2012, p. 105). Ralph contributed towards the declaration on the 'Year of the *kastom* Economy' on various occasions. This included working with the VCC advisors and respective organizations towards developing a policy aimed at strengthening Vanuatu's traditional economy to foster the use of traditional wealth. Supported by UNESCO and the government, the policy, aimed at preserving, maintaining and revitalizing elements of the indigenous traditional economy (Regenvanu, 2010). In line with this policy, Ralph wrote an article arguing for a return to Vanuatu's traditional economic practices, clarifying its richness in abundance as "an enormous asset to be utilised" (Regenvanu, 2010, p. 33). I now discuss his political career from his entry, to his time in the Ministry of Lands and the Constitutional amendments and land reforms put in place.

Going into Politics

The Land Summit's Resolutions highlighted the weaknesses in the current leasing systems – particularly the abuse of Ministerial power³⁶ to sign off on customary land leases (Regenvanu, 2009). They also highlighted the difficulties that local communities were experiencing with determining and asserting customary ownership of land. The resolutions were a further example of the many other complaints coming from civil society regarding loss of control over resources. By standing for election, Ralph had to provide a voice inside parliament to continue bringing these concerns through policies into government. As Ralph explains:

These policy proposals included- 'The Recommendations of the Workshop to recognise and promote the Traditional Economy as

³⁶ 'Part D: Ministerial powers where land is under dispute'. Resolution 9 points to (a) 'Remove the power of the Minister to approve a lease for land where there is a dispute', and (b) 'If there is a dispute it must first be solved before the Minister can approve a lease'. (Oxfam report, *The 2006 Land Summit*, 2006).

the basis for achieving National Self-Reliance' (2005), 'The Vanuatu National Self-Reliance Strategy 2020' (2005), 'The Resolutions of the Land Summit' (2006), 'The Year of the Traditional Economy' (2007). All of these policy proposals included recommendations to the government on policies that should be implemented and laws that needed to be changed and had been forwarded to government with a specific request that government consider and implement them. By 2008, the government was still not implementing these policies - it was not doing what we felt the majority of the population had asked it to do. So I thought, "Well, if the existing parties and political leaders are not going to implement them, we ourselves are going to have to get into parliament and government to implement them". (Regenvanu, personal communication, July 1, 2014)

His Election

Ralph's announcement to enter politics was supported by many as news about his entry made headlines. It became one of the most commented on articles on the Vanuatu Daily Post website (Rousseau, 2012, p. 100), and those with internet access through work or home contributed as another demographic³⁷ of his support group. Ralph began his political career as an independent MP and after the 2008 election results, his victory confirmed "a new record for the highest number of votes with...1,710 votes, 624 more than his closest rival" (Rousseau, 2012, p. 98). Rousseau's observations during Ralph's campaign and success show Ralph's qualities and the public's views of what a *stret man* (Bislama - 'right person') ought to be. Some of Ralph's attributes in being a *stret man* include his 'style of speaking', his position not to gain 'support' through 'treating'³⁸ or vote-buying practices', 'his success with voters', and his 'self-presentation' which "did not necessarily present a 'new style of leadership'...but instead provides an interesting case study of the parameters of leadership in contemporary Vanuatu" which incorporates aspects of both *kastom* and modern political self-presentation (Rousseau, 2012, pp. 110-109).

³⁷ "the educated, middle-class ni-Vanuatu based in Port-Vila" (Rousseau, 2012, p. 100)

³⁸ Rousseau confirms how Ralph "had refused to provide them [his supporters] with kava [which] was read by them as validation" (Rousseau, 2012, p. 109).

Minister of Lands

On February 2011, Prime Minister Sato Kilman (People's Progressive Party) appointed Ralph to be Minister of Lands. During his three weeks in the position before being reshuffled to the Ministry of Justice, Ralph announced a freeze on issuing new leases until the Land Summit resolutions were dealt with and implemented in law ("Vanuatu land lease overhaul to require clan consent", 2011; R. Regenvanu, personal communication, January 5, 2016). Ralph added that he embarked on these reforms when he became Minister of Lands again in March 2013 until June 2015 (R. Regenvanu, personal communication, January 5, 2016).

Back into office in 2013, Ralph prepared to address land issues through legislation and policy. In an interview, he clarified that "eighty per cent of my time will be taken up with cleaning up the mess that's been left behind" ("Vanuatu's new Lands Minister keen to reform way country manages land", 2013, p. 1). At that time, Ralph worked towards a number reforms. These included amendments consisting of the constitutional amendments, amendments to the Land Reform Act and Land Leases Act, and a new Customary Land Management Act (McDonnell, 2015).

Constitutional and Legislative Reforms

Ralph and his "high level working group established inputs from various sectors of the community including business community" (Ewart, 2013, p. 1), giving their views on the drafting of the reforms towards the land laws and amendments to the country's Constitution. This task included "a one year process of consultation"³⁹ throughout the islands" (Ewart, 2013, p. 1) to gather the views of people and organizations following the growing concerns over the alienation of ni-Vanuatu

³⁹ Before passing the bill in 2014, the national consultations specifically asked communities throughout the provinces they had reached to ask if the proposed bill would work in their community, "and everyone said yes" (Regenvanu, *Radio New Zealand*, 29 Jan 2014).

from customary land (“New Vanuatu laws strengthen role of custom in land deals”, 2014). This process resulted in the drafting of a number of resolutions. In an interview, Ralph explained that there was a variety of sources behind the drive for policy changes to address these issues of land alienation. These included: the Constitution as a guiding principle, the 20 resolutions from the Land Summit, and the one year process of consultation which address these resolutions. Ralph clarified that “all of those views have been inputted into the new laws” (Ewart, 2013, p. 1). Before these resolutions could become law, two Constitution amendments had to be passed first. A change to Article 30 of the Constitution required Parliament to consult with the *Malvatumauri* about any changes to land law in Vanuatu. This “was basically to ensure that any bills presented in parliament which are to do with land have to pass through the National Council of Chiefs first” (“New Vanuatu laws strengthen role of custom in land deals”, 2014).

Secondly, a newly drafted Article 78 state that customary institutions can resolve disputes concerning customary ownership, and not the formal state courts. Ralph explains that “[T]he new laws bring determination of custom owners back to customary institutions, it removes the power from courts and the government to determine who the custom owners are and puts it back under rules of custom” (McDonnell, 2014, p. 1). This paved the way for the new Customary Land Management Act “whereby *nakamals*⁴⁰ make determination of customary ownership... [And] if the decision cannot be made...the second level is a custom area land tribunal which is nominated by the chief in that customary [area]” (“New Vanuatu laws strengthen role of custom in land deals”, 2014). In his interview with Radio New Zealand, Ralph stated that “[T]here’s also a third level in the Customary

⁴⁰ McDonnell clarifies here that the *Customary Land Management Act* amendment defines a *nakamal* as “a customary institution that operates as the seat of governance for a particular area [which] include all men, women and children who come under the governance jurisdiction of that *nakamal*” (McDonnell, 2009, p. 156).

Land Management Act which is the island land court...where [if] appeals relating to process...customary rules... [And if] applications” are not followed, jurisdiction can be put “back down to either the *nakamal* or the custom area land tribunal where the application for judicial review came from”. Therefore, “all land determinations can’t go outside that realm of those three courts” (“New Vanuatu laws strengthen role of custom in land deals”, 2014) where discussions of land ownership is maintained on local grounds and institutions, based on customary rules, and not the formal state courts.

Altogether, the new land laws comprise of: the Constitutional amendments to recognise customary institutions (*nakamal*) and the role of the *Malvatumauri* National Council of Chiefs. This change allows customary institutions to make final determination of land ownership and removes the power of the Minister over customary land (McDonnell, 2014). These reforms gained further support at the National Land Law Summit and *Malvatumauri* subsequently, before being passed in Parliament in December 2013 (McDonnell, 2014).

