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# Reconciling kastom, tourism, art in the Pacific: the case of the Leweton Cultural Group and “water music”

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## **Working Paper (Document presented as Confirmation of Candidature – PHD)**

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### **Title**

Reconciling *kastom*, tourism, art in the Pacific: the case of the Leweton Cultural Group and “water music”.

### **Abstract**

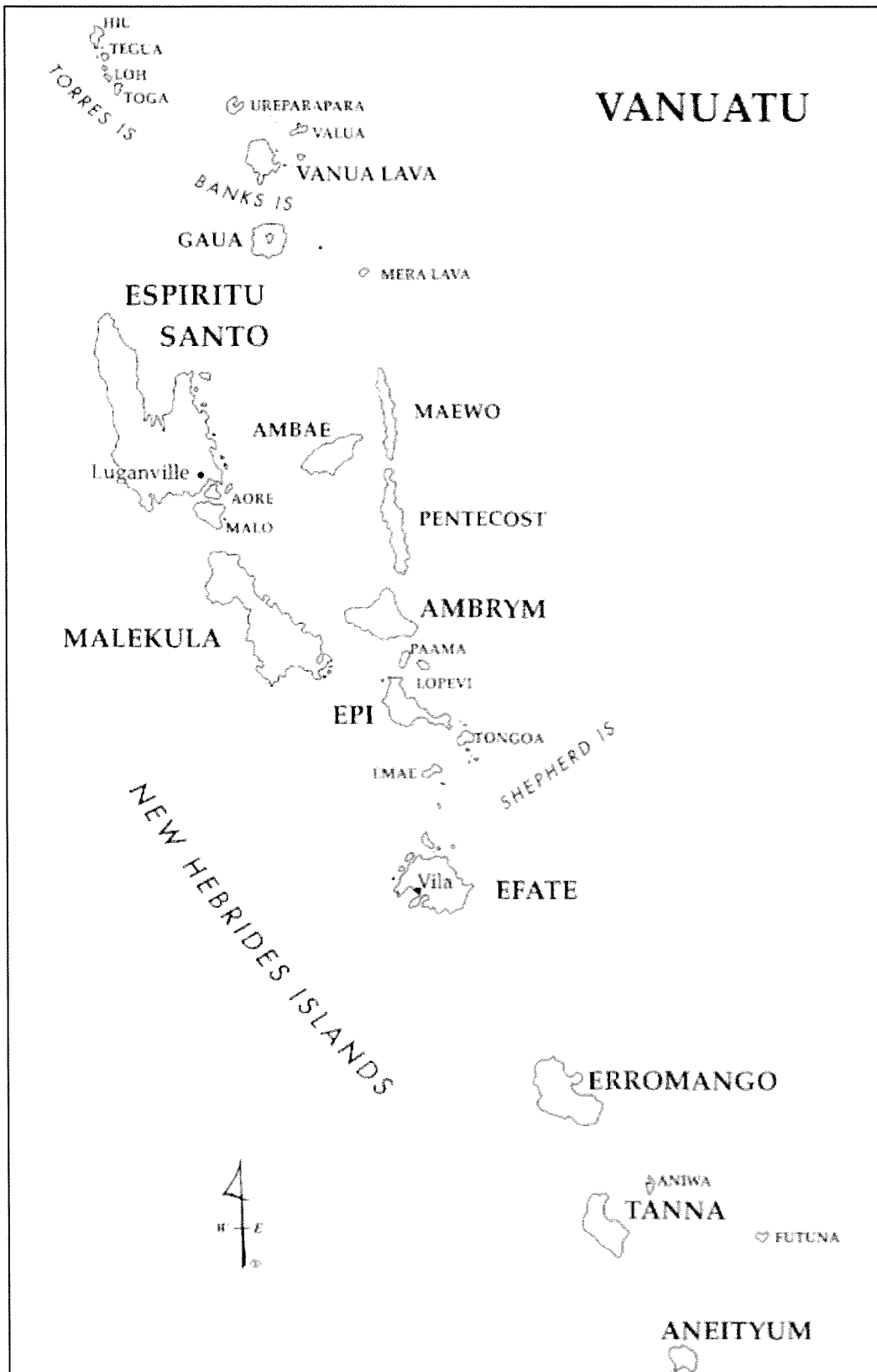
Post-colonial Vanuatu is one of the most culturally and linguistically diverse countries in the world. Ni-Vanuatu cultural performers present themselves as local, national, and international actors simultaneously by allowing outsiders to witness and engage with their living cultural expressions or “*kastom*”.

Contemporary ni-Vanuatu communities are establishing themselves as distinct and differentiated “cultural villages”, often in urban settings away from traditional or *kastom* places.

Taking the case of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora from the islands of Gaua and Merelava who perform “water music”. I will investigate the forces at play in the transitioning of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora into the Leweton Cultural Village. I will track the trajectory of the Leweton Cultural Village as an enterprise operating locally, nationally, and internationally, with these scales of activity providing markers for my research. I will present this research as a PhD incorporating four interlinked publications.

The project will involve a single case study, the Leweton Cultural Group/Village with embedded or multiple units of analysis. Taking a critical realist approach I will conduct an ethnography using semi-structured interviews and participant engagement to explore how these embedded units intergrade and provide critical recommendations about policy development in the areas of cultural heritage maintenance, tourism, and artistic and cultural development.

Map 1. Vanuatu (Bolton, 1999)



## Introduction

Vanuatu is a Y-shaped archipelago of 83 islands, of which 70 are inhabited (see Map 1). These islands are populated by people who refer to themselves as ni-Vanuatu. Most ni-Vanuatu also identify with at least one, and usually several, of the approximately 110 distinct language groups (Tryon, 1996). Ni-Vanuatu people live in a complex world full of cultural and linguistic diversity. Indeed, when calculated on a per capita basis, Vanuatu is the most linguistically diverse country in the world, and only its near neighbour Papua New Guinea has more in absolute numbers. The disputed Bislama term *kastom* refers to the idea of a traditional system of law, religion, economics and/or governance. It incorporates all aspects of life including birth, death and marriage rituals, art, music, dance, kinship and the entire spectrum of human interaction and the sights, sounds and smells which signify “the spiritual presence in combination with the participation of the earth itself” (Huffman, 2005). In reality, there are as many *kastom* systems as there are languages as each of the 110 language groups currently found in Vanuatu represents a people with different oral histories, cosmologies, customs and traditions (Hickey, 2006). The living expression of this diversity appears in many different forms: at different times it is formulated and presented as customary practice (rituals marking births, deaths, marriages,); as a commercial enterprise (in the tourism industry); and as creative and artistic performance (at international festivals and events).

As Haidy Geismar (2009) writes “Ni-Vanuatu artists make themselves local, national, and international simultaneously through representing and selling *kastom* to the outside world in national exhibitions and engendering international interest.” (Geismar, 2009, p. 72). Notwithstanding the international success of some ni-Vanuatu groups as artists, and indeed as tourism enterprises, it is not clear how these forms of expression influence each other. This is the problem space in which my research project is situated. Does the *kastom* expressed at a funeral pass into another form by virtue of the performance of a *kastom* dance as a tourist spectacle? The performance of *kastom* as an artistic/creative production may be different from the form of *kastom* performed for tourists or for funerals and the differences require unpacking so as to understand the importance of the “intercultural space” of urban settings, such as Luganville, where the specific *kastom* structures of the 110 different language groups are interacting with each other and with the exogenous structures of Euro/Americans including the relevant industry (i.e. tourism and/or music). It is also unclear how much of the “tension” is a product of perspective – indeed, it is possible that this tension does not exist for the ni-Vanuatu groups.

Taking the case of the Mwerlap-speaking people from the islands of Gaua and Merelava, I will investigate the forces at play in the mobility of people in post-Independence Vanuatu. I will describe the process by which a diasporic community transitioned into the Leweton Cultural Village in the urban setting of Luganville, Espiritu Santo. I will track the trajectory of the Leweton Cultural

Village as an enterprise operating locally, nationally, and internationally, with these scales of activity providing markers for my research.

The multiform nature of the Leweton community (performers, tourism operators, indigenous community), combined with the staged development of the Leweton enterprise from remote island, to urban Village, to international enterprise lends itself to a multi-part exposition. The form of expression corresponds directly with the scale of activity:

- indigenous community corresponds with local island;
- tourism operators corresponds with the urban Village in a post-colonial nation-state; and
- international performance corresponds with the enterprise of touring an artform internationally.

These scales of activity act as markers and while there is a lot of research into the interaction between traditional culture and tourism, authenticity, and cultural policy – in short, a lot of research into two of these form-scale interactions, this will be the first study to track a single, ni-Vanuatu community through each of these three form-scale interactions. In particular, it is the focus on the possibility that these interactions can be reconciled to provide opportunities for the community to achieve its own (perhaps un-stated) goals and objectives that is the point of interest and that adds knowledge. Another key point of difference from the existing research is that the Leweton group is one of 110 culturally and linguistically diverse groups in Vanuatu. This differs from existing research in that much of it has focused on single minority cultural groups relative to a dominant or colonial power, for example between Maori and Pakeha (Taylor, 2001) and for African Americans in the USA (Willis, 1994). Consequently, the implication is that the findings of this research may be applicable for other similar communities.

I will present this research as a PhD incorporating four interlinked publications with three written publications focusing on the three form-scale interactions. The fourth publication will be a participatory video broadcast on Vanuatu television.

In the first publication I will introduce the diaspora of Mwerlap-speaking people, with a particular focus on the community based on Espiritu Santo. At the time of Independence, there was minimal penetration of the cash economy and the newly formed national government, into the rural areas where 90% of the population lived. I will describe the processes which stimulated the mobility of people from rural to urban areas and provide the context for the formation of the Leweton Cultural Village. This will be submitted to *Shima* (previously an ERA ranked B journal).

The second publication will investigate the establishment of the Leweton Cultural Village. The Village was originally formed as a commercial tourism venture, offering primarily cruise ship tourists the opportunity to see the performance of the women's water music. This "commodification of culture"

raises the “specters of inauthenticity” but has been supported by national and international donors as an aid and development project, and a form of revenue generation. This will be submitted to *Perfect Beat* (previously an ERA ranked A journal).

The third publication will track the international success of the Leweton group as they present themselves in a multiplicity of roles and modalities. With success in the music industry come challenges for their tourism enterprise. But these are interactions that might well be regulated by government authorities. With the increasing involvement of international aid donors, what lessons are there for policy-makers in Vanuatu? This will be submitted to *Island Studies Journal* (previously an ERA ranked B journal).

The fourth publication will be a documentary video integrating the three publications above into a coherent presentation that privileges the voices of the Leweton community. The video will be broadcast on Vanuatu television.

This research will be conducted over the course of six field trips with the Leweton group. Three of the field trips will be conducted on tour with the group in Australia, a further two field trips will be conducted in Luganville, Espiritu Santo, and the final field trip will be traveling with the group to their “home” islands of Gaua and Merelava. Data from this fieldwork will be shaped by the five years of collaborative work that I have conducted with the Leweton community. This is all grounded in the 9 years that I lived in Vanuatu between 2000 and 2009. For three of these years I lived in Luganville, the same town in which the Leweton Village is established.

The four aims of this study are as follows:

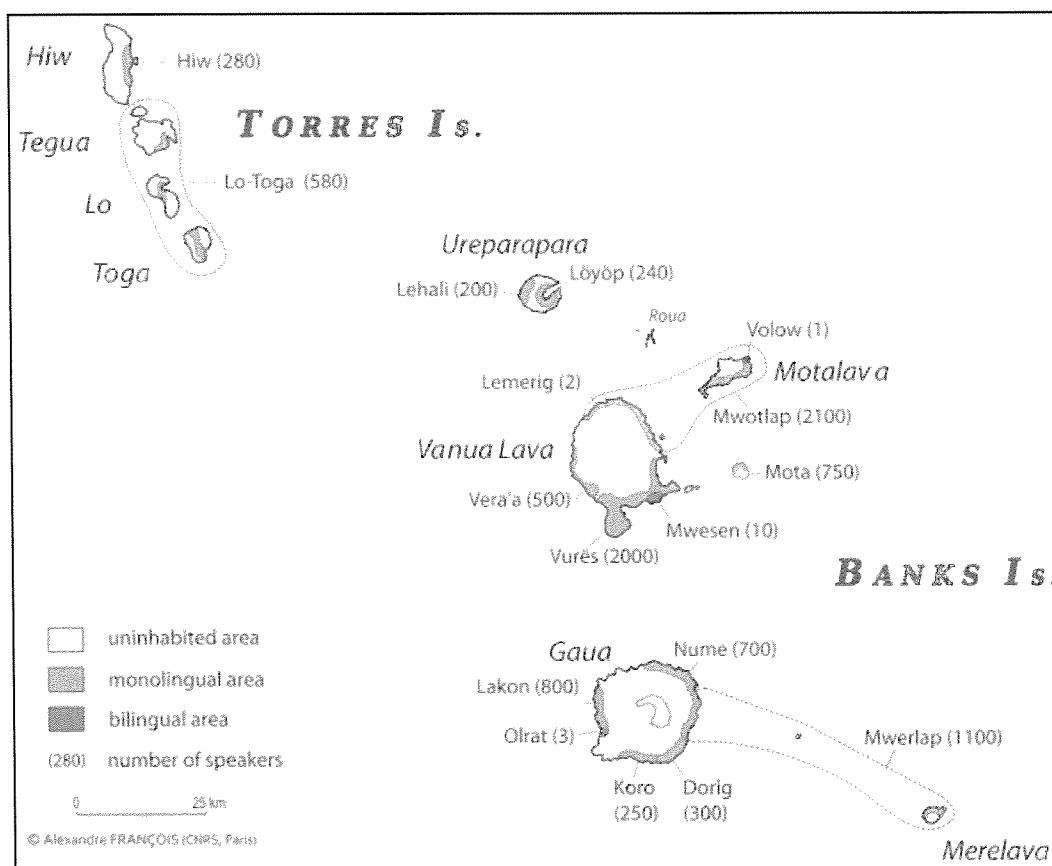
1. To describe the processes which stimulated the mobility of people from rural to urban areas and provide the context for the formation of the Leweton Cultural Village including the characteristics of Mwerlap out-migration, from Merelava to Gaua, from Gaua and Merelava to other places for work (circular migration), for re-settlement (urbanization), and to international destinations (as form of international circular migration).
2. To describe and explain the practice of establishing a cultural village, as a domicile, a commercial tourism product, a venue for performance, and a site of living cultural expression – and the way that this practice is a form of self-determination.
3. To document the processes involved in Aims 1 and 2 from the perspective of the Leweton community,
4. To recommend ways to improve self-determination policy, cultural policy and tourism policy, to support ni-Vanuatu communities.

The context for my thesis is the Melanesian island nation of Vanuatu. The Republic of Vanuatu (formerly New Hebrides) was formed in 1980, when it gained its independence from the colonial administration of the French-British Condominium, which had been in place since 1906. Vanuatu is divided into six provinces. In the far north of Vanuatu, the islands of the Banks and Torres

form the province of TORBA. TORBA has a population of 9,359 people and an area of 882 km<sup>2</sup>. This is the smallest population and the smallest land area of all the provinces. The location of these islands in the remote north of Vanuatu, and the combination of a small population on a group of islands with a small land mass, have contributed to a level of government service delivery which is not the same as the other provinces. Vanuatu, Papua New Guinea and the Solomon Islands are among the last places in the world where the “subsistence economy” – or the “traditional economy” – still outweighs the cash economy in terms of providing livelihoods for the population” (Regenvanu, 2009). Even though people in the outer islands use cash to pay for soap, tea, sugar, kerosene, metal implements, transport, and school fees, the participation of the 80% of the population (who live outside of the capital) in the traditional economy is far more significant than their involvement with the cash economy (Regenvanu, 2007).

The group of islands known as the Banks form the south-eastern half of TORBA. The bigger (yet still tiny) islands that make up the Banks are: Gaua (formerly Santa Maria), Kwakéa, Merelava (formerly Star, known as Mwerlap by the inhabitants), Mota, Motalava, Ureparapara, and Vanua Lava. There are several other smaller islands. This research is concerned primarily with Mwerlap-speaking people from the islands of Gaua and Merelava in the south-east of TORBA province.

Map 2. TORBA Province (François, 2012)



The Leweton name is an acronym for the villages of Levetmise, Lekwel, Wetnap, Tasmaat, Ontar.

In this context of extremely high levels of linguistic and cultural diversity, this research project will examine the ways in which a diasporic community of people from Merelava and Gaua are navigating an intercultural space by mobilising themselves and their cultural assets in a variety of rapidly evolving formats, spanning a range of industries, sectors and cultural transitional areas. Other studies have described the relationship between a cultural village, its cultural expression, tourism, and cultural policy (Jolly, 1994). My PhD research will build on this body of work and extend it in two directions. By locating these activities in the anthropological literature I will frame these entrepreneurial activities as hermeneutic markers of resilience based on the intangible cultural heritage of the community (Regenvanu, 2009). Secondly, I will add to the knowledge and understanding of the significance of “cultural villages” by exploring the role they can play as an incubator of cultural export products particularly in the contemporary music industry. The former approach locates the resilience in the social structures of the Leweton community, while the latter approach investigates the idea of resilience as a form of collective agency located in the presentation of living cultural heritage as entrepreneurial actions. Both the structures and the actions of the Leweton community are embedded in cultural transitional areas where two or more cultures converge and interact. These cultural transitional areas are sites in which there is an abundance of diversity of cultural traits (Turner, Davidson-Hunt, & O’Flaherty, 2003) where different people and different cultures are coming together, intergrading, and coproducing an emergent new culture.

The timeliness of this research is evidenced by the grey literature on the topic. The Hangzhou Declaration, the product of intense discussions led by over 100 of the world’s leaders in the field of culture and development in May 2013 calls on governments and policy-makers around the world to “integrate culture within all development policies and programmes ... culture [is] a fundamental enabler of sustainability, being a source of meaning and energy, a wellspring of creativity and innovation, and a resource to address challenges and find appropriate solutions” (UNESCO, 2013).

There are several national and state level policy documents that have been published in Australia in recent years that build resilience frameworks into tourism policy. Australia’s proximity to Vanuatu and the role Australia plays as a source of tourism export revenue (for Vanuatu tourism enterprises) and as a destination for the export of cultural products (for Vanuatu cultural groups) make these policies important to Vanuatu. Such policy documents include *Industry Resilience: Programs and Resources for the Tourism Industry* (Australia Unlimited, 2010) and *Tourism and Climate Change – A Framework for Action* (Department of Resources Energy and Tourism, 2008). The former document provides state based resources for tourism businesses for improving sustainability and resilience. The latter outlines a five-prong action plan for the tourism industry to more adequately deal with climate change.