In working towards these land reform packages, Ralph endeavoured to ‘mix’ of *kastom* laws by incorporating customary institutions to exist amongst state laws. This was achieved by pushing for national-level land reforms that favour *kastom* ways. This demonstrated a Janus-like approach - taking into account *kastom* (local ways) in the contemporary state setting by passing Constitutional Amendments and later, Land Legislations in Parliament (a national space).

Ralph confirms this to McDonnell that: “[T]he new laws bring determination of custom owners back to customary institutions, it removes the power from the courts and the government to determine who the custom owners are and puts it back under rules of custom” (McDonnell, 2009, p. 156). This coincides with the Rules of Custom in Article 74 of the Constitution, “[I]t is not the rules from the Westminster

court system that are going to direct ni-Vanuatu how to deal with our custom lands but our *nakamals* must direct us through our Rules of Custom (*kastom*)” (Garae, 2015, p. 1).

McDonnell (2015) notes that such transition of power from the formal state courts into local chief-based customary governance structures gives power to the local-level. The fact that, “leases for development on customary land will now need free, prior, informed consent of the ‘custom owner’ group”, will hopefully putting a stop on land grabs as witnessed in the past (McDonnell, 2015, p. 2).

In an article in the New Zealand Herald, Wilson reports that “the package of reforms, which include Land Reform Amendment and Custom Land Management Acts, returns critical powers over decisions about land ownership and leasing to local landowner groups” (Wilson, 2014, p. 1). Careful piloting programs were in place to follow the consultative process as Ralph gave assurance in an interview that they would work closely to monitor the programmes and identify any unintended consequences that might need to be addressed through further legislation (Ewart, 2013). The important aspect of the package of reforms was the focus on transparency as such changes aim to protect communal land owners from land grabbers and hopefully enable fair dealing.

Nonetheless, there has been some critique on these legislations which confirms the differing views ni-Vanuatu have on land. In opposition to the work Ralph and his peers have accomplished over the years around land issues in particular, there has been criticism that the changes to the land reforms may cause problems. In response to an article by Siobhan McDonnell, one commenter suggested that the reforms would bring ‘chaos’ as they would bring in a new hybrid system which is in fact ‘new’ to the indigenous customary land owners (McDonnell, 2014).

This reinforces the diversity in people's views and understandings on issues of land as evident at the Land Summit. Only 4 land disputes were processed on the *nakamal* level before the pilot was halted by the change of government resulting in a new Minister of Lands - Paul Telukluk - who announced his intentions to repeal the land reforms in place (Ligo, 2015). Telukluk removed the allocated funding under the Customary Land Management office (McDonnell, personal communication, Jan 5, 2016) impeding the new land laws. However, in October 2015, Telukluk – along with thirteen other government MPs – was imprisoned for bribery (“Vanuatu court sentences MPs, including former PMs Carcasses and Vohor, to jail for corruption”, 2015). Following the January 2016 snap election, Ralph has once more taken on the role of Minister of Lands (Cullwick, 2016), making it likely that the repeals Telukluk prioritised will themselves be overturned.

Challenges

Despite Ralph's support and use of *kastom* in his work, he has faced a number of challenges while trying to occupy a Janus – like position. There has been some criticisms of his actions which are seen to lack ‘respect’ on occasion in parliament. I describe three examples where Ralph is seen controversially not showing respect and as a result, potentially not valuing *kastom*.

Focus group discussions established that ni-Vanuatu value a stronghold towards ‘respect’ as an integral shared value. A young public sector employee shared the following:

I would very much like to see more respect in our country, because once you have that, people will look up to you and notice that quality in you as a person. It all starts with respect; once you respect one another, all aspects in your life are settled- as far as land disputes. (James, focus group, Port Vila, 2014).

A journalist agreed with this sentiment and suggested that the value of respect ought to be passed on, because in her view: “if we don’t continue to teach respect and *kastom*, we will lose out on all these important values” (Sasha focus group, Port Vila 2014).

The discourse of ‘respect’ in Vanuatu has been highlighted by past researchers. Rousseau confirms the notion of respect is valuable to ni-Vanuatu as a “foundational element in relating to people” where “a lack of respect is equivalent to a lack of the correct form of relations” (Rousseau, 2004, p. 192). Bolton worked on a survey with fieldworkers on 46 languages and discovered in every one of the languages, there were at least two words for ‘respect’ - meaning ‘to show respect’ or in the form of ‘love’ and ‘described through actions’ (Tor & Toka, 2004, p. 14). Such accounts portray ‘respect’ being strongly valued by ni-Vanuatu. One of my interview questions addressed the disagreements people had with Ralph and most had not much to say, other than recall an incident in which Ralph criticised Maxime Carlot Korman, in parliament (Vanuatu Republic Party).

Korman incident

In 2009, Ralph criticised Korman who was Speaker at the time that he [Korman] would be ‘buried’ if he attempted to contest in the 2012 General Election. This had Ralph publicly criticised and ridiculed (“MP Regenvanu forced to apologize over email”, 2009). Korman had served as a veteran politician with Ralph’s father, and demanded an explanation of Ralph’s ‘buried’ description which Ralph was compelled to offer an apology (“MP Regenvanu forced to apologize over email”, 2009). Clearly, respect is still valued highly in Vanuatu politics amongst politicians, elderly and young people alike. *Pacific Islands Report* published an article on this incident outlining the late Patrick Crowby’s ‘call for more respect’ from Ralph who “lacked integrity and respect for the leaders of Efate” (Lini, 2008).

A young speaker from a focus group discussion briefly shared a Facebook post to comment on his experience witnessing how Ralph responded to a comment online. In his view: “Ralph’s disagreement was astonishing and [I] took it as maybe that is how politics is played out” (Junior, focus group, 2014)⁴¹. This reveals that similar rules apply to indigenous measures of behaviour and morals in the new and virtual ‘world’⁴² as it is in traditional settings as the *nakamal* or in parliament. It was clear throughout the focus group discussions that participants were using indigenous values to judge and comment on Ralph, while they also recognised his legitimate use of Western-style politics and ideas to pursue a ‘local and global’ agenda of reform that they also support. This shows the public’s recognition of a different style of politics around Ralph, incorporating *kastom* and politics in contemporary Vanuatu.

A recurring theme throughout discussions was ‘knowing how to address different ways or *fasin* to speak and behave’. This stood out as a ni-Vanuatu ‘valued’ way which resembles a symbol of respect with suggestions that, as a Minister, Ralph could *storian* (sit down and spend time, gain teaching) with the elderly people in Port Vila communities and rural areas. Another participant touched on this and argued that as time progresses on, Ralph might adopt this practice. This ‘back to basics’ approach through consulting with elderly people would provide Ralph with ideas on how to retain Vanuatu *kastom* in parliament especially in showing respect (Maddy, focus group, 2014). This stood clear as a value, highlighting acts of ‘knowing’ and ‘showing respect’ always; in either a *kastom* setting of a *nakamal* or a modern parliamentary settings, as also in the real and the virtual world.

⁴¹ Specific reference to this comment was not specifically pointed out as it happened in the past and measures to retrieve the comment was not in a favour during the focus group interview.

⁴² Such as an online social networking website.

Sacking & arrest

Although Ralph to some, represents the best of politicians (Van Trease, interview, Port Vila 2014), at one stage of his political career, he was sacked as noted from his position as Minister for Lands by former Prime Minister- Sato Kilman. The sacking followed his vote against the ratification of the country acceding to the World Trade Organization (WTO) (Radio New Zealand International, Dec 2011; Radio New Zealand International, March 2012; Van Trease, semi-structured interview, 2014). Another incident which occurred in Ralph's career was his arrest. In December 2008, he and fellow opposition MP Moana Carcasses were arrested after assisting 30 inmates who had escaped from Vanuatu's main prison alleging harsh treatment (Radio New Zealand International, 2008). After Ralph took the inmates to the Chief's *nakamal* in Port Vila, they invited the *Malvatumauri* and Police to negotiate what to do with the inmates. Ralph "pleaded not guilty to three counts of accessory after the fact, harbouring or assisting a prisoner and obstructing police officers on duty" (Radio New Zealand International, March 2009). Due to lack of evidence, the Public Prosecutor applied to the Supreme Court to have these charges dropped (Radio Australia, February 2012). Ralph explained that he had taken the prisoners to the chiefs so they could be disciplined by community leaders based on the traditional *fasin* instead of facing further harsh treatment at the hand of the police (Radio New Zealand International, 2008). This incident exemplifies the tension that rises between a politician acting on principle and a perceived cultural need to maintain a respectful demeanour and actions towards authority. Ralph shows that those two aspects cannot be accommodated in national politics. It highlights the difficulty in determining what and who to respect. In Ralph's case, he is being criticised more though for not respecting his elders than for his arrest and vote against the WTO.

Conclusion

Ralph and his colleagues have been active in empowering proposals and agendas favouring a return to our ni-Vanuatu *kastoms* since the VCC through to Parliament. Attaining his push for cultural agendas, Ralph worked towards proposals following Vanuatu's richness in traditional economy over the cash economy⁴³. In this article, Ralph refers to the subsistence lifestyle as 'tradition', a reinforcement on the idea of the islands or rural areas as holding 'authentic' ni-Vanuatu practice is maintained. This ranges from classifying the subsistence lifestyle practices as tradition rather than just 'subsistence', grouped with economic practices, cultural belief and traditional ways – in a sense putting a package of not necessarily related ideas, practices, beliefs and objects together, framing 'the traditional economy'. Through the initiatives Ralph worked alongside, the drive towards promoting the traditional economy to be recognized further emphasizes on the ideology separating the 'mixing' where the *aelan* is the 'place of *kastom*' and *taon* as 'enacting modernity' in contemporary Vanuatu. Ralph's type of 'mixing' which combines *kastom* into state legislation to operate (where necessary) establishes and returns jurisdiction to traditional leadership systems (which chiefs used in the past) into the current state legislature. Therefore, the land reforms are seen as highlighting *kastom* ways by providing openings in which *kastom* can govern through 'the *nakamal* way'⁴⁴, in this instance regarding land issues.

This chapter has focused on the Janus like aspect of Ralph's work. Like Lolo who embodied his past and his present in a single figure. Ralph has worked towards land reforms that pass jurisdiction on land disputes to the *nakamal* while he was Minister of Lands. The Constitutional and legislated changes vested the power in chiefs to

⁴³ 80 per cent of Vanuatu's population still live in rural areas (Regenvanu, 2010, p. 30).

⁴⁴ See Huffer and Molisa (1999), an SSGM discussion paper on 'the *nakamal* way'.

determine land claims in the *nakamal* and portray Ralph (and his networks) allowing the past (*kastom*) indigenous ways to operate in the present (state) system. This ‘mix’ of *kastom* and state structures and ideas resemble Goodale’s concept of indigenous cosmopolitanism. Taking into account both indigeneity and exogenous ideas follows Lini and the VP’s actions in promoting *kastom* at the state-level (see Chapter One). Through his endeavours, Ralph paves a way for locals to represent themselves as indigenous, still active in *kastom*, while also capturing exogenous ideas, they can engage in an outward looking indigeneity. In reinforcing the local institution of the *nakamal* through parliament, the relations between the local in the global or indigenous and non-indigenous are seen as cooperative despite their historical complexities. What emerges is two categories of ‘mixing’: the indigenous and exogenous, past and present, complementing each other through Ralph’s Janus approach in revitalizing land laws based on *kastom* during his time in parliament. However, the challenges Ralph faced show that one needs to know when and how each category *should* function together or separately.

The next and final chapter looks at two academic discussions of *kastom* in relation to this research, and clarifies its potential for future use in parliament, concluding this thesis.

Conclusion: Finding *Kastom* in Contemporary Vanuatu

Introduction

The previous chapters of this thesis show how discussions of *kastom* reflect the relationship between Vanuatu's past and present, and indigenous and exogenous ideas and practices. Anthropologists have highlighted its oppositional nature (Bolton, 1999; Lindstrom, 1982; Rousseau, 2004; White, 1993) which this research has explored, in particular during the nation's movements towards Independence (Chapter One). Confirming "its utility as a rallying point" (Tonkinson, 1982, p. 310), Lindstrom (1982) describes "shared tradition as the basis of a unified opposition to...colonial power... [And] as one basis of some new national identity" (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 317). The differences between this use of *kastom*, and the viewpoints from participants on *kastom* today were explored in Chapter Two. As a result, traditional *fasins* illustrate the 'mixing' of indigenous and non-indigenous ideas in the contemporary setting of Port Vila. Participants described their anxieties around the loss of 'pure' *kastom* as found in the *aelan* but showed enthusiasm for the revitalization of *kastom* as part of their modernity. Chapter Three investigated the resurgence in land alienation since the early 2000s. The case study of Ralph has demonstrated how *kastom* has been revitalized in national politics by its inclusion in land reform policies. This is another example of 'mixing'. Yet by adopting a Janus-like approach that simultaneously utilises past and present, indigenous and exogenous, Ralph and his associates have avoided the negative connotations identified in Chapter Two. Chapter Four looks at the theorizing of *kastom* with reference to Lindstrom (1982) and White (1993), then links their arguments to my research. The final section summarizes the multiple uses of *kastom* witnessed in Vanuatu from the past to present, and concludes this thesis.

Kastom

Lindstrom (1982) Kastom as a 'category'

Focusing on the island of Tanna (Vanuatu), Lindstrom (1982) explores how '*kastom* (or tradition)' is used as an analytical category in contrast to "that other ideal type, modernity" (p. 316). Lindstrom questions how traditional or premodern societies reveal themselves in modernization, and shows how the interplay between the two defines the course of development. With a focus on how *kastom* is used as a political symbol, Lindstrom outlines how traditional knowledge grows in status through the rehabilitation of *kastom* at the national level. Illustrating the promotion of *kastom* by the VP in 1979, he that "a construction of national identity and unity with *kastom* attempts to escape the divisive inheritance of the Franco-British Condominium" (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 318), alongside the Constitution's guarantee of a National Council of Chiefs for matters relating to *kastom*. He argues that the 'construction' of *kastom* comes with different interpretations and definitions between bodies of knowledge such as Christianity, and the John Frum movement. *Kastom* becomes a consensus made up "of some fragmented knowledge" (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 320). Through these different epistemologies, there is a fluctuation in the value placed to *kastom*. It was devalued by the Christian missions; in competition alongside cult movements in Tanna; then later, revalued to complement introduced ideas and institutions (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 321). These different positions of *kastom* prove the variety of definitions the term holds, not just limited to a straight-forward definition, but, its clarity and value depending on the situated context.

The revaluation of *kastom* occurred at the national level in the 1970s, resulting in the abolition of the Christian/*kastom* oppositions, and the restoring of *kastom*'s

political value (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 324). An example tells of a Christian school in Tanna teaching with a combination of European education alongside Tannese tradition, a “church/*kastom* house” (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 325). Lindstrom (1982) sees this as evidence of the “bankruptcy” of such a light/darkness dichotomy in which people make a ‘categorical distinction’ between customary things, objects, events and those which are new (p. 325). This common dichotomy relates to Lini’s speech proclaiming God and custom sailing the country forward (Lini, 1980, p. 62), and Lolo’s statement partnering - the Church and *kastom* together. These beliefs of *kastom* working alongside new institution once again demonstrates *kastom*’s definition as not limited to a particular meaning. Rather, as a category, *kastom* is witnessed operating on different levels – nationally in politics as suggested by Lini, locally through education in Tanna, and in conjunction in local villages (north Pentecost), where the church and *kastom* appear to co-exist in those Janus-face figures such as Lolo⁴⁵.

Lindstrom (1982) goes on to outline how the cash economy entered Tanna through the impact of tourism in the area. While John Frum followers debated on preserving *kastom* and its rights from being sold as a commodity and its legitimacy, VP candidates saw tourism generating income for island development towards roads and water supply. From these different views, disagreement broke out as locals VP supporters and John Frum followers had their own ‘road’ to follow regarding defining and controlling *kastom* (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 325) – i.e., selling it to tourists to enable development in their community, or preserving it as ‘of the place’ and not a commodity.