Climate change has been identified as one of the most important issues affecting people in the Pacific Islands (Turner et al., 2003). Building resilience through adaptive capacity is listed as the primary action for the tourism industry (Australia Unlimited, 2010). In 2010 UNESCO released a document entitled "The Power of Culture for Development" that explores concepts around cultural development, cultural tourism, sustainability and resilience. To this end the document states: "Culture builds resilience by reinforcing the abilities of people to be innovative and creative especially in the adversity of disasters and conflicts." (UNESCO, 2010, p. 7)

Taken together, these policy documents rely on a notion of human and industry resilience to develop strategies and capabilities so that communities and industries can withstand external shocks. Cultural and creative industries, such as tourism or heritage, and cultural infrastructure, such as cultural villages, are engines for social dialogue and cohesion, as well as jobs and revenue. This research will bring together theoretical perspectives from the disciplines of anthropology, intercultural studies, tourism, and creative industries to explore the role that the cultural villages can have in the development of intangible cultural heritage in cultural transition areas as a vehicle for social transformation.

## **Literature Review**

Butler (1999), in a review of different definitions of sustainable tourism, explores the varying attention to input and output sustainability factors. He explores definitions that determine sustainable tourism as the kind that occurs in such a way as to mitigate harmful impacts on the ecosystem of a destination (Woodley, 1993), the economic viability of destinations (Payne, 1993); and those that support a combination of these factors and have a focus on the future. Constantin and Constantin (2009) acknowledge the 'cultural element' of sustainable tourism and cite a definition by the World Tourism Organization:

"Sustainability principles refer to the environmental, economic and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development, and a suitable balance must be established between these three dimensions to guarantee its long-term sustainability."  
(Constantin & Constantin, 2009, p. 150)

Specifically Constantin and Constantin (2009) explore the particular role played by the location in the sustainability of a cultural tourism destination, arguing that sustainable development of destinations can be achieved when a holistic focus is adopted. They call this focus a 'coherent package' and suggest that it includes economic, legal, institutional, infrastructure, cultural, and social elements. Along with a long-term, future focus the latter definition of sustainable tourism is a critical construct for understanding sustainable tourism in this research.

This case study investigates the value of the strong social fabric that exists in

the Leweton community – a critical factor in constructing Constantin & Constantin's (2009) *coherent package*. Musical production in the Melanesian region is so deeply rooted in its geographic context and yet so rich and diverse that it can be viewed as a natural competitive advantage: for both the cultural performers and the tourism and hospitality operators (Dick, Farr-Wharton, & Brown, 2011). Innovative, strategic collaborations can increase awareness of these regions and promote their cultural diversity at the same time as developing a tourism brand (Dick et al., 2011).

In the same way that ecological borders are places of biodiversity, so to “cultural knowledge systems can intergrade producing a richness of knowledge and practices that enhances the resilience of local societies” (Turner et al., 2003, p. 440). This “edge effect” has been prevalent in Vanuatu society for thousands of years and there has been a constant state of flux between various communities which has probably been more responsible for its startling diversity through the admixture of various ideas, peoples, customs and traditions (Hickey, 2006). And the interplay between the legacies of colonialism; between traditional and contemporary expressions of identity (individual, communal, national); between anglophones and francophones; between the desire for cash and the need to control one's own land ... these interactions create new cultural edges and complexify the diversity of ecological and cultural capital upon which people can draw for their livelihoods. Sometimes people can create an edge effect that has negative outcomes. Some introduced plant species run wild and become weeds starving native flora of resources. In the face of a global hegemony emanating from the North and the West how resilient can Leweton really be?

Before exploring the concept of resilience and its relevance to my thesis, it is important to locate the research historically and culturally. For the past 50 years, research situated in the “World System” and referencing “dependency theory” (Brenner, 1977; Leys, 1977; Wallerstein, 1974) has explored contemporary geopolitics positing a centre/periphery model, which assumes that the actions and processes emanating from European colonial ‘metropolises’ (R. Connell, 2007) and nations have profoundly affected other less powerful peoples. Researchers within the World System approach argue that the concentration of value in these metropolises – a value that has been generated through colonialism – “has given rise to a system in which political and economic domination of peripheral areas directly benefits the central nations, and facilitates the reproduction of relations of domination and subordination over the medium and long term” (Evans, 2001, p. 3).

Raewyn Connell's (2007) critique of the work of key sociological theorists James Coleman, Anthony Giddens and Pierre Bourdieu clearly identifies this “reproduction of relations of domination” (Evans, 2001) in their work, in the form of: taking the Global South either as sources of data about which to theories can be generated in the metropole, or as subjects of Northern theory the application of which is assumed to have universal validity (R. Connell, 2007). Linda Tuhiwai Smith also explains the oppressive nature of research

from the perspective of indigenous peoples in her landmark book *Decolonising Methodologies* (Smith, 1999) and Margaret Jolly (2008) suggests that notions of 'North' and 'South' like 'West' and 'East' uneasily connect geographical cardinal points with geopolitical potencies. Further, she writes:

The designation of North and South refer both to the hemispheres above and below the equator in a conventional Mercator projection of the global, and the respective positions of rich and developing nations of Europe and North America and the poor and underdeveloped countries of Africa, Asia, South America and the Pacific. (Jolly, 2008)

For Connell, all aspects of life are fundamentally about land. In the North people have been alienated and dispossessed of their land ... and so they reproduce and project these alienating and dispossessing activities in the guise of research, investment, resource exploitation, competitive tax regimes, religion, foreign aid, and sustainable development. As Evans explains:

While the general approach has been tremendously productive, recent critiques have stressed that the centre/periphery model is at risk of representing non-European peoples as passive victims and dupes of colonialism, and thus systematically under-represents the agency of so-called peripheral peoples. (Evans, 2001)

In my thesis, I attempt to privilege the voices of the people from the periphery of the World System in my research and unpacking the conceptual frameworks which have marginalised cultural entrepreneurs in the Global South. In doing so, I build on the work of Knut Rio who engaged in a similar project in his explanation of the role of the "totalizing perspective" (Rio, 2005) in the social ontology of Ambrym island (also in Vanuatu). Rio (2005) argues that there are problems in trying to understand, characterize and conceptualise social relations on Ambrym with a Western ontological framework, in particular because of "the division between concrete relations and abstract relations which pertains specifically to relations with the Western state" (Rio, 2005, p. 418).

What is implied in Rio's argument is the *absence* of the state, at least in the sense of the role it plays in Western ontology. It follows that the forces that influence the lives of the Mwerlap-speaking community of Leweton, like those that influence the social relations that Rio studied on Ambrym, are likely to be substantially different from the forces that influence subjects of the state in the West/North. Not surprisingly, the literature supports this view. Up until the 1970s, the influence of the state in rural areas of Vanuatu was practically non-existent (Rodman, 1993, p. 173; Schoeffel, 1996). In the 1970s, the colonial administration established Vanuatu as a tax haven, modelled after the Cayman Islands (Rawlings, 1999, 2004) and this act and the decision to hand over the administration to the Republic in 1980, are arguably the two most significant policy decisions with the furthest reaching impact on the population of Vanuatu. Since achieving Independence, the Vanuatu Government has had minimal impact in rural communities, especially in the Banks Islands. As an AusAID project reported "Vanuatu's critical liability as it faces these problems

is the disconnection of the formal, national political structures of government from much of the social reality of the country and the erosion of traditional mechanisms of social control without a corresponding emergence of new ordering mechanisms” (M. A. Brown & Nolan, 2008). Successful government initiatives in rural areas are those that have engaged the traditional systems of governance for projects related to fisheries (Johannes, 1998), marine resource management (Hickey, 2006), and gender (Bolton, 2002).

The absence of instruments of the state and the implementation tools (especially in rural areas of Vanuatu) required to regulate, monitor and police the interactions between individuals, families, communities, and industry leaves ni-Vanuatu and expatriate citizens to negotiate these interactions for themselves. And these negotiations do not take place in a cultural vacuum or “spaces of no culture” (Gershon & Taylor, 2008). In her ethnographic account of the 2008 election campaign in the Port Vila constituency of the Vanuatu national election, Benedicta Rousseau critiques the perspective of some observers from the Global North (in this case Australia) who she argues are “culturalist” in that they “dehistoricize” their understanding of what truly constitutes a Melanesian “style”. This is a term used in a similar context by Sahlins (cited in Bolton 2002). Rousseau argues that “due attention must be given to our understandings of people’s behaviour in relation to particular institutional settings” (Rousseau, 2012). In other words, we might avoid the pitfalls of “cultural bias” by conceiving of a discursive, intercultural space (characterized by an absence of instruments of the state) where both ni-Vanuatu and expatriates are “immersed in a culture which they are coproducing” (Douglas, 2004). This co-produced, hybrid culture is complexified further by the extreme cultural diversity of Vanuatu.

Contemporary Vanuatu society is characterized by what appear to be dual systems of governance and economics, but what is, in fact, a multiplicity of systems. The national system of government and the modern cash economy have been recently overlaid onto many complex traditional systems (Miles, 1998). In Melanesia, the disputed Bislama term *kastom* refers to the idea of a traditional system of law, religion, economics and/or governance. It incorporates all aspects of life including birth, death and marriage rituals, art, music, dance, kinship and the entire spectrum of human interaction and the sights, sounds and smells which signify “the spiritual presence in combination with the participation of the earth itself” (Huffman, 2005). In reality, there are as many *kastom* systems as there are languages as each of the 110 language groups currently found in Vanuatu represents a people with different oral histories, cosmologies, customs and traditions (Hickey, 2006).

The term “Fourth World” has been used as a collective term for sub-national groups of culturally and linguistically differentiated people, who are “usually in the minority and without the power to direct the course of their collective lives” (Graburn, 1976, p. 1). Trumpeter and composer, Jon Hassel has also coined the term “Fourth World” to describe his own musical style. Despite some possible conceptual convergence, in this instance I am using the term

exclusively in accordance with Graburn's definition (1976) with respect to the Mwerlap-speaking community as a minority, and the fact that the pluralistic nature of Vanuatu society means that the 110 indigenous cultures of Vanuatu are Fourth World people. More problematic is Graburn's (1976) emphasis on the disempowerment of the collective lives of the Fourth World people. While there is some resonance in this term for the stateless people of Nagaland, West Papua, and the various indigenous cultures that populate the continents of Australia and North America (amongst others), the terminology dispossesses the Mwerlap-speakers of their agency (Evans, 2001) and diminishes their interest in, and commitment to, the Vanuatu nationalist project (Miles, 1998). Notwithstanding the semantic problems in the use of the Fourth World language, there are some unique dynamics involved in coproducing culture in a place with the "highest ratio of differing languages and cultures in relation to population size" in the entire world (Huffman, 2005). The language of the Fourth World may yet provide some value to my thesis.

I have shown that the dynamics at play in this intercultural world create an abundance of cultural transition areas where different people and different cultures are coming together and coproducing an emergent new culture – some with more agency than others, and as we shall see, some from a position of greater privilege than others. Similarly, the "mixed narratives" (Strathern, 1996) of this literature review begin to converge as the never-been-modern "hybrids" (LaTour, 1993) jostle conceptually with "totalizing perspectives" (Rio, 2005). This coming together of cultures creates the "edge effect" which brings to mind an "ecology of resilience – a culture of multilingualism and translation" (Dick & Meltherorong, 2011) based on a fundamental indivisibility.

Returning to the idea of resilience, ni-Vanuatu artist, anthropologist, former Director of the Vanuatu Cultural Centre, and current Minister for Lands, Ralph Regenvanu has outlined a compelling case that the traditional economy is the source of resilience for Melanesians, which has allowed them to cope with the vicissitudes of the global economy over past decades (Regenvanu, 2009). He describes the characteristics of Melanesian resilience and argues that a shift in perspective is required (by policy makers, academics, think-tanks, donors, investors) to grasp the idea that the traditional economy is a powerful asset not a problem to be solved or a challenge to be endured (Regenvanu, 2007). Regenvanu and others (Huffman, 2005) have championed this concept at all levels of society in Vanuatu.

Other studies have explored the nature of resilience in diverse fields including the environmental sciences (Turner et al., 2003), social psychology (Brader, 2011) and community studies (Magsino, 2009) as volatile and disruptive changes brought on by adverse climate events and an economic downturn reversed previous certainties in business operations and communities. Resilience has been defined as "a pattern over time, characterized by good eventual adaption despite developmental risk, acute stressors, or chronic adversities" (Masten, 2012). In the field of community studies resilience is

defined as: “The response to stress at individual, institutional, and societal levels categorized as the characteristics that promote successful adaptation of adversity.” (Magsino, 2009, p. 12)

What lessons are there to be learned from the Leweton experience if we use the framework of resilience to explore the trajectory of their cultural expression? How can these lessons be translated into meaningful policy recommendations (i.e. for formulation and implementation of policy)?

The community of Leweton is the “site” of this research. In 2006, an enterprising young man, Sandy, approached his family members living on a block of land in the Sograon (Showground) area just on the fringes of Luganville – the “northern town” as it is known by residents of the capital in the south – or “Canal” as it was known by locals up until recently. Sandy galvanized the diasporic community of Mwerlap speakers (from Gaua and Merelava) around the performance of “water music”. Sandy had witnessed the “gaze” (Urry, 1990) of the tourists in his work on various resorts and tourism projects, and he knew the potential of the cultural practice of the water music, unique to Mwerlap speakers, whereby a group of women stand thigh-deep in still water and perform ... water music. Or water percussion. They splash, paddle, hit, scoop, sweep, shake, and clap the water into a series of water “songs”, creating totally unique percussive tones presented with the spectacular visual effect created by sunlight shimmering on the beaten surface of the water and diffracting rainbows of light through the diffracted waves.

There have been other studies conducted which explore the tensions between a specific cultural village and tourism in Vanuatu. Most notably is Margaret Jolly’s work with the Sa speaking community of South Pentecost. There are some strong parallels between the Sa community and the Mwerlap community especially in relation to the iconic nature of the cultural activity involved. To experience the water music from Gaua and Merelava is something that transcends the aural as it is equally spectacular as a visual phenomenon. It is unique in Vanuatu, in that no other community outside Gaua and Merelava have this as part of their *kastom* repertoire. Similarly, the Na Gol (land dive) of the Sa people, being the forerunner to bungee jumping, is also an iconic spectacle – something that one must *experience* – that happens only in South Pentecost. Marc Tabani would include both the Na Gol and the millenarian commemorations of the John Frum movement held annually on 15 February on the island of Tanna in the same category of “grand ritual” (Tabani, 2010). Tabani terms these phenomena “neo-ritualizations” and provides an exhaustive description of the colonial reinvention of both of these expressions. For Tabani, it is a highly problematized space, he perceives these events to be celebrating an idealized version of the past, as opposed to being a contemporary expression of a living cultural heritage.

Other elements of local *kastom* which are mobilised as iconic tourism attractions include volcanoes, especially Yasur on Tanna, and the

Benbow/Marum complex on Ambrym, and the World Heritage-listed Roi Mata domain at North Efate. There are ten cultural villages or tours listed on the Vanuatu Tourism website which offer a *kastom* experience for tourists, and I am aware of several more which are not listed on the website. As I have alluded to above, there are some parallels between the Leweton Cultural Village (and its water music) and some of the other *kastom* experiences offered to tourists. The one thing that sets the Leweton case apart is its mobility. It has its own unique production and presentation challenges, but the water music is designed to be mobile. This is significant when compared with the volcanoes and the other place-based *kastom* activities that dominate the cultural tourism offerings.

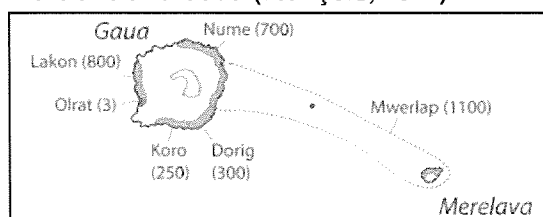
The multi-disciplinary nature of this problem lends itself to inquiry through distinct publications. It is a complex and disputed space with Tabani arguing that *kastom* is a reification of pre-colonial traditions and Regenvanu promoting the *kastom* economy as the fundamental source of resilience for Vanuatu communities and arguing for the “mainstreaming of culture” into public policy. My research project is specifically focused on the Leweton community – but the Leweton community is “*man kam*”, meaning they are immigrants. They are established in Luganville but they are from Gaua and Merelava. The first publication will describe how they came to be “*man kam*”. The second publication will focus on the establishment of the cultural village. The third publication will explore the factors that have enabled the international success of the Leweton group. The final publication will be a documentary film produced in conjunction with the Leweton community. Where appropriate and necessary, the four publications that are incorporated into this research project will delve deeper into the relevant literature.

### Publication 1 - Leweton as diaspora of Mwerlap-speaking people in Espiritu Santo

In the first publication I will introduce the Leweton community as a diaspora of Mwerlap-speaking people, located in the literature of Pacific Island mobility and diaspora and the forces behind urban migration and globalization. Mwerlap speakers are originally from the islands of Gaua and Merelava that are separated by about 45km of the Pacific Ocean with the tiny Merig Island roughly halfway between them. Gaua is the larger of the two. Gaua is roughly circular in shape and is populated by linguistically and culturally distinct villages and hamlets on the northern, western, southern and southeastern

sides. In fact, as can be seen by the language map at Map 3., there are actually two languages spoken on the western side, and two on the southern side, making a total of six distinct languages on an island that is half the size of the City of Lismore, Australia.

**Map 3. Mwerlap speaking community on Merelave and Gaua (François, 2012)**



On the eastern side of Gaua, we can see the result of the first level of migration of speakers of the Mwerlap language. At some point in the past, people from Merelava have colonized the eastern side of Gaua. Arutangai (1987) relates the case of the *kastom* ceremony in 1982 which settled this issue and allowed the Merelava group to stay.

The second level of migration is the temporary or "circular" migration from Merelava and Gaua to plantations, the labour trade, and the urban centres of Port Vila and Luganville (Arutangai, 1987; Bonnemaïson, 1976; Haberkorn, 1992; Lindstrom, 2011).