⁴⁵ See Chapter Three for discussions into the dichotomy of *kastom* and its significant ‘Others’ (Taylor, 2010, p. 281) such as the Church or non-*kastom* (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 317) or not-*kastom* (Rousseau, 2004, p. 40).

The ‘road’ the VP supporters took involved valuations of *kastom* and modernity as ‘both good’ (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 327). Through this combination of *kastom* and political utility, local Tannese people (VP supporters) could easily move from claiming to be *kastom* or modern within minutes (Lindstrom, 1982, p. 327). This switch in identity between being ‘*kastom*’ or ‘modern’ relates to Goodale’s indigenous cosmopolitanism explored in Chapter Three where locals create new forms of indigeneity in combination with exogenous ideas. It also relates to Taylor’s Janus face approach where people have the ability to see ‘both sides’ and weigh up the relative value between having *kastom* and selling *kastom* to generate income for the community. This is witnessed in Port Vila’s town dwellers described in Chapter Two, who are seen engaging in both modernity and *kastom* but with different degrees of success. The examples of ‘mixed’ bride price ceremonies and the non-middleclass urban population show the different ways in which *kastom* can be attached to people and projects. Like Ralph’s case study in Chapter Three, the execution of ‘mixing’ must be done carefully in a way that enables potentially dichotomous categories to work alongside each other instead of in conflict.

White (1993) – Kastom’s positions: ‘next to’, ‘alongside’, ‘under’, ‘above’

A further analysis of *kastom* that is of relevance to this research is White’s (1993) article based on Santa Isabella (Solomon Islands). White presents ‘three discourses of custom’ on the island. His detailed study explores *kastom* throughout these three discourses by: identifying its oppositional character, foregrounding contrasts between local ways and external constructs using the church and the state.

He references Keesing’s description of *kastom* as meaning “so many different things to so many different people, [that] it is a kind of ‘countless symbol’.” (White, 1993, p. 477)

Kastom not only illustrates the process of mystification; it shows how abstract symbols can derive power precisely because of their vagueness and vacuity... Their very abstractness and lack of precise content allow a consensus that would otherwise be impossible... In contemporary Vanuatu *kastom* is something everyone can share a commitment to because it is vaguely conceived, undefinable, and open to such diverse constructions. (Keesing, 1982, p. 299)

White endorses this point by noticing that “vagueness or emptiness is necessary for the effectiveness of *kastom* as a political tool” (White, 1993, p. 477). He expands on this statement, arguing that *kastom* needs to be characterised as ‘vacuous’ to operate in multiple ways in diverse contexts. White proves this through his analysis of three distinct contexts: a recollection of a spirit encounter, an introduction of a local court meeting, and a discussion of ‘custom chiefs’ which includes the role of the church and state. Through those examples, conceptions of the person and the meanings of *kastom* are shown to emerge where people discuss and ‘negotiate’ exogenous and indigenous ideas (Christian/local spirits; Western court/customary land) (White, 1993, p. 478). Furthermore, these three distinct contexts show *kastom* in relation to other discourses, and how *kastom* occupies a different position in relation to each of the contexts, as ‘under’, ‘over’, ‘beside’ and even ‘inside’.

The first context labels *kastom* as sacred knowledge/practice- ‘under’ or ‘covered over by’ the modern sacred/*tabu*-Christian life through a story of a local man called Thomas. In this story, Thomas shares his experience of clearing a sacred piece of land accompanied by his two dogs. He saw a huge rock and started clearing around it and suddenly, the rock turned into a huge snake. Thomas fights with the snake then calls his dogs who kill the snake. The next day when Thomas returns to bury the snake, but it has turned into a rock. On his return home that night though he feels the snake’s presence on his leg and body. Thomas holds on to his walking stick blessed by a Christian priest, which helps ward off the snake. A traditional healer summoned by his family succeeds in ridding Thomas of the spirit. The next

day however, his two dogs who accompanied him into the bush die, which White uses to show that despite people's Christian faith, *kastom* spirits still exist. The power of prayer on Thomas' walking stick on the other hand shows how Christianity has overcome *kastom* (or is 'over' *kastom*,) as the *kastom* 'snake' is positioned 'underneath it'. White (1993) summarizes that the general relation between custom and Christianity expresses a 'spatial metaphor' of above/below (p. 482). He clarifies that this "does not describe them as antithetical so much as two realities that occupy the same conceptual-functional space and contend for power or prominence" (White, 1993, p. 482).

Kastom as 'legal practice' was White's second context as *kastom* was also discovered 'next to' the island's court system. White (1993) explains how he participated in an 'inquiry' of "contested land rights convened by the justices of the local government court" (p. 483). Here, concepts of *kastom* are invoked to define the situation of land at hand as not a matter of gaining titles but as a way of establishing claims to power over who has the right for land use "by invoking the notion of *kastom* and then contrasting that with the 'court'" through drawing a "functional equivalence between custom and court by stating their concern with social conduct"⁴⁶ and specifically with resolving conflicts detrimental to the community"⁴⁷ (White, 1993, p. 484). White (1993) sums up that like Christianity and *kastom* in the first discourse, *kastom* and the court in this second context occupy an "adjacent and overlapping" positions in showing power when it comes to dealing with interpersonal problems (p. 485).

The final context looks at 'Custom Chiefs' who are seen as customary leaders or "embodiments of the strength and vitality of local traditions" (White, 1993, p. 486).

⁴⁶ See Lindstrom (1993).

⁴⁷ See White (1985).

Here, *kastom* is seen mutually working to define Chiefs and vice versa- where “Chiefs have ‘full and sole power over matters of tradition and custom’ - while it is ‘custom that determines who and what is a chief’” (White, 1993, p. 490). Adding to this description of chiefs, White (1993) notes how Santa Isabel’s colonial history has attempted to reinvent chiefs “as part of government or church structures” (p. 486). He presents a story of a local- Dudley Tuti – who prior to the country’s Independence, was installed Bishop of Santa Isabel as the island’s paramount chief. Through such status incorporating local authority and a religious role, White (1993) describes Tuti’s utilisation of tradition as a paramount chief as “not necessarily ‘what [their] grandfathers used to do’ but something to be found in post-Christian society, the source of unity and peace as opposed to conditions of divineness and hostility” (p. 489). As a local Bishop, Tuti’s experience in the church is still “shaped by oppositions of ‘old’ and ‘new’, ‘heathen’ and ‘Christian’ with origins in the missionary experience but these oppositions are not articulated as dichotomies or antonymies” (White, 1993, p. 489). White (1993) uses the examples of Tuti to show an emergent form of *kastom* and Christianity which “reconcile oppositional constructions of *kastom* and Christianity in a single discourse of chiefs” (p. 489). Tuti later represented the island in the country’s Council of Chiefs following the recognition of chiefs within contemporary government. Here, *kastom* is included ‘inside’ governmental institutions as leaders such as Tuti are representing their island in a modern national government context.

Through these discourses, White (1993) concludes that the two ‘oppositional contexts’ of ‘traditional’ and the ‘European’ can work together as not in dichotomy or as exclusionary to one another. From his study *kastom* emerged and is situated ‘under’, ‘over’, ‘beside’ and even ‘inside’ the Western and modern- Church and state (White, 1993, pp. 478-493).

Discussion of Contemporary Kastom

Both Lindstrom and White demonstrate how *kastom* has multiple meanings, operating as a category, positioned in a variety of relationships with things new/modern. This has led to differences in the value given to *kastom* and in understanding *kastom* in different contexts. With reference to Vanuatu, the detailing of each island's *kastom* and its implementation in state law can be overwhelming, moreover with the intrinsic diversities each cultural group is founded upon. Therefore, to combine it all in regulation can be challenging. The same applies in defining one singular *kastom* or identity of ni-Vanuatu within the range of cultural and linguistic diversity throughout the archipelago. This issue has been addressed by Forsyth (2004, 2009), and Rousseau (2008).