The third level of migration is the permanent settlement of urban Port Vila and Luganville by people from Merelava and Gaua (and of course other islands) (Bonnemaïson, 1976; Haberkorn, 1992). When framed in the context of an evolutionary development from the first level migration, this dynamic is a form of reverse colonisation – rather than the 110 ni-Vanuatu indigenous cultures being a passive subject of colonisation, they are proactively colonising space in the Third World, arguably in competition with each other (other Fourth World people), and with the Euro/American/Chinese (of the First and Second World). It correlates with the emergence of the nation-state of Vanuatu. It is a clear break away from the pattern of circular migration as the Leweton community members are permanent residents of Luganville, with second and third generation residents born there (Haberkorn, 1992). One of the key drivers of this was the establishment of the Vanuatu tax haven in 1971 (Haberkorn, 1992).

The result was electrifying. Between 1972 and 1974, Port Vila became a boom town. Thirteen overseas banks opened their doors, the expatriate population tripled, subdivisions sprouted in what had been previously virgin bush and, as a side effect, tourism took off. Two large new hotels were built to international standards; air services increased rapidly and cruise ships tied up at regular intervals alongside a newly built wharf capable of berthing vessels up to 40,000 tons. Suddenly Port Vila was on the map. (Forster, 1980, p. 371; cited in Haberkorn, 1992)

During the during the early and mid-1970s, "a considerable number of educated people headed for Port Vila and Luganville joined by planters driven away from the islands by the copra slump" to the extent that more than half of all urban residents in Port Vila and Santo were permanent migrants (Bonnemaïson, 1976, p. 11). This combined result of "structural and cyclical factors triggered off a new wave of wild or uncontrolled urban migration" (Bonnemaïson, 1976, p. 11) that no longer reflected "structures, means of control and links with the home environment" (Bonnemaïson, 1976, p. 11).

Despite the considerable expansion and diversification of Vanuatu's urban economy, it was associated developments that ultimately provided the basis for a change from temporary to more permanent urban mobility. A steady growth in urban wages, formerly geared toward the urban sustenance of single workers, facilitated family residence in town, hence permitting longer periods of urban residence, especially for women (J. Connell, 1985;



Haberkorn, 1992). While such developments *facilitated* a change from temporary circulation to more permanent urban relocations, the growing demand for skilled manpower requiring a stable labour force *necessitated* such a change. The most significant of these changes resulted from the abolishment of a tripartite colonial administration (Haberkorn, 1992).

It should be noted that Luganville migration history is different from Port Vila's because of events associated with the charismatic Jimmy Stevens and the Nagriamel movement. On 27 May 1980, eight weeks before national independence, he and his supporters staged a coup known as the Bow and Arrow Rebellion. The rebels occupied Luganville and proclaimed Santo's independence, calling their new country Vemarana. The new nation was short-lived, however; it collapsed with Stevens' arrest on 1 September. According to a witness of these events and long-term Santo resident, Caroline Nalo, "after the rebellion in early 1981 Luganville was empty, one major component of the population – the Santo half-castes – having fled or been deported, another component – in-migrating Islanders – having fled from the rebels. It was only after people realised that Luganville was now safe that people started coming back/migrating anew to Luganville and by the time they did, the land laws had changed and people could lease urban land at relatively low cost. And for francophones, coming back to Luganville was more difficult than anglophones because they tended to have been, or were suspected of having been, involved in the Rebellion" (Nalo, pers. comm., 15 June, 2013).

There is very little written about Banks Islanders migrating to Luganville. One exception is Andrew Ala's (1987) case study of the Mango settlement. Primarily populated by people from Motalava, Vanualava and Mota, Ala describes the tenuous nature of the Mango settlement and reports the clear desire on the part of the Mango community to convert the settlement into a "Melanesian village model" (Ala, 1987).

Jean Mitchell (2004) has documented a similar process of urbanisation in Port Vila in the community of Blacksands with a particular focus on the perspectives of the urban youth in the community as a generation of people who do not have the same intensity of connection to their parents' home island. The case studies of permanent migration in Vanuatu mentioned above are all easily differentiated from another comprehensive study of the Pango village on Efate which is concerned with the influence of an urban town on peri-urban villages and vice-versa (Rawlings, 1999). Both Mitchell and Rawlings were writing at a time when "circular migration" was still the way that policy-makers (if not researchers who informed policy, such as Haberkorn) understood the flow of people around Vanuatu. Mitchell's study was an important piece of work as it showed that ni-Vanuatu were settling permanently and having children in the urban centres ... and more pertinently, that those children not only had different perspectives to their parents but that they were also having children themselves (Mitchell, 1998, 2004). Mitchell's insights into the urban youth in Port Vila still resonates today, though her work

reads almost like a historical artefact, such is the alacrity with which urban Vanuatu society is changing.

In this publication, I will also explore the:

- history of the water music;
- Mwerlap-speaking diaspora as a sub-national (Fourth World) force, in the context of a low-impact nation state; and
- Mwerlap-speaking diaspora as a network in the specific context of networks as a “project of decolonisation” (Smith, 1999).
- “ongoing interplay between the general structural setting, people's more immediate personal-social environment (family, household) and their perceptions, interpretations and actions” (Haberkorn, 1992)

This thesis is not a manifesto for revolutionary (or circular) migration. Nor is it a study of urbanization ... or linguistic diversity. But all of these concepts are necessary to understand how the Leweton group came to be in Santo, what the Leweton group has been able to do, why it is doing it and what it means for policy-makers in Vanuatu.

## **Publication 2 - Establishment of the Leweton Cultural Village**

The second publication will focus more specifically on the period between 2006 and 2011. During this period members of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora (from Merelava and Gaua) established a formal community in Luganville called “Leweton”. The Leweton group established a purpose-built space for performing the water music and then constructed a “cultural village” around it. This historical moment is a critical point for the purposes of my thesis. This is the point at which the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora becomes the Leweton Cultural Group. This is a conscious act of boundary-setting which has implications as a form of self-determination. It carves out a small part of the intercultural space of urban Luganville for the Fourth World Mwerlap-speaking diaspora to claim as their own within a broader “cultural transition area” being the Third World of contemporary Vanuatu. This is about the physical space in which the intercultural field becomes manifest into an area of cultural transition – theoretically it would not be a “cultural village” if it was simply in the island being a village. What then, is it? Viewed through the lens of Southern Theory (R. Connell, 2007) and the decolonising project (Smith, 1999), the conscious expression of agency by the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora to reclaim and represent themselves as the Leweton Cultural Village can be interpreted as a transcendental act where the actions of the individuals and groups transform rather than maintain the existing societal structures. As Homi Bhabha (Bhabha, 2012) writes, the spaces in between these Worlds “provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood – singular or communal – that initiate new signs of identity, and innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation, in the act of defining the idea of society itself.” By reclaiming their own physical and conceptual space, the Leweton community transform the structures of the society in which it is an agent.

Based on interviews with ni-Vanuatu inter-island migrants, Lindstrom (2011) shows that the postcolonial experiences reveal agency as “migrants model new urban settlements after island homes and also remake their village with urban experience and resources” (Lindstrom, 2011, p. 2).

The Leweton group are conscious that they are Mwerlap-speakers, from Merelava and Gaua. They are conscious that they are living in an urban setting on an island that is outside their own traditional land tenure system. They take the radical step of purchasing the urban Luganville land – breaking away from a traditional land tenure system and investing in the North/West imported system of land title registration. And the fundamental reason for this is to enable the community to present aspects of traditional culture in a format that can be consumed by tourists. Hayward might refer to the breathtaking audacity of the community to establish itself in such a fashion as an “overtly syncretic” (Hayward, 2011) hybrid of *kastom* and spectacle. After the success of the domestic tourism project, and the up-scaling to the level of international touring artists, the paradox of *kastom* as art (Tabani, 2010) becomes a para-paradox or what Tabani might refer to as a “multitude of syncretisms” (Tabani, 2010, p. 310).

In Vanuatu, while many “indigenous groups are drawing on the resources of a global civil society to reconstitute themselves as traditional communities and retain their creativity and dynamism” (Pigliasco, 2009) they are also challenged to engage with the expatriate dominated domestic tourism industry and the international music and festival industry with both positive and negative outcomes. Indeed, contemporary cultural expressions provide a prism through which we can critically evaluate the nexus between traditional and contemporary perspectives, contextualized in the uneasy hybrid relationships between traditional and contemporary artforms (Geismar, 2005). I have published previous work which includes a pertinent example of the Western uneasiness with the para-paradox of *kastom* as tourist spectacle as art:

“producers and promoters at the European world music expo, WOMEX, has failed to recognise the traditional and customary music of Melanesia as an art-form. For example, in 2010, the Vanuatu delegates to WOMEX reported that discussions with the organisers of WOMEX yielded the comment that traditional music performed in the islands of Vanuatu, in its local setting, does not fit into the rubric of ‘world music’ and perhaps was better suited to presentation at a tourism trade fair” (Dick et al., 2011).

The Leweton group is not the first group to establish itself as a “cultural village”. Communities elsewhere in Vanuatu and the Pacific have also consciously claimed their space as a syncretic approach to maintaining their living cultural heritage and expressing this heritage in a format which can be accessed (for a price) by tourists. The cruise liner industry is a “generative mechanism” (Bhaskar, 1998) or a contributing factor in the development of the phenomenon of the Pacific “cultural village” in general and towards the establishment of the Leweton Cultural Village in particular. The tourists came

on large boats and ni-Vanuatu people acted to capitalise on the opportunity. Cashman's (2011) study of authenticity in the cultural performances of Tahitians for the passengers on cruise ships is particularly relevant here, as are Mitchell's (2004) insights into what she says is not a mutual engagement when the young unemployed youth wander in to town to watch the tourists from the cruise ship getting drunk in the bar on the main street. The conflation of cruise ship tourism and contemporary urban ni-Vanuatu youth culture, unanchored by *kastom* in the romantic place-based sense, offers a window into a dystopian perspective of the present. Whereas the Tahitian performance of culture for cruise ship passengers, and the Leweton performance of *kastom* for cruise ship tourists both offer something less extreme – not dystopian ... not utopian ... something more syncretic. As Geismar writes, the interactions between *kastom*, tourism and art are extremely complex as they are:

“fusing together often polarised categories of thought and spheres of ni-Vanuatu experience. Joining together the national and the local, the urban and the rural, the customary and the commercial, contemporary art powerfully represents ideas about being indigenous in contemporary Vanuatu to outside observers. More and more ni-Vanuatu are turning to the production of contemporary art, forming artist's associations, exhibiting and selling their work (see Geismar 2004). In doing this, they materially unite ideas about *kastom* with the increasing incursions of urbanism and the cash economy into their everyday lives. (Geismar, 2009)

This language is echoed in Cahn's (2008) findings in Samoa where microenterprises that successfully “blended” an entrepreneurial style that incorporated Samoan cultural and social forms of governance were able to enhance their sustainability.

Framing entrepreneurial and artistic (and life) activity in this way evokes an organizational perspective of the creative ecology concept (Howkins, 2010) that argues that the creative industries, arguably an overt syncretism or paradox of the Global North, are more clearly associated with the notion of an ecology. An ecological framework for entrepreneurial activity in the Global South offers the prospect of broadening the scope of research in this field so as to incorporate the role of intangible cultural heritage, intellectual property, and the essential indivisibility of land and the environment, culture, language, and people.

As the incidence of cruise ship visitations increased, the Leweton group built on the unique and spectacular performance of the water music and “bundled” (Farr-Wharton, Brown, Dick, & Peterson, 2012) other elements of their cultural heritage into the overall “show”. It now includes *Matto* a syncretised format of the Melanesian stringband with elements of traditional musical instruments and rhythms and chants, *Na Mao*, the men's traditional dance accompanied by traditional rhythms played on slit gong drums made of bamboo and wood accompanied by chants and songs; and *Nelang* the women's version of the traditional dancing and singing. As the village becomes more established and

more popular (and more profitable) they have incorporated demonstrations of other cultural activities including preparation and cooking of food, traditional games and magic tricks, preparation and consumption of kava, and weaving of toys, baskets, mats, and costumes.

To some extent, the fact that tourism is fundamentally a place-based phenomenon involving the production of destination identity (Dredge & Jenkins, 2003; Urry, 1990) means that the tourism industry may be able to facilitate the interaction between culture and enterprise in a Fourth World setting where place has primacy (Lindstrom, 2011; Urry, 1995). In this thesis I extend my previous research which has produced evidence that destination identity comprises the promotion of critical factors (anchors) that present a destination in a way that seeks to attract tourists (Dick et al., 2011; Farr-Wharton et al., 2012). These anchors are core activities and experiences around which destinations can design services and infrastructure. Anchors, as defined in my previous research (Farr-Wharton et al., 2012), “revolve around unique cultural, historical, scenic (sometimes termed geographical) and/or recreational activities that give a region a comparative advantage in attracting tourists” (p. 3). The contention is that some destinations typically adopt one primary and unique anchor, around which, other activities, services, and infrastructures are “bundled”, to create a marketable point of difference with other regions. In the case of the Leweton community, this bundling occurs around the anchor of the water music. The process of creating such a point of difference has the potential to mean destinations are highly vulnerable to changing economic, cultural and environmental climates. In response to such a scenario, I offer that the process of bundling tourism experiences around a primary anchor requires a more critical approach to ensuring long-term sustainability and resilience. This is important because the right mix of tourism experiences bundled around the primary anchor can create resilience and sustainability for the tourism industry and mitigate the vulnerability to environmental and financial shocks. Bundling these experiences and tourism destinations requires significant strategic design and investment to maintain sustainability and resilience.

Tourism research conducted in Pacific islands (and other indigenous communities) must be conscious of the fact that music tourism can significantly affect, and threaten, the host community (Gibson & Connell, 2005; Hayward, 2009, 2012). Babadzan (1988) has written about the complex relationship between culture, politics, and national identity in Pacific Islands, especially with regard to the tensions around contemporary perspectives on traditional practices. This is balanced by the view of Kaeppler (1987) who maintains that festivals are important communicative vehicles to affirm ethnic identity and assess the impacts of tourism on Pacific; Phipps (2009) also suggest “festivals are important to Indigenous communities for their contribution to community wellbeing, resilience and capacity”.

Musical production in the Melanesian region is so deeply rooted in its geographic context and yet so rich and diverse that it can be viewed as a

natural competitive advantage: for both the cultural performers and the tourism and hospitality operators (Dick et al., 2011). Innovative, strategic collaborations can increase awareness of these regions and promote their cultural diversity at the same time as developing a tourism brand (Dick et al., 2011). As we scale the project upwards to the international level we can begin to see the importance of the cultural space from which we turn our perspective. For both the Blacksands youth of Mitchell's study and the Leweton group, Urry's gaze is turned around – the urban youth become the tourists in their own town, while the Leweton group become the performing tourists in faraway lands (though they behave much better than the cruise ship passengers).

### **Publication 3 – International Success and Local Tensions**

The third publication will track the international success of the Leweton group as they present themselves in a multiplicity of roles and modalities. With success in the music industry come challenges for their tourism enterprise. But these are interactions that might well be regulated by government authorities. With the increasing involvement of international aid donors, what lessons are there for policy-makers in Vanuatu? This will be published in *Island Studies Journal* (previously an ERA ranked B journal)

The establishment of the cultural village has enabled the development and refinement of the “performance”. This is the third phase of my thesis. The development of the performance can be viewed as a successful commercial and artistic activity. From the development of a tourism product for the in-bound tourism market, the Leweton group has generated enough revenue to purchase a larger block of land and develop it into a dedicated performance and rehearsal space which doubles as a meeting place and headquarters for the group. They have also constructed some rental accommodation. As an artistic product for export, they have been invited to perform at several international festivals and events, touring throughout Australia and Malaysia. They have been featured on international television and have a CD and DVD in production to be released on the prestigious Wantok Musik Foundation label. But there are tensions between these two manifestations of the Leweton product (Jolly, 1994; Tabani, 2010). The Leweton “performance” is an expression of the intangible cultural heritage of the Mwerlap speaking community. This cultural heritage is very much alive and in flux. In the performance of the culture, the Leweton group are maintaining and transferring their heritage and knowledge, expressing contemporary renditions, creating art, creating tangible products (*laplap* (local cuisine), mats, carvings), operating a tourism enterprise, and developing their musicality.

Researchers such as K. G. Brown (2009) and (Hayward, 2001, 2011) have explored the role that music has played as a value-adding component to general tourism strategies in islands. K. G. Brown (2009) notes that as early as 1988 entertainment, culture and heritage became a vibrant component of the tourism marketing strategy of Cape Breton. While there are arguments that music can actually become the central tourism experience of a

destination (Gibson & Connell, 2005), my own research has taken this one step further and developed a case for the indigenous music and cultural practices of Espiritu Santo to be better exploited as a competitive advantage (Dick et al., 2011).

But this is a very complex dynamic (Geismar, 2009). If industries in the Global South can be said to show properties of an “ecology” then what does this say about the industries in the Global North? Are these “spaces of no culture” (Gershon & Taylor, 2008)? Does creativity in the North occur in a cultural vacuum? A member of the Leweton community, who was an industry delegate at an international indigenous festival called The Dreaming (held concurrently with the Woodford Folk Festival) in Australia in 2011. The Leweton delegate remarked that the Australian people in the audience seemed unaware of their cultural heritage and seemed to be borrowing culture from others “with their numerous piercings and tattoos that apparently had no meaning” (Anonymous, 2012). The report goes on to reflect that

“Vanuatu still has huge and living respect for kastom compared with other parts of the world. The performers at The Dreaming were more focussed on giving a good (in many cases very good!) stage performance than on custom and tradition. The Santo delegation noted that we have different kinds of kastom: some things just cannot be turned into a stage performance without breaking kastom, whereas others can be “played with” and performed at festivals. Vanuatu must continue to respect this difference and not let influences from the outside world change it. When custom dances are performed on stage, their significance needs to be explained.” (Anonymous, 2012)

For most people in Vanuatu, the academic inquiry into concepts such as resilience and ecology “remain a distant intellectualizing of what, on a daily basis, is accepted as a normal procedure underpinning local decisions about food, respect, genealogy, ceremony, schooling and development” (Dick & Meltherorong, 2011). Ni-Vanuatu musician and author, Marcel Meltherorong states that:

“a lot of us artists in Vanuatu we try and bring the things from the past into the present so that the future will be better for our children. But we are scared that one day we will lose this: sandrawing, bamboo flute, stories, dance. The meaning of the dance, how to cut the canoe. In Vanuatu we still have this knowledge this structure this kastom which is all about respect – respect of everything and respect of differences. So that’s what I try to promote with my music. (Dick and Meltherorong, 2011)

As a researcher in this space it is important to be conscious that I am an outsider, perhaps a “trusted outsider” (Moran, 2006), and that my perspective has inherent power structures. As Rosanna Raymond writes: “to read about yourself labelled as hybrid and having your authenticity questioned by people outside of your community left me feeling disempowered” (Stevensen, 2011: 153).