Also, *kastom* as practice and morality can add to the problematic detailing of the term itself. It is a detail way of life passed down to generations through practices and ethos or morality – strictly Melanesian/ni-Vanuatu as a way of thinking about the world. This is proven in the case study of Ralph on the basis of whether he has a true understanding of *kastom* as judgements were made on his knowledge and morality around *kastom*. This is the notion that *kastom* is not *just* practice, rather, it has multiple facets as a category; comprising of 'knowledge', 'practice' and 'ethics'.

This following section looks at using the ideas of *kastom* discussed by White, and applying these to my research findings through descriptions of *kastom*'s relationships to various contexts of modernity in Vanuatu.

Kastom 'outside' of town

A common theme which stood out through my analysis is people's 'separated' understanding of 'pure' *kastom* as grounded in the *aelan*, while in *taon* certain

traditional practices have been mixed with things new or not-*kastom*. One example of the ‘mixing’ in town was the story of a bride price ceremony discussed in a focus group. As research participants described it, the effects of a traditional ceremony based on *kastom* mixed with cash had a negative impact on the alliances of the bride and groom’s family as cash was now demanded with *kastom* gifts such as fine mats, pigs, and crops for example. According to participants, demand for gifts have risen if a bride is from another island or has new ‘value’ through having a degree qualification (focus group, Port Vila, 2014). Therefore, instead of uniting the newly engaged couple and their families, the amount of pressure grooms and their relatives face when it comes to paying bride price with cash can cause chaos between families, affecting their relationships after such hybrid exchanges. This confirms the influence of cash in modern settings like Port Vila. In response to the discussed ‘mixing’ of bride price, those in town who do not show any customary knowledge or practice are advised they should ‘*ko bak long aelan*’ to acquire *kastom* and return to apply it where necessary in *taon*. A participant suggested:

At times it is good to return to the island, to remind [ourselves] of [our] origin, [our] identity, roots and the way to live/speak/eat and talk with parents/elders/families. In town today, there is none of that respect seen. In the islands otherwise, it is well established. The young people today need to return to the islands to realize how respect is played out and the *fasin* (ways) of how to be a ni-Vanuatu. For example, in terms of land, kids have to return to know the basic foundations and knowledge surrounding how to own and look after such inheritances. (Jill, Port Vila, 2014)

This motive to return to one’s roots reaffirms the ideology in Chapter Two that ‘pure’ *kastom* is situated and found in the *aelan*, where it can be acquired and applied in *taon*. This suggestion to revitalize *kastom* through returning to the *aelan* demonstrates the importance in knowing not *just* customary practices, but the demeanour and morality around *kastom* and how to apply it in *taon* as a valued ni-Vanuatu *fasin*. Nonetheless, Jill’s statement is definitely aimed at the young

generation of ni-Vanuatu in Port Vila, who are seen as most likely to lack *kastom* knowledge and practice because of their urban upbringing.

Kastom ‘separated’ in people’s understandings

The debates on *kastom* being ‘separated’ in the two settings (town/*aelan*) show further class issues emanating from such division as urban dwellers suggest others to *ko bak long aelan*. Following Gewertz and Errington’s analysis of the emergence of class in Papua New Guinea (Chapter Two), ideas about ‘who belongs’ in *taon* show an expected demeanour and lifestyle as norms where some locals ostensibly do not ‘fit’ into Port Vila’s *taon* life. Many living in town have become embedded in the cash economy, dependent on employment and are immersed in an urban lifestyle that includes ideas and practices that many judge as non-indigenous. As a result, those who do not and cannot afford to live in this way are subject to the injunction to “*ko bak long aelan*”. Some research participants see the mixing in *taon* as unacceptable/wrong and diluting the traditional practice. Evidence that this is a more widespread view comes from the National Council of Chiefs, which has tried to control exchange practices such as bride price, encouraging people to follow customary procedures, values and gifts.

Despite this anxiety around ‘mixing’, *kastom* has been incorporated into national politics through the recent land reforms. Through these processes, the gazetted amendments have passed jurisdiction for identification for customary land owner group away from the formal state courts and into *nakamals* – traditional forums for community decision making (McDonnell, 2015) showing *kastom* ‘inside’ state law and politics which is my next theme.

Kastom ‘inside’ state law and politics

Following the land grabs under previous Land Ministries as discussed in Chapter Three, Vanuatu’s land laws have been amended. Under the new amended Land Acts of 2014⁴⁸, applications for leases on the development of customary land will now need consent of the custom owner group, stopping successive Ministers signing leases, as in the past. This provides an interesting avenue for using *kastom* ‘in’ politics to ascertain structures of ownership, decision making and authority to combat corruption at the state level during Ralph’s term in government. Ralph’s support for *kastom* however, faced minor challenges which proves the need to know *kastom*’s multiple forms. The challenges in Chapter Three show the importance of knowing how *kastom* can operate as a category in new spaces such as in parliament, and its extended definitions from not *just* practice but as morality too. As witnessed, Ralph has faced challenges in enacting *kastom*, as people are seen using *kastom* to assess his behaviour whether they are appropriate or not. There are similarities here with White’s presentation of *kastom* as both giving authority and defining authority.

In some circumstances informants judged the motive or thought/s behind his actions, rather than the action itself as appropriate or inappropriate. Ralph’s comments to Korman, may not seem wrong in substance, but the way in which Ralph used certain types of language or the way in which he opposed Korman in public, for example, could be seen ‘wrong’ or ‘disrespectful’ and this led to feelings of disrespect by Korman – and, indeed, some of Ralph’s supporters.

It becomes clear that ni-Vanuatu still value respect on the part of parliamentarians. Ralph’s incident with Korman not only shows *kastom* through *knowing*, but

⁴⁸ The Ministry of Lands and Natural Resources has a webpage showing all the new amended land acts of 2014, retrieved at: <https://mol.gov.vu/index.php/en/acts-and-laws/232-the-new-land-laws-2014>

showing respect ‘inside’ parliament, despite the ‘modern’ nature of the setting. This links to White’s example above, showing *kastom* being used to mutually define the basis of authority.

Conclusion

Drawing on Lindstrom (1982) and White’s (1993) accounts, I argue it is vital for ni-Vanuatu to recognize *kastom*’s possible classification as a ‘category’ that can exist alongside new influences as implemented in parliament by Walter Lini (in the past), Ham Lini and Ralph Regenvanu (recently). Through the ‘vacuous’ characteristic of *kastom* (Keesing, 1982), we can see it fitting into different contexts whether locally, nationally, or internationally. As a ‘flexible’ term, *kastom* can fit into different gaps, such as in the land reforms where *kastom* is not clearly defined as a precise set of laws or processes, but rather, provides the power to enable people to act according to *kastom* in the *nakamal*.

The sphere of *kastom* and its fascinating history used in this research show *kastom* as *stamba* [*foundation*] for ni-Vanuatu both through its early promotion as a tool for unity in the move towards independence and more recently in complaints that it is being “mixed” with things not-*kastom*. Its past implementation in defence against the colonising power demonstrate its importance in uniting ni-Vanuatu to become independent and reclaim ownership of land. The ‘mixing’ of *kastom* practices with cash has been halted by the *Malvatumauri* Chiefs, proving their power in restoring the *stret kastom fasin* of a traditional exchange in principle. This form of ‘mixing’ shows how participants felt towards this hybrid as an issue mentioned in Chapter Two. Finally, the way in which ‘respect’ is expected shows that people place value on respecting *kastom* ways in actions and speech, as seen upon Ralph’s incident

with Korman in Parliament. Furthermore, it is evident that people judge a person's knowledge of *kastom* according to their demeanour and self-presentation.