The legacy of colonialism and Christian conversion looms large over the case study site. The Leweton community has a multilateral engagement with a colonizing force; if we reframe the engagement from the perspective of the southern cultural actors as a unique claim over the cultural space, the enterprise described in the case study is a powerful reminder that in the Global South, traditional culture is not something that exists in the past, a museum artefact, or a fossilized relic. This project will provide a useful lens to help conceptualize the momentous and momentary modernism of contemporary expressions of living cultures – and the power relations that characterise interactions of cultural enterprises in post-colonial settings. Are not the terms “traditional” and “indigenous” (as prefixes for culture) rendered obsolete in this framework? Because within any of the relationships between the cultural enterprise and the market and/or state (and within the cultural enterprise and the individuals which constitute it) and the community there is a power dynamic at play – usually one that favours the colonizer or expatriate. In the context of this power dynamic, a resistance force may appear – a vector of cultural resistance, perhaps, that acts as a claim over (in/around) the cultural landscape reminding us that none of us come from a place of “no culture” (Gershon & Taylor, 2008). While external forces may act to de-characterise aspects of the Leweton performance/enterprise, as southern communities suffer many interferences of market/financial power, we can see that the cultural enterprises resist and re-claim these spaces and the essential values and traditions through expression of the indivisibility of their intangible cultural heritage and that of modern or contemporary culture.

What else emerges from the fog of uncertainty in these transformative and transforming societies? What emerges from these hybridised organizations? The bottom-up trial and error learning process has a particular resonance. In these sites, the community learns about the potential benefits of commodifying culture, but at the same time they are forced to answer complex questions such as how to share these benefits, and what the community feels to be fair in the matter of income and other collective cost/benefit trade-offs such as maintenance of traditional intellectual property rights, for example.

(Brulotte, 2012) identifies some other forces as identity politics that are beyond the commercial realm, inquiring what it means to be an authentic cultural production in contexts of indigenous ethnicity. Confronting archaeological discourse and community understanding of cultural production, this author expresses the force of social and racial classification systems to add value (or not) to artefacts and local arts, a debate that makes sense when opposing global north and south. These heuristic processes become more salient when we consider the hybrid institutions that appear in Vanuatu such as the Malvatumauri National Council of Chiefs and the Vanuatu Cultural Centre (M. A. Brown & Nolan, 2008).

#### **Publication 4 – Video Documentary**

The final publication will be a documentary video integrating the three



publications above into a coherent presentation that privileges the voices of the Leweton community. The video will be broadcast on Vanuatu television. The documentary will focus on the overarching framework of an “ecology of resilience” – a framework that can work as a loom to weave together the disparate threads of this research project: the fragility of the ecological systems of the planet and the conceptual fragility of the linguistic and anthropological playground that Vanuatu (and other Fourth World peoples) provide; the nature of intercultural space in which the Leweton group is expressing their living culture; and the essential, indivisible, and transformative potential of humanity.

## **Req 2. Research Design**

The context for this research project is one of extreme cultural and linguistic diversity. Ni-Vanuatu cultural performers from these different cultural groups present themselves as local, national, and international actors simultaneously by allowing outsiders to witness and engage with their living cultural expressions or “*kastom*”. One of the forms in which contemporary ni-Vanuatu communities are presenting themselves is as distinct and differentiated “cultural villages”, often in urban settings away from traditional or *kastom* places.

In urban Luganville, there is a multiplicity of Fourth World people, each with their own language(s) and *kastom*, interacting, relating and engaging with Euro/American (First World) settlers, and more recently Chinese (Second World) and other Asian immigrants to create the Third World nation state of Vanuatu.

Taking the case of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora from the islands of Gaua and Merelava who perform “water music”. I will describe the transition of the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora into the Leweton Cultural Village. As I track the trajectory of the Leweton Cultural Village as an enterprise operating locally, nationally, and internationally, these scales of activity will provide the markers for my research. I will present this research as a PhD incorporating four interlinked publications and presenting them as cohesive and critical contribution to the understanding of the dynamics between social structures and human agency.

The project will involve a single case study, the Leweton Cultural Group/Village with embedded or multiple units of analysis. Taking a critical realist approach I will conduct an ethnography using semi-structured interviews and participant engagement to describe and explain how these embedded units, intergrade and provide critical recommendations about policy development in the areas of cultural heritage maintenance, tourism, and artistic and cultural development. Qualitative social research is concerned with how the world is interpreted, understood, experienced, produced, or constituted (Babbie 2004). The purpose of this research project is to reveal the underlying tendencies in the development of the “performance” of the

water music and the (“bundling” of) other “living cultural expressions”, as they are re-presented as tourist attraction, as a festival act on the international festival scene, as art, and as all of this at the same.

Porter (1993) has outlined the case for the adoption of critical realism as a philosophical grounding for ethnographic research. He argues that emphasising social structure can counterbalance the micro-sociological tendencies associated with ethnography because the aim is not only to describe events but also to explain why they occur by identifying the influence of structural factors on human agency and how agency maintains or transforms those structures. With its emphasis on structural mechanisms rather than unique events, “a critical realist approach to ethnography facilitates subsequent comparative or critical work ... conclusions about the effects of those structures can be tested through empirical examination of events in other settings” (Porter, 1993). This provides a basis for the development of policy recommendations for supporting other communities to achieve the multivalent outcomes (maintaining cultural heritage, facilitating local/domestic enterprise, providing a basis for cultural export) associated with successful cultural villages. Additionally, because the research is “explicitly founded on a clearly articulated philosophical position, it is possible for critics to engage with the assumptions inherent in that position and to assess their validity” (Porter, 1993).

The complex and multidisciplinary nature of the problem space creates a broad contextual research field. This contextual field is populated with a deep and rich set of academic work in the disciplines of anthropology, ethno(musico)logy, linguistics, archaeology, and sociology. A case study is an in-depth study of a particular research problem rather than a sweeping statistical survey. I will draw on linguistic divisions so that I can identify the Mwerlap speaking community. I will draw on anthropological perspectives such as Strathern, Jolly, Bolton, Rodman, Lindstrom, and Rio as these researchers provide the canon of academic research in Vanuatu. The very concept of *kastom* could be argued to be created by anthropologists working in Vanuatu. The field is so diverse that a case study design is necessary to narrow down a very broad field of research into an example that is easier to understand because case research allows the researcher the opportunity to tease out and disentangle a complex set of factors and relationships, albeit in one or a small number of instances. Easton (2010) defines case research “as a research method that involves investigating one or a small number of social entities or situations about which data are collected using multiple sources of data and developing a holistic description through an iterative research process” (Easton, 2010). This process of iterative–parallel research “...implies a continuous moving back and forth between the diverse stages of the research project” (Verschuren, 2003).

The primary research question is:

- How is it that the Mwerlap-speaking diaspora came to form the Leweton Cultural Group/Village?

Secondary research questions are:

- How do the forms of “living cultural expression” (*kastom*) intergrade? How do the manifestations of the collective (Village/Group) intergrade?
- How do the structures (industry, state, institutions) impact the way the community operates?
- What influence is the Leweton group having on the social structures (ie how does agency affect structure)?
- What lessons are there for policy-makers? Is the “Cultural Village” a model of contemporary empowerment and resilient sustainable development?

The project will involve a single case study, the Leweton Cultural Group/Village with embedded or multiple units of analysis in that the holistic unit takes multiple forms. Originally a ritualistic cultural expression performed for the celebration of harvests, life events, or for pleasure, *kastom* dances and songs are now presented as spectacles for tourists. But they are also presented as creative and artistic performances. Each of these forms of expression represents the key markers in my research. The form that exists as “cultural heritage” is a form of locally produced meaning – the meaning is opaque to non-members. The form that exists for tourists is something that contributes to a national conceptualisation of *kastom* and cultural tourism. The form that exists as art/creative performance is given meaning/agency to the extent that the international festivals desire to fly the Leweton group around the world. Each of these forms represents an embedded unit of analysis. This is the crux of the argument for a thesis incorporating publication: Each of the three written publications will explore one of these embedded units. At the same time, each unit represents a “scale” of activity that may provide an insight into how this case can be made relevant for other cultural villages in Vanuatu. How do these embedded units, these forms, intergrade?

Yin (1989) lists major reasons for choosing a single-case design: critical, extreme/unique, representative/typical, revelatory, longitudinal. Working with the Leweton Cultural Group involved the longitudinal collection of data based on the 5 years that I have been working with them, including stories, histories, notes from tours, reports, briefing documents, interviews, and observations.

There is a high degree of trust and respect between the Leweton group and myself based on the time spent with them in their community, the time sent with them on tour, and the time spent together planning activities domestically and internationally. While there are many examples of the “cultural village” established specifically as a tourist spectacle in Vanuatu and in other parts of the world, few have the same combination of success that the group has achieved as a spectacle for inbound tourists (tourism export) and as an

international touring act (cultural export). This makes them an extreme case (Yin, 1989). The point of this kind of case study is that we can learn much about structures and mechanisms by studying extreme situations. Mechanisms, which are usually hidden as they are counteracted by other mechanisms, can become clearly apparent in some extreme situations.