These contexts show the different meanings of *kastom* and its stance as ni-Vanuatu *stamba*, not limited to a particular definition but as emanating through certain actions and knowledges discussed in this research. As Rousseau (2008) puts it, *kastom* is “[C]entred around the values of respect, unity and harmony, in contemporary everyday life [and] *kastom* operates as a critical tool in determinations of the propriety and legitimacy of behaviour, personality, relationship and intent” (Rousseau, 2008, p. 16). As a nation, ni-Vanuatu should recognize the use of *kastom* today, and how it can fit and operate in a contemporary setting to represent our Melanesian *fasin* in relation to non-indigenous contexts. Through this, we can look at moving our country forward with our *kastoms*, and continue to support its use to steer the nation alongside Christianity⁴⁹. Our knowledge and use of our Melanesian *fasin* which unites us in diversity throughout the *aelan* could be incorporated with categorized distinctions so they can stand in new arenas like foregrounding policies, to represent and drive change to develop the ‘Melanesian Way’. I conclude with the words of the late Fr Walter Lini:

The future of Vanuatu is bright, and it is important that we should be allowed to develop in the Melanesian way on our own. As a nation we ... [can] step confidently into a new future...and look forward to taking our place among the nations of our world. (Lini, 1980, p. 63)

[w]e must polish up our very own Pacific and Melanesian ideas, to make them the basis of unity in our own country and within our region and to give us the necessary strength and direction to choose wisely what we want and do not want for the future (Lini, 1980, p. 291)⁵⁰.

⁴⁹ As envisaged by many of the leaders of Independence.

⁵⁰ In *Vanuatu: Twenti wan tingting long taem blong independens*, Institute of Pacific Studies, University of the South Pacific, p. 291.

Lini's suggestions show a compassion towards progressing the nation forward *with* our ni-Vanuatu *kastoms* to mark our Melanesian identity. As argued in this research, it becomes vital to acknowledge and apply our *kastom* ideas and practices wisely, by knowing its operation as a category which positions it alongside different contexts. This approach in mixing juxtapositions of 'indigenous/non-indigenous', 'old/new', 'past/present', or '*kastom/modernity*', provide a new perception of pairing these competing epistemologies. This research has shown that with a careful 'mixing' of these *fasins*, our ni-Vanuatu *kastoms* can be lifted - especially in Port Vila - to continue and reconcile 'the Melanesian Way' with Vanuatu's contemporary state.

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Appendix 1: Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

I am an Anthropology student at the University of Waikato. As part of my Honours Dissertation, I am undertaking research on **Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu**. The aim of my research is to explore Mr Regenvanu's journey, from an Anthropologist, an artist, to a Member of Parliament, who is currently the Minister of Lands and Justice in Vanuatu. I am interested on people's view of him and his impacts and influences on our nationhood, Vanuatu.

Semi-structured interviews

For this research I hope to conduct a couple of semi-structured interviews with roughly four participants, one being with Mr Regenvanu himself. The other three would be with officials in the Cultural Centre in Port Vila, Vanuatu, where Mr Regenvanu had been previously employed. The interviews will be approximately half an hour to an hour in length. Your opinions and thoughts are important so you are welcome to bring up any issues which you view as important to my research.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview. I would like to audio record the interviews so that I have an accurate account of your views and opinions.

What are your rights as participants?

If you choose to participate in my research, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question(s)
- Withdraw from the research up to a month after the interview
- Decline to be audio recorded and request that recorder be turned off at any time
- Request that any material be erased
- Ask any question about the research at any time during your participation

Confidentiality

I will ensure, to the best of my ability that all interviews and discussion remain confidential and a pseudonym (fake name) will be used in publications so that you will stay anonymous. All written transcripts and recorded audio and information stored on computer will be kept safe and only I will have access to them.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the Secretary of the Committee, email fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wanaga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

The results

The results of my research will be used as part of my Honours dissertation. As such, one will be produced as hardcopy, and another, as a soft copy, online. The findings may also be used in journal publications and presentations.

What Next?

If you would like to take part in my research I will contact you in the next week so we can arrange a time to meet. If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

Lavinia Mahit

021 071 7615

gmahit@gmail.com

Fiona McCormack

fio@waikato.ac.nz

Infomesen sheet (Bislama)
UNIVERSITY BLONG WAIKATO
FACULTY BLONG ARTS MO SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Kalja mo Politics long Vanuatu

Mi wan Anthropology student long University blong Waikato. Long side blong Honours research pepa blong me, me kat intres blong mekem wan research long Ralph Regenvanu: mo lukluk long Kalja mo Politics long Vanuatu. Wetem research ya, mi aim blong explorem Mr Regenvanu mo life histri blong hem, olsem wan Anthropologist, wan artist, go kasem wan member blong Parlemen mo nowia weh hemi Minista blong Lands mo Justice long Vanuatu. Mi wantem faenem out how manples oli lukluk hem mo ol samting weh hemi makem blong impactem mo sem taem, influencem nation blong yumi long Vanuatu.

Smol interview

Blong conductem research blong me, mi plan blong preparem some smol interview wetem 4 participants, weh e includem Mr Regenvanu too. Mi hope blong faenem 3 nara man long Kaljaral Senta weh oli wok wetem Mr Regenvanu befo. Ol interview bae oli takem 30 minits olsem or more, ksem 1 hour. Ol tingting blong yu oli impoten tumas so plis yu save tokbout any issue lo side blong topic blong mi.

Mi wantem invaetem yu blong tek pat long interview mo mi wantem recordem ol interview too olsem bae mi kat stret infomesen long side blong tingting blong yu.

Ol raets blong yu olsem wan participant

Spos u agri blong tek pat long research blong me, yu kat raet blong:

- Refusem blong ansarem any stret question(s)
- Yu save withdro long research taem e kasem wan manis long interview
- Yu save stopem mi blong no recordm ol tingting blong yu
- Rekwistem eni infomesen blo mi wipem out
- Askem any kaen kewsten anytaem long ol interview

Praevacy

Bae evri infomesen long ol interview mo toktok bae mi keepim olgeta safe mo private oltaem, mo bae mi save hidem nem blong yu mo usem wan narawan blong replacem. Every not weh bae mi takem mo audio recording bae mi nomo me save accessem mo bae mi deletem olgeta time mi finalisem report blong mi.

Olgeta long Human Research Ethics Committee long Faculty blong Arts mo Social Sciences lo Waikato University oli been appruvum research blong mi. Sapos u kat eni kwestion long side blong research blo mi about safety blong yu, emailen fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wanaga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

Ol resalt

Ol resalt blong research blong mi bae mi usum blong Honours research paper blong mi. Wan copy bae go long lecturer blong mi blong markem mo wan long Mr Regenvanu blong hemi approvem.

Wanem bae happen next?

Sapos u agri blong tek pat long research blong mi, bae mi contactem u nekis week blong arrangem wan time blong yumi meet mo discussem ol intaview questions blong mi. Spos u kat any kwestion about research blong mi, plis contactem supavaesa blong mi.

Ta.

Lavinia Mahit

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Dr Fiona McCormack

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Appendix 2: Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM- Semi structured Interview

Description of project: This research aims to examine politics and culture in Vanuatu. I am particularly interested in exploring the culture and politics in Vanuatu while incorporating a case study on Mr Ralph Regenvanu as a Ni-Vanuatu Anthropologist, and his engagement in, and influence on the culture and politics in Vanuatu.

I have read the information sheet and understand that

- I can refuse to answer any question, terminate the interview and can withdraw from the research up to a month after my interview.
- All information will remain confidential.
- My identity will be stated solely due to the context of the research involving a personal biography.
- All information collected will remain secure in in the Researcher's files in a University student account with protected passwords.
- Information will be used for the Researcher's Honours dissertation only.

I (your name) _____ agree to participate in this research and acknowledge receipt of copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.

_____ (to be signed and dated by participant)

_____ (to be signed and dated by Lavinia Mahit)

Consen Fom – (Bislama)
UNIVERSITY BLONG WAIKATO
FACULTY BLONG ARTS MO SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Kalja mo Politics long Vanuatu

RESEARCH CONSEN FOM- Intaview

Project: Research ya hemi aim blong examinem politics mo culture long Vanuatu. Mi interes bigwan blong explorem wan Ni-Vanuatu Anthropologist; Mr Ralph Regenvanu, hu e engage bigwan mo influencem manples, mo kalja wetem politics long Vanuatu.

Mi readim infomesen sheet mo mi undastan seh

- Me save refusem blong ansarem eni kwesten, leko intreview mo withdro long risej taem e kasem wan manis.
- Evri infomesen bae stap praevet oltaem.
- Bae ril nem blong mi e kamaot from se resej ya e involvem sam infomesen long pesonol laef blong wan big man long Vanuatu mo bae isi blong ol man oli identify mi from mi bin wok wetem Ralph Regenvanu.
- Everi infomesen weh bae mi givem bae stap safe oltaem long student file blong riseja weh hemi kat password blong protectem.
- Every infomesen bae go tuwodsem Honours risej pepa blong researcha nomo.

Mi (nem blong yu) _____ agri blong tek pat long research mo mi sapotem copy blong infomesen sheet ya mo consent form blong research ya.

_____ (paticipent blong saen ya)

_____ (riseja blong saen ya. Lavinia Mahit)

Appendix 3: Key Interview schedule

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

Focus group and semi-Structured key questions and schedule

This schedule outlines some of the topics that I would like to discuss during our interview. You do not have to answer every question and you are welcome to bring up other issues not covered on this schedule. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts and experiences on culture and politics in Vanuatu being a citizen and an employee of our Cultural Centre, focusing on impacts and influences by Mr Regenvanu in Vanuatu.

- What are your thoughts about the importance of Culture in contemporary Vanuatu and how has this changed overtime?
- What are your thoughts of contemporary Politics in Vanuatu and how has this changed overtime?
- What do you value as a ni-Vanuatu?
- What are your thoughts on Ralph Regenvanu?
- Have you ever had any disagreements on Ralph?
- What are your thoughts on foreign influences here today?
- How can we promote/protect our culture/*kastoms*?
- How do you envisage Vanuatu in 10years time?

Smol intaview schedule (Bislama)

UNIVERSITY BLONG WAIKATO
FACULTY BLONG ARTS MO SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Kalja mo Politics long Vanuatu

Intaview kwesten

Schedule ya e showem ol topic weh mi wantem toktok wetem long ol intaview sessions blong yumi. Sapos yu no save ansarem sam kewsten, hemi orate nomo, givem tingting blong yu long ol kwesten weh u save ansarem nomo. Mi intres bigwan blong harem ol tingting blong yu long saed blong kalja mo politics long Vanuatu, mo Mr Regenvanu wetem ol influence mo impact blong hem, wetem ol yangfala hemi been kat contact wetem.

- Wanem nao ol tingting blong yu long saed blong kalja long Vanuatu tedei mo impotence blong hem?
- Hao now kalja e been change long taem blong befo wetem taem nowia?
- Wanem nao ol tingting blong yu long saed blong politics long Vanuatu tedei mo impotence blong hem?
- Hao now politics e been change long taem blong befo wetem taem nowia?
- Hamas save yu kat long Mr Ralph Regenvanu?
- Yu ting se Mr Regenvanu hemi impactem Kalja mo Politics long Vanuatu?
- Wanem nao long tingting blong yu Vanuatu e save promotem mo sem taem protektem ol *kastom* mo kalja blo yumi tete?
- Wanem nao viuvu blong yu long how Vanuatu bae lukluk long 10 yia olsem?

Appendix 4: Semi-structured formal letter

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

9 October 2013

Lavinia Mahit
Department of Anthropology
Faculty of Arts and Social
Sciences
University of Waikato
lglm1@students.waikato.ac.nz

Cultural Centre, Port Vila
Vanuatu

Dear _____

Re: Interviews for ANTH591 Dissertation on “*Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu*”

I am a Ni-Vanuatu Anthropology student at the University of Waikato. As part of my Honours Dissertation, I am interested in undertaking research on Culture and Politics in Vanuatu, and explore Mr Regenvanu’s impacts and influences from an Anthropologist, to the current Minister of Lands and Justice.

The purpose in writing to you is mainly because you have had previous employment experience with Mr Regenvanu while he was still working at the Cultural Centre, and within your institution, I am confident there is a vast data of information which can contribute towards my research around the culture and politics in Vanuatu. I would very much appreciate your time and help towards my research project.

The aim of my research is to explore Mr Regenvanu's journey, from an Anthropologist, an artist, to a Member of Parliament, currently the Minister in Vanuatu. I am also interested on your individual view of Mr Regenvanu of his impacts and influences on our nationhood in Vanuatu.

Semi-structured interviews

For this research I hope to conduct one of semi-structured interview with yourself and two other colleagues and also, Mr Regenvanu, separately via email, who has worked with you at the Cultural Centre. The interviews will be conducted via email since I will not be travelling to Vanuatu. Your opinions and thoughts are important so you are welcome to bring up any issues which you view as important to my research and elaborate further. I will send back transcripts of your responses back to you before I finalize them into my report for a second chance, if you feel like making any changes.

I would like to invite you to participate in my interview.

What are your rights as participants?

If you choose to participate in my research, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question(s)
- Withdraw from the research up to a month after the interview
- Request that any material be erased
- Ask any question about the research at any time during your participation

Confidentiality

I will ensure, to the best of my ability that all interviews and discussion remain confidential, however, participants' identities will be revealed due to the context of this research involving a personal biography of a highly respected individual and information about your colleagues who could be easily identified. All written transcripts via email and information stored on computer will be kept safe and only I will have access to them. They will be destroyed at the end of this course.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the secretary of the Committee, email fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wanaga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

The results

The results of my research will be used as part of my Honours dissertation. As such, hardcopies will be made for my marker, for you and my other three participants for approval.

What Next?

If you would like to take part in my research I will contact you via email regarding my interview schedule. If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

Thank you for your time and consideration, I hope to hear from you soon.

Yours sincerely,

LaviniaMahit

lglm1@students.waikato.ac.nz

Dr Fiona McCormack

fio@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 5: Ralph's Questionnaire form

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

This schedule outlines some of the topics that I would like to discuss during our interview. You do not have to answer every question and you are welcome to bring up other issues not covered on this schedule. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts and experiences on culture and politics in Vanuatu being a citizen and an employee of our Cultural Centre, focusing on impacts and influences by Mr Regenvanu in Vanuatu.

- What are your thoughts about the importance of Culture in contemporary Vanuatu
- How has this changed over time?
- What are your thoughts of contemporary Politics in Vanuatu?
- How has this changed over time?
- In what capacity do you think the public know you and trust you as a political leader?
- And for how long?
- What impacts have you made upon Vanuatu and its culture and politics?
- Do you think there have been visible changes throughout Vanuatu's Culture and Politics since your political career?
- If so, what are those changes?
- What do you think still needs to be done in terms of culture and politics in Vanuatu?
- Do you think Anthropologists are needed in Vanuatu?
- Is there any other Ni-Vanuatu Anthropologists that you know other yourself?

Appendix 6: Ralph Regenvanu's Information Sheet

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

I am an Anthropology student at the University of Waikato. As part of my Honours Dissertation, I am undertaking research in politics, culture and anthropology in Vanuatu. My topic is titled; **Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu**. The aim of my research is to explore your journey, from an Anthropologist, an artist, to a Member of Parliament, currently the Minister of Lands and Justice in Vanuatu. I am also interested in how people view you and your impacts and influences on our nationhood in Vanuatu. I would like to explore your employment experience and knowledge of the Cultural Centre, which has a vast contribution to Vanuatu's culture and politics. Your contribution regarding culture and politics in Vanuatu since your involvement will greatly showcase a case study which I am interested to portray in my research.

Semi-structured interviews

For this research I hope to conduct a semi-structured interview with you. I will also a couple of other officials at the Cultural Centre who you have worked with. The interview will be conducted via email with scheduled questions in which you have a timeframe of two weeks to return your responses to me. I would be grateful if you could be thoughtful in your responses. Your opinions and thoughts are important so you are welcome to bring up any issues which you view as important to my research. The required forms such as the consent form, information sheet and interview scheduled questions are also translated into Bislama if you feel confident in answering in your mother tongue language, by all means, feel free to. I will send back transcripts of your responses back to you before I finalize them into my report for a second chance, if you feel like making any changes.

I would like to invite you to participate in an interview.

What are your rights as participants?

If you choose to participate in my research, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any particular question(s)
- Withdraw from the research up to a month after the interview
- Request that any material be erased

- Ask any question about the research at any time during your participation

Confidentiality

I will ensure, to the best of my ability that all interviews and discussion remain confidential, however, participants' identities will be revealed due to the context of this research involving your personal biography and information about your colleagues who could be easily identified. All written and/or emailed transcripts and information stored on computer will be kept safe and only I will have access to them. They will be destroyed at the end of this course as I personally do not want this report to be used for further research.

This research project has been approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences. Any questions about the ethical conduct of this research may be sent to the secretary of the Committee, email fass-ethics@waikato.ac.nz, postal address, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Te Kura Kete Aronui, University of Waikato, Te Whare Wanaga o Waikato, Private Bag 3105, Hamilton 3240.

The results

The results of my research will be used as part of my Honours dissertation. As such, one will be produced as hardcopy, for my marker, including copies for you and the other three participants for their approval.

What Next?

If you would like to take part in my research I will email you with my interview questions. If you have any questions about my research, please feel free to contact me or my supervisor.

Yours sincerely,

Lavinia Mahit

lglm1@students.waikato.ac.nz

Dr Fiona McCormack

fio@waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 7: Ralph Regenvanu's Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

RESEARCH CONSENT FORM- Interview

Description of project: This research aims to examine politics and culture in Vanuatu. I am particularly interested in exploring you as a Ni-Vanuatu Anthropologist, and your engagement in, and influence on the culture and politics in Vanuatu since your involvement.

I have read the information sheet and understand that

- I can refuse to answer any question, terminate the interview and can withdraw from the research up to a month after my interview.
- All information will remain confidential.
- My identity will be stated solely due to the context of the research involving my personal biography given my status.
- All information collected will remain secure in in the Researcher's files in a University student account with protected passwords.
- Information will be used for the Researcher's Honours dissertation only.

I (your name) _____ agree to participate in this research and acknowledge receipt of copy of this consent form and the research project information sheet.

_____ (to be signed and dated by participant)

_____ (to be signed and dated by Lavinia Mahit)

Appendix 8: Ralph's Semi structured interview questions

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

This schedule outlines some of the topics that I would like to discuss during our interview. You do not have to answer every question and you are welcome to bring up other issues not covered on this schedule. I am interested in hearing about your life journey, your thoughts and experiences on culture and politics in Vanuatu, focusing on impacts and influences upon Education here in Vanuatu and also, the youth population you have engaged with.

- What are the main highlights of your life journey?
- As an Anthropology student myself, I'd like to know, what made you choose Anthropology and become an Anthropologist?
- How has this brought you to where you are now?
- How do you view Culture and Politics in general?
- What are your thoughts about the importance of Culture in contemporary Vanuatu and how has this changed over time?
- What are your thoughts of contemporary Politics in Vanuatu and how has this changed over time?
- In what capacity do you think the public know you and trust you as a Political leader?
- What impacts have you made upon Vanuatu and its cultural and political spheres? (You may wish to discuss scholarship grants you sponsored students with to count towards Education and the young people you have influenced)
- What do you think still needs to be done in terms of Vanuatu's culture and politics?
- Do you think Anthropologists are needed in Vanuatu?
- Is there any other Ni-Vanuatu Anthropologists that you know other yourself?
- How important is it to have Anthropology in Vanuatu?
- Is there a need for this discipline? If so, explain. If not, explain why not.

Appendix 9: Focus Group Poster

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu



ANTHROPOLOGY FOCUS GROUP

VANUATU CULTURE AND POLITICS

VANUATU NATION
Influences Politics
Ralph Regenvanu
IMPACTS CULTURE
Past Future

LET YOUR VOICE BE HEARD

Research participants wanted
Come and participate in a discussion regarding Vanuatu's future
If you're interested in participating, please email Nia at lg1m1@students.waikato.ac.nz

Appendix 10: Interview with Howard Van Trease

UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
FACULTY OF ARTS AND SOCIAL SCIENCES
Semi-structured interview schedule

Ralph Regenvanu: Culture and Politics in Vanuatu

This schedule outlines some of the topics that I would like to discuss during our interview. You do not have to answer every question and you are welcome to bring up other issues not covered on this schedule. I am interested in hearing about your thoughts and experiences on culture and politics in Vanuatu being protester of Vanuatu politics of land and Melanesian style of politics for example, with a focus on the impacts and influences upon Mr Regenvanu here in Vanuatu.

- What are your thoughts on the nature of Vanuatu's current state?
- How do you see traditional politics in modern politics?
- What are your thoughts of Vanuatu during its pre-colonial era and today?
- What are your thoughts on cultural boundaries and political boundaries played out in Vanuatu?
- How do you envisage Vanuatu in 10years time?
- Will small nation states like Vanuatu be subordinate to global forces as the IMF, WB, ADB, or will there be a new global governance emerging?
- What are your thoughts on Ralph Regenvanu?

Appendix 11: Ralph Regenvanu's brief timeline

Born; 20 September 1970

Jan – Dec 1992: Field Survey Officer VCHSS; spent one year travelling around Vanuatu recording cultural sites as a Field Survey Officer with the Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey (VCHSS) at the Vanuatu Cultural Centre

April 1994 - September 1995: Curator, National Museum of Vanuatu

April - September 1995: Acting Director, Vanuatu Cultural Centre

April - October 1995: Director, Vanuatu Cultural and Historic Sites Survey

September 1995 – December 2006: Director, Vanuatu Cultural Centre

2003: Part of drafting committee of the UN Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, which was adopted by the UNESCO General Assembly.

2004: Seven illustrations reproduced in The story of the eel and other stories from Uripiv island, Vanuatu, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Vanuatu.

2005: Detail of “Las kakae” reproduced on cover of Lightner, S., Naupa, A. Histri blong yumi long Vanuatu: an educational resource: Volume 3, Vanuatu Cultural Centre, Vanuatu

September 2008 – September 2012: Member of Parliament, 9th Legislature of the Parliament of the Republic of Vanuatu for the Port Vila Constituency

December 2008- Arrested for helping 30 inmates after starting a fire in prison

December 2010 – February 2011: Minister of State, responsible for portfolio of Ni-Vanuatu Business Development, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu

2010 – Instrumental in tabling a Parliamentary motion on West-Papua

November 2010- Launch of own Political Party; GJP

1976-1982: Central Primary School

1982: Malapoa College

1983-1987: Brisbane Grammar School

1988 - 1991, 1993: Australian National University, Canberra, Australia; graduated with a BA (Hons)

Publications- 1996: “Transforming representations: A sketch of the contemporary art scene in Vanuatu” in Bonnemaïson, J., Kaufmann, C., Huffman, K., Tryon, D. (eds) *Arts of Vanuatu*, Crawford House Publishing, Bathurst

1996: “Vanuatu’s traditional cultures” in *Hapi Tumas Long Vanuatu: Vanuatu’s longest established and most popular visitor’s guide*, Trading Post Ltd, Port Vila

2007-2011: University of the South Pacific, Port Vila, Vanuatu studied for a Bachelor of Law Degree

Awarded University of the South Pacific Gold Medal for the Most Outstanding Bachelor of Laws Graduate

February - March 2011: Minister of State, responsible for portfolio of Lands, Geology, Mines, Energy, Environment and Rural Water Supply, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu

March 2011 – January 2012: Minister of State, responsible for portfolio of Justice and Community Services, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu

October 2012 – present: Member of Parliament, 10th Legislature of the Parliament of the Republic of Vanuatu (second term)

March 2013 – present: Minister of State, responsible for portfolio of Lands, Geology, Mines, Environment and Water Resources, Government of the Republic of Vanuatu

2013: Appointed Acting Prime Minister on four separate occasions

2013: Minister of Lands – June 2015

2016: Minister of Lands - present