This design leads to a set of constraints and opportunities. The key constraint is its low (statistical) representativeness therefore a single-case design must be able to stand on its own – limitations come later – you are not so interested in this aspect (why not) as what will justify the use of a case study for this research.

Potential problems can arise, with an embedded single-case design when a global approach allows an investigator to avoid examining any specific phenomenon in operational detail. Thus, a typical problem with the holistic design is that the entire case study may be conducted at an unduly abstract level, lacking sufficiently clear measures or data. I will mitigate this potential problem by triangulating the research project across the three embedded units: cultural heritage, tourism spectacle, and international artistic performance.

### **Proposed Methodology**

A qualitative, critical realist ethnography, influenced by the ‘critical turn’ in tourism studies and Indigenous methodologies, will be used to guide the case study of the Leweton Cultural Group. Case research can be defined as a research method that involves investigating a situation about which data are collected using multiple sources of data and developing a holistic description through an iterative research process.” (Easton, 2010)

I will use the case study design to process different kinds of ethnographic data with a view to understanding the different forms and scales of interaction of the Leweton group. These different forms and scaled constitute the different embedded elements of the case study.

<b>Form of Expression</b>	<b>Embedded Unit</b>	<b>Scale</b>	<b>Audience</b>
Ritual	Mwerlap community	Local	Community
Tourist spectacle	Leweton Cultural Village	National icon	Inbound tourists
Music/dance/art	Leweton Cultural Group	International	Festival patrons

In-depth interviews and participant engagement are the key methods employed to gather evidence for the case. A series of semi-structured, in-

depth interviews will be conducted with stakeholders and members of the Leweton community, while participant observation will be occurring throughout. Interpretive analysis of the interviews, coupled with my insider observations as a participant, will reveal key issues in policy and planning for regional tourism, creative and cultural industries, urbanization, and self-determination.

Porter (1993) has demonstrated the efficacy of critical realist ethnography. My primary ethnographic research methodology is a form of participant observation. The methodology of participant observation stresses a “logic of discovery,” a process aimed at instigating concepts, generalizations, and theories (Kaplan, 1964). It, in other words, aims to build theories grounded in concrete human realities (Glazer and Strauss, 1967; Agar, 1986). This requires a flexible, open-ended process for identifying and defining a problem or problems for study, concepts, and appropriate procedures for collecting and evaluating evidence. While critical realism continues to use ethnographic techniques of data collection, it abandons many of the methodological assumptions normally associated with ethnography (cf. Brewer 1991). Usually the ethnographer participates in, observes, and subsequently describes the life of a community or group, but avoids making any changes to it. I propose to adapt this standard participant observation by taking a similar approach to what Lissant Bolton calls “participant engagement” (Bolton 2002). I participate in community life in Vanuatu “with the express objective of making changes” (Bolton 2002). I do not concentrate on my participant engagement role, and the outcomes which I have achieved in collaboration with the group but rather describe the contexts against which the Leweton Cultural Village developed—on local understandings of *kastom* and indigenous knowledge and practice with respect to performance of water music and other cultural expressions — and on the transformations that the establishment of the Village effected to both (in which I was involved).

In working with the Leweton group and collaborating with the other partners involved in supporting the production and presentation of *kastom* music in Santo, I sought to “enact their objectives and to reflect their preoccupations. The difficulty that participant engagement poses to the writing of ethnography is the difficulty of acknowledging the effect of one’s own involvement in the events described and yet of not overrating it. In the end, one individual can have little influence on a community unless his or her actions are endorsed and supported by community members.” (Bolton 2002)

The Leweton Cultural Village was established a year before I had any involvement with them. This research is an ethnographic description of a process that has a historical element which culminated in events which did not involve me. I describe it as an “ethnographic description” intentionally. This is description in the sense used by Marilyn Strathern: “description presupposes analysis, and analysis presupposes theory, and they all presuppose imagination” (Strathern, 1999:xi; cited in Bolton, 2002).

Rather than separating self from subject, I maintain a self-conscious

awareness of the inseparability of theory, data, self and analysis in daily life as suggested by Allen and Walker (2000). I employ a qualitative methodology using the theory of critical realism to create a narrative of the life of the village and its relationship with the world. Conscious of the fact that research is a part of colonialism (Smith, 1999), I shape the research with decolonizing methodologies (Smith, 1999). To some extent, this enables Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous cultural values to be made explicit- to what end? This is important because the Leweton Cultural Group lives and works in a Fourth World location where the tourism industry is dominated by non-indigenous individuals and companies with non-indigenous cultural values. The Leweton group is also non-Indigenous to Santo, but is, of course, indigenous to Gaua and Merelava.

Becker (1998) explains that qualitative research allows a researcher to think about and conduct research in a simultaneous manner. Qualitative research also allows a researcher to emphasize the context within which the activities studied occur and the meanings of activities studied for participants (Bresler and Stake, 1992).

Qualitative data in the form of participant engagement, document analysis (media material, reports, plans), participatory video production and reflections of key stakeholders in the Leweton community, and the broader Vanuatu cultural policy community, will be gathered to analyze the networks and relationships that are most likely to benefit from the Leweton input into policy formulation and implementation.

I will present data based on my decade-long (and ongoing) collaborative practice as a non-Indigenous engagement with the cultural industries in Vanuatu. The data will be presented in the form of three written publications in respected journals and one documentary film (26min) and a research paper consisting of an introduction, literature review, research methodology and exegesis/analysis.

In this thesis I will use the Leweton experience as a case study of the ni-Vanuatu “scaling up” of the structures of their relations. As we step through the four publications, it becomes clear that there is a “scaling-up” of the Leweton community’s project and the relationship between their resilience, their networks, and their music/arts: in other words between the structure and action. As the first publication will demonstrate, the initial stages of migration are fundamentally about family as the Mwerlap-speaking community move around Vanuatu and the Pacific Islands in search of short term work. In the second publication, the Leweton group establish a permanent base (colony) on Espiritu Santo in an urban/rural hybrid in which institution becomes the agent of the community. In the third publication, the Leweton Cultural Group develops its “performance” into a sophisticated enterprise operating in the tourism sector and in the arts/cultural sector and the scaled-up network becomes the agency that mobilises the community. Studies of the role of networks and relationships in tourism are plentiful (Stokes, 2006). Network

theories developed outside of the field of tourism are being applied to aspects such as destination management, inter-organizational relationships and tourism assets packaging (Stokes, 2006). Further, Archer (2010) argues that the arts and cultural sectors are inherently resilient because of their location in dispersed networks that make up larger systems. Such systems are decentralized clusters of creative production (O'Connor, 2010). The resilience inherent in arts sectors, from a network analysis perspective, facilitate innovation as factors such as network tie strength (Granovetter, 1973), tacit knowledge sharing (Brown et al 2010), trust and social capital (Naphiet and Ghoshal, 1998) and structural holes (Burt, 1992) create dynamic interplay between firms. Findings established the role of networks as a mediating factor within resilience literature.

By using a “participatory video” approach (Harris, 2010), this project will provide an opportunity for self-representation of the ni-Vanuatu people. The film will be created in conjunction with the Santo-based Leweton community and several villages on Merelava and East Gaua – all members of the Mwerlap speaking diaspora. The film will present an aspect of life of their own devising and design. The film will centre on the village of Leweton and the Chief of this village. As Chief, he has complex social obligations and interactions with his village, the neighbouring villages, and the greater area of Merelava and Gaua. The fundamental approach throughout production will be to allow the story to tell itself. Each community will choose its own story and its own mode of expression: from myth re-enactment to myth de-bunking, from stories of destruction to strategies for survival. The film will be an artefact of these complex relationships.

I will work collaboratively with the Leweton group to produce this film. The content will be chosen by the community. I will draw conclusions regarding the way contemporary film and music interacts with the traditional economy creating a cultural “edge effect” (Turner et al, 2004) and how this interaction functions as a contextual variable in the creation of knowledge and meaning in Vanuatu.

### **Action Plan**

June 2013 – Field work documenting elements of the Leweton Cultural Group tour of Queensland.

July to August 2013 – Develop literature review and interviews, write Publication 1. and draft Publication 2.

August 2013 – Submit Publication 1. to Shima.

September 2013 – Submit Publication 2. to Perfect Beat.

October 2013 to January 2014 – field work in Luganville, Port Vila, Gaua, and Merelava, Vanuatu and at Woodford Folk Festival, Queensland conducting

interviews and pre-production for video, and documenting tours, performances and festivals. Begin re-write of Publications 1 and 2 based on peer reviews.

February to April 2014 – write Publication 3. Re-submit Publications 1. and 2.

April 2014 – Submit Publication 3. to Island Studies Journal.

May to August 2014 – write draft Introduction, Design and Methodology, and Conclusion chapters of PhD. Re-write of Publication 3. based on peer reviews. Re-submit Publication 3. to Island Studies Journal.

September to November 2014 – production of documentary video.

December 2014 to January 2015 – editing and post-production of video

February to March 2015 – write final version of Introduction, Design and Methodology, and Conclusion chapters of PhD.

April 2015 – submit PhD.

## **Ethics**

I have been granted ethics approval already. Do you have the ethics approval number?

